USSR

Viktor Shapoval

6.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the First World War, the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War, Russia was a collapsed, devastated country, where hunger and disasters ruled. Under these conditions, the construction of a new state began. The New Economic Policy (1921–1928) started with the cautious allowance of old market relations that helped achieve a short stabilisation. Later, from 1928, five-year plans were introduced with the aim to mobilise the economy by regulatory measures in order to strengthen the country for defence, declaring the motto “the best defence is a good offence.” Against this background, the intellectual and artistic life was experiencing a decade of post-revolutionary freedom (hungry, but intoxicated with hope), discovering new trends in the field of poetry, theatre, plastic arts, architecture, limited only by the task of serving the working people of the whole world. Remarkable experiments in the field of social construction, reconstruction and (often bloody) deconstruction pushed the very different forces of society in the struggle for the right to make decisions, but gradually unanimity and total control replaced freedom and diversity. In this whirlpool of events and opinions, an affirmative action (Martin 2001) in relation to nationalities was perceived as a natural and integral part of the proletarian internationalism, limited only by fears of the bourgeois nationalism. Among the many manifestations of the concept of the brotherhood of all nationalities, a Gypsy nationality project was implemented and led to the creation of a completely new literature, which will be discussed in this chapter.

The main principles of the USSR policies towards the Gypsies as part of the general nationalities policy were declared many times: the Gypsies, as a nationality oppressed by Tsarism, had full civil rights in the USSR and enthusiastically participated in the construction of socialism. They thus also looked forward to the moment when their foreign brothers will be free from the capitalist oppression. The Gypsy project became one of the ethnically oriented projects of the Soviet cultural revolution, but a very remarkable one. It had reached a unique and worldwide unprecedented success. Books, schools, clubs, and other cultural achievements demonstrated new opportunities for the development of the small nationality:

Ласа адасавэ рэндэ машкир ромэндэ, сыр романэ школы, клубы, лолэ вэнглы, романы печать. Ласа адасавэ рэндэ сыр одова, со романэчявэ (чявэ и чяя) джяна тэ сыклён

и прэ буты. Адава сыкавэла, со культура машкир ромэндэ зальяпэ [...] Бутяритко государство заботисола ваш ромэндэ, дрэван камэл тэ газдэл машкир ромэндэ культура. Государство подрикирла пэскирэ стредствэнца и отмэкэла бут ловэ прэ амарэ культурна рэнды. Пирдал адая помошнь амэндэ сы пэскирэ школы, клубы, журнало, книги. (Панково 1930:3)

Let's take such things among Roma such as Roma schools, clubs, red corners [propaganda spots], the Roma media. Let's take such things like the fact that Roma (boys and girls) go to study and work. This shows that the culture among the Roma started to develop [...] The workers' state takes care of the Roma, really wants to raise the culture of Roma. The state supports with its resources and releases a lot of money for our cultural deeds. Thanks to this help, we have our own schools, clubs, one journal, books.

It is symptomatic that the author's attention focused on new organisational forms and spaces as symbols of the 'correct' culture. This is tightly and naturally connected with their state support and advantages for an ethnic nationality. Such a relationship model describes Roma mostly as passive consumers of this massive cultural care. This impression is supported by examples such as the insufficient involvement of Moscow Roma in the cultural events organised by Roma activists and the government. And it is a very important nuance for understanding the Gypsy educators' attitude toward their own people.

The cultural achievements of the Gypsy project looked great. However, according to some authors, this project was nothing but a Potemkin village and one of the many imitations forged for propaganda purposes (cf. Деметер, Бессонов & Кутенков 2000:206–207). At the same time, a balanced assessment of this policy should include undoubted acceptance of the wide range of new opportunities for cultural growth, that were possible only as part of the Soviet ideology and only available for the narrow layer of mostly urban Roma in Moscow and few other places. This did not underestimate the significance of the fact that, among other successes, over a decade period about 260 books were published in the firstly standardised Romani language, and this was a result of the exhausting efforts of a very small group of mostly nonprofessional writers. The period from 1926 to 1938 was very fruitful for Roma culture and especially for the new Romani literature, but at the same time it was a very hard time for everyday life conditions. The Roma 'Renaissance' paradoxically started in the period when relative economic freedom was ended and when food shortage began to increase.

The long-lasting result was a new ideal image of an educated Roma, which was deeply rooted in the memory of the nationality:

Папу миро сыклья ды Романэ школа интернато (ды штэто “Нижняя Дубровенка” ада надур ки Смоленск на окраине города)... ада ки война исыс. И да интэрнатостыр потом бут ромэн битчхадэ ки Москва ды варисаво Педогогическо техникумо ваш ромэнги исыс скидка при поступлении.

My grandfather studied at the Roma boarding school (in the town of Nizhniaya Dubrovenka, this place was near the city of Smolensk on its outskirts [now the city street near the village Serebrianka])... this place, where the war was. And later from this boarding school many [graduate] Roma were sent in Moscow to some kind of Pedagogical College, for Roma there was a discount on admission. (Dmitriy Gasperovich, email correspondence with the author, April 27, 2003)

The project had a huge positive impact. Education was, and still is in a way, aimed to make someone's life better (Деметер 2014:3). Everyday life conditions of Gypsies did not differ from the rest of the population and thus was full of troubles. The 1917 Russian revolutions profoundly changed the lives of millions of people, Gypsy choirs and horse trading lost most of their incomes, because the population was getting poorer. The New Economic Policy (1921–1928) allowed a private initiative to normalise living conditions in order to only accumulate strength for the Great Break. The new goals of the state were industrialisation and collectivisation, and they left almost no time for leisure, which reduced Gypsy choirs' income. The actress Olga Demeter-Charskaya (1915–2016) was reminded of a hit song of that time, titled *Трактористка* (a woman driving tractor); the song was considered as an ideal combination of two politically correct themes: industrialisation and collectivisation, and was a dream for any Gypsy woman in a choir. The famine of 1932–1934 (Eaton 2004:16, 42) was a heavy period for Roma, which finally destroyed the basis of former Gypsy autarky. Official employment and trade union membership become important. The younger generation started to look for new opportunities. Nikolay Pankov, one of the most active personalities leading the Roma project emphasised that new phenomena and institutions were presumably involving young Roma. For many of the Gypsy men, there was a common path towards new careers, through the Red Army enlistment, for example: Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, Andrey Taranov. This experience explains their inclination to simple solutions and no ideological hesitations. They stood far from delicacy in resolving issues of social constructing and reconstructing.

The Soviet authorities did not immediately pay attention to the Gypsy nationality. To claim the opposite should be interpreted more as a rhetorical statement, as this one shows:

С первых дней Октябрьской революции советская власть, освободившая отсталые народы СССР, поставила перед собою заботу о приобщении цыган к трудовому организованному населению и о вовлечении их в производство и строительство социалистического общества. (Таранов 1929:21)

From the first days of the October Revolution, the Soviet government, which liberated the backward peoples of the USSR, set itself the task of introducing Roma to the organised working people and of involving them in the production and construction of the socialist society.

In general, the chronological boundaries of the Soviet cultural revolution are rather vague. Even its central period, when the so-called *культсбор* (an additional tax from many groups of the population for the development of culture) was introduced, is outlined indefinitely from the early 1930s to 1942 or 1943. On the contrary, the chronology of the Roma cultural project is very clear, starting in 1925 and ending in 1938. In 1925, a group of Roma activists started to organise the All-Russian Union, which existed formally until February 1928 (Marushiakova and Popov 2008:2). Again in 1925, in December, the first Gypsy school was opened in Moscow (Дударова 1927:16). The end date can be considered August 1938, because in September the Gypsy schools were reorganised into Russian ones. In 1926, the project of Cyrillic Romani alphabet was officially approved (Черенков 2013:8). At the same time, Roma emancipation has become more active: organised activists started working on shifting Roma to the sedentary way of life (Деметер & Черных 2018:210). The first leaflet of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies emphasises that its leaders are Gypsies (Таранов et al. 1927:1). They reasonably believed that this focus was important for their readers. The energy of nationality-oriented people yielded impressive results. That very short period gave at least 260 books, 13 years of school education and organisation of Gypsy working communities in many trades. It also led to the establishment of the Roma theatre, which still exists and continues to be popular.

Geographically, those events were possible mainly in Moscow, and seldom in few other areas. There were no Roma schools in Leningrad, for instance. In short, the stage was very narrow and Roma enthusiasm was thoroughly controlled, as any nationally oriented activity of the time.

Some aspects and results of the Soviet Roma project have been discussed before (Kenrick 2007; Lemon 2000; O'Keefe 2013), but comprehensive description and analysis of the Romani language printed publications is still lacking and the topic remains underresearched. Such analysis is lacking, especially regarding the literature production process. Original documentation concerning the editorial and publishing processes of 1927–1938 can add important details. For this reason, the publishing chain processes, from authorship, through production, editing and censorship, and finally to readership, will be comprehensively discussed in the chapter.

Romani language books published before 1938, in pre-war USSR, could, by and large, be previously accessed: until 1938 they were considered a prominent success of Soviet national policy; later they were considered one of the successes of the respective period; after 1991 they were described as a simple and ineffective tool of communist propaganda (Деметер, Бессонов & Кутенков 2000:206–207). The multidimensional analysis by Valdemar Kalinin and Aleksandr Rusakov was the first to show the Soviet Romani literature as a successful example of a new national literature in its thematic and genre diversity, as well as a field of linguistic and poetic experiments (Русаков & Калинин 2016). This opens up a number of still unstudied aspects in this new literature phenomenon

that developed over only a decade. Rusakov also focused on the Soviet version of the standardised Romani language of the 1920s and 1930s in a socio-cultural context (2013). This is also a starting point for a deeper exploration of the language which had to be used not only for everyday communication, but on a higher level, in the field of politics, grammar, agriculture, geography, astronomy, etc. Despite the fact that the result was not always perfect, the attempt of those enthusiastic forerunners developed fast and powerfully and looks inspiring even a century later.

The struggle between the old and the new was very important for understanding the conflict within the Roma community. The Roma activists understood this and emphasised it. At the very beginning, the Soviet Gypsy cultural project was not a purely immanent ethnic initiative. It was also not at all an artificial construction. The project was an enthusiastic breakthrough undertaken by the Roma and non-Roma activists and sympathisers in order to reach many cultural aims at once. These aims were partly idealistic and controversial, but sincere. The balance between the original and translated books shows that external and especially socialist ideological and aesthetic values were dominating, but the language itself had its own internal peculiar values.

When the processes started in 1925, Roma were considered as ethnically united, nomads and natural internationalists. The activists thus believed that the differences between the Roma groups were very little and irrelevant (Шаповал 2020b). Perhaps this was one of the reasons for the project's failure. This narrow circle of activists effectively created a numerous and diverse literature and many other cultural projects. Though this tremendously interesting experiment was very fruitful, not very expensive and very fast, unfortunately it was stopped unripe, similarly to many other nationally oriented projects of that period.

The project did not continue after 1938 and many plans were left unfulfilled. The national Theatre *Romen*, however, continued to exist and became a new centre for cultural development. Nevertheless, a dozen years of predominantly elementary schooling had created a very thin but strong layer of relatively educated people in/for this small nation. Seemingly a Potemkin village for propaganda purposes, the project successfully united very talented Roma and their sympathisers.

The Gypsies, who made only 0.04 percent of the total Soviet population, had received a considerable cultural assistance, and many non-Roma persons were actively involved in the project. Two Roma bibliographies (Герман 1930; Саткевич 1966) unanimously show the special media attention toward Roma issues in the period 1927–1938 (Shapoval 2020:348) as illustrated in Figure 6.1. This was also the time of great popularity of the Gypsy choirs and, since 1930, of the *Romen* Theatre. Note that the top result of any other year of the twentieth century is less than 50 (1911), and in the ninetieth century is less than 20.

Figure 6.1 Number of published sources concerning Gypsies in Russia / USSR (1927–1938)

The public sympathy for Gypsy art, especially for singers, was doubtless. State support for minorities was also regular and visible in the success of their literature production (cf. Горький 1953:324). The linguistic aspect of this cultural work was called “language building” (Алпатов 2000:222). Gypsies were seen as an ideal object for such a social experiment. They were almost all illiterate. There was no alphabet for the Romani language, neither was there formal schooling in it. They were considered by the authorities to be nomadic and severely oppressed by Tsarism victims of former inequality.

Under these conditions, Romani literature, which was going to appear as a new great achievement of a previously illiterate small nationality, had to have support in advance. Comparing Ingush and Romani literature, two approximately equal in terms of the size nationalities, one can find an example of a very strong affirmative action (Martin 2001) toward Roma in this aspect: there were at least 110 books (more than 5800 pages) published in Romani language in 1927–1933, and only 97 items (including articles and poems, not exclusively books and brochures) published in Ingush for a twice longer period (Shapoval 2020:349).

6.2 The Production Process

The enthusiasm of the nationality’s activists and writers, as well as the support of the state and society are very important, but this intention alone is not enough for the books’ publication. One needs special equipment, paper, specialists and readers as final consumers.

There are at least two different aspects in the production process. On the one hand, is the aspect related to the history of the Romani literature as an intellectual phenomenon. This includes discussion on the personalities who created the new literature, what

samples and aims did they have in their new project, among others. On the other hand, are the aspects related to economic and social history, addressing questions such as how the technical process was organised, where and how Roma books were printed, how they were delivered and where they were used. The last aspect and questions have still not been studied closely.

In order to create his poems, the poet needs a bit of inspiration, a sheet of paper, and a piece of bread, too. The typographer needs machines, qualified workers and many other things to create a book. The following example demonstrates how technical resources are important; in 1938, the reorganisation of the national book publishing system temporary left the Roma authors without a printing house. The efforts to change the situation were unsuccessful, because previously “all Gypsy literature was published in the 17th Printing House of the city of Moscow” (RGALI, Ф. 631, Оп. 6, Д. 617, Л. 34), and the state plans did not provide other possibilities for printing for few years. The limited technical resources in this case were aggravated by the lack of specialists who perished during the wave of repression ending in 1937–1938. In general, it is well known that Gypsy books were created in the USSR until the 1938, but the details of this process were partly unseen behind the general enthusiastic formula: Gypsies were one of the many people, repressed by Tsarism, who escaped to the light of freedom and knowledge.

We should start with the simplest question, though rarely touched upon. Producing books requires a printing house and specialists. In 1928–1931 Gypsy books were published in two printing houses of the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR (*Tsentrizdat*):

1. Almost every Romani language book was printed and bound at one address: Moscow, Shlyuzovaya embankment, house number 162. Before 1917 (at least since 1897) this was a dyeing factory and paper mill of the 2nd guild merchant Alexander Grigoryevich Kirillov (Вся Москва 1915:333). Now it is a ruin, though listed in the Red Book (i.e. book with list of threatened artefacts) of Architecture (Электронный п. д.). The contemporary address is Moscow, Shlyuzovaya embankment, 10.

Since 1927, this was the Printing house “Book Factory” of *Tsentrizdat*, which gathered specialists for book production in 52 languages. Head of the Editorial Sector of the publishing house was Semen Markovich Dimanstein, 1886–1938 (Вся Москва 1927:351). The same complex of buildings, placed on the street corner, had another address: Shliuzovoy passage, no. 6, as it is indicated in the first Soviet Roma book which was an ABC-book for adults (Дударова & Панков 1928:96).

When, in 1931, *Tsentrizdat* was reorganised, its “Book Factory” (at Shliuzovaya embankment, 10) was managed by Viktor Samuilovich Wainstock and Head of production was Genrich Franzevich Matz/Motz, 1889–1938 (Вся Москва 1931:457). Later it was named the Printing house of the *Polygraphkniga* Trust (OGIZ) No. 17 (known as “Factory of National Books”) and was headed by Aleksey Petrovich Shchukin, 1894–1938 and technical/product head continued to be G. F. Motz, alias Matz (Вся Москва 1936:197). Since 1932 until 1938 Printing house No. 17 printed all Romani language books prepared during this period

by various state-owned publishing institutions. However, many technical specialists (not of Roma origin) involved in the printing of books in many languages were dead after the Great Purge. It was the lack of skilled hands that made the recovery of the Romani language books' production process after 1939 a difficult task. This, however, is only an assumption and one interpretation. Soon, the Second World War started, which changed all possible plans for book printing.

2. In 1930–1931, the *Tsentrizdat* possessed the second printing house in the second capital city Leningrad, where a small number of Romani language books was also printed. Before the 1917 Revolution, it was a printing house of the Governing Senate that was the legislative, judicial, and executive body of the Russian Emperors; and nowadays it is the building of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation. The factory had two addresses. The printing house of the *Tsentrizdat* named *Comintern* was located in the Senate's printing house building: house 1, Krasnaya (former Galernaya) and headed by Ivan Andreevich Vishnyakov, 1898–? (Весь Ленинград 1930:181; Весь Ленинград 1931:192), who wasn't involved in Romani language book production after 1939, as he was drafted in the army during the Second World War where he worked as a naval typographer and was awarded military awards afterwards. This address is indicated on the Romani language translation of the famous book by Klim Voroshilov (1881–1969) *Авэла-ли марибэ?* (Will There Be a War?) (Ворошылово 1931:2), which was a brief and trivial explanation of the inevitability of the future world war, printed in Russian several times by millions of copies. The second building of the printing house *Comintern* was in the former printing house “Kügelgen, Glitsch & C” (established 1906), and was located at Yekaterinhofskiy (now Rimskiy-Korsakov) Avenue, 87 (Весь Ленинград 1926:161; Весь Ленинград 1935:411). We have not yet discovered a Romani language book indicating that it had been printed at this address.

Producing books in the Romani language was not at all an easy task. Surprisingly, the Romani literature production was rapidly growing during the years of paper shortage in the country. Many of the preserved manuscripts of Roma authors were not written on standard sheets (they were not on sale), but on hand-slanted sheets cut off from a large printing roll. This was gray rough paper with spread ink and not always good pens. The quality of the paper and writing materials, however, contrasts with the careful and clear handwriting on these papers. The censors, who left traces of a red pencil marking undesirable and doubtful places, and typesetters, who left black fingerprints on the margins, worked directly with these copies.

The shortage of writing paper in any form as well as paper for book printing was shocking and offensive, as Korney Chukovskiy, one of the most published Soviet authors, witnessed in his diary (Чуковский 1991:42, 59, 77, 76). Nevertheless, in the meantime, there was paper especially provided for ethnic minorities' books. For instance, in 1933, in Crimea, “There are also a lot of books printed in Tatar [language]. But the Tatars hardly read them – and the saleswoman at the kiosk told me that in the end she was tearing these books into pieces – and in the form of package she was selling them to customers

who come for grapes.” (ibid:79) It is highly possible to suppose that some Romani language publications blindly sent somewhere for sale had the same fate.

Every year the writers of the Gypsy group of the Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers (MAPP) fought for a small place in the state plans for their books. It wasn't a certain thing. In one of his preserved letters, Alexander Germano officially asked the *Tsentrizdat* about Gypsy books planned for 1932 (Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 66). The answer to this request remains unknown, but the year 1932 was in the end the most successful one for Romani language books' production.

In addition, other state publishers were also obliged to publish books in the languages of the USSR peoples, including Romani. It was a difficult task because of the lack of skilled people, e.g. in the Nationalities Sector of ONTI (abbreviation of *Объединенное Научно-Техническое Издательство* in Russian or Joint Scientific and Technical Publishers) “the main staff by the day of the report is only 30 percent full.” (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 1) This led to the urgent involvement of partly unskilled personnel for the translation of technical texts: “12-е) Contact Moscow organisations ... and take into account the members of nationalities there.” (ibid.:2) In the resolution on the Report of this sector on December 19, 1931 is written that “the GIKhL [State Publishing House for Fiction Literature] had not complied with the decisions of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks dated August 15, 1931, as the work on the production of fiction in languages of a significant part of nationalities has not yet been organised.” (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 3) In such alarming situation many publishing houses were forced to participate in this work by publishing books of different nationalities: “Use the stuff of all publishers included in ONTI for parallel publication of literature in Russian and nationalities' languages.” (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 1 об.) This measure also explains the apparent peak in the number of Romani language publications that was reached in 1932.

Appropriate measures were taken very soon: “3 – ... shock-working month started from February 15 to March 20 [1932] ... the issue of nationalities' literature should be transferred to the socialist conveyor.” (ibid.:4) The last term (in Russian *соуконовейер, социалистический конвейер*) meant activation of workers' proposals and inventions aimed at improving the efficiency of their work. Today this process would be called ‘constant brainstorming’.

Russian books were pushed back in line and priority was given to the preparation of books in the languages of nationalities: “7 – As a last resort for the elimination of downtime ... allow the loading of linotypes of the 17th Printing House with Russian typing, if there is no typing in nationalities' languages.” (ibid.:4)

Perhaps the Romani language publications were even in a better position in the 17th Printing House when compared to the other nationalities' languages. At that time, an essential part of the activities related to small languages was devoted to Latinisation. This process did not touch the Romani language which continued to be published in Cyrillic. The meeting of the editorial board “Creativity of the Peoples of the USSR” at the

GIKhL (State Publishing House for Fiction Literature) on December 22, 1936 concluded that the plan for book production of Gypsy literature was 100 percent complete (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 37). Strangely enough, this monumental book of 1937 (Горький & Мехлис 1937) did not include any translation from Romani (Shapoval 2021:7).

The standard print-run of Romani language books was from 1000 to 500. There are two reasons why Romani books of the interwar period have been preserved so poorly. The first reason is understandable and obvious, as at that time books and other paper things disappeared. Under the conditions of lack of paper, any piece of paper could be used for the needs of the everyday life. Roll-up cigarettes and fruit and herring packaging are quite obvious ways of use. The second reason is not so simple. The editor and publisher Leonid Domgerr informs: "The copies of the first half volume [of A. Pushkin's works] published at the end of 1938 reached the print-run of '27,000', although in reality only 5,000 copies were printed." (Домгерь 1987:328, note 17) If Pushkin's ceremonial jubilee edition suffered so much from the paper deficiency, it is hard to imagine what a gap could be expected between the declared and the real print-run of nationalities' publications of that time. A print-run of 500–1000 copies does not differ technically from a print-run of 100 copies, as the paper used for adjustment and test sheets just consumes up such insufficient savings. Thus, the very modest print-run of 500–1000 for Romani language books should be considered accurate and not far from the exact number of printed copies.

On the one hand, the Gypsy writer was fairly well protected from suspicions of having a wrong social background; he (or she) could not be accused of an exploitative social background. On the other hand, the taxation system of artists was very disappointing and sometimes the material profit from creative work was hardly existing.

It would be interesting to look at the information about authors' fees. When interpreting retail prices for the period of the first two five-year plans (1928–1937), we should take into account the plausible assumption that the real purchasing power of the rouble (*червонец*) decreased very fast. This process was uneven and almost catastrophic in the period 1931–1933. Roma activists and writers, however, somehow survived this period. The fees of creative workers were constantly growing in nominal terms, although this hardly compensated the real devaluation.

Writers and translators worked intensively. For example, in 1932 Nikolay Pankov had translated a minimum of 461 pages and edited more than 360 pages of translations by other persons. In addition, he worked as a Gypsy teachers' instructor and a political activist. It is worth pointing out that, in 1932, having a lot of work meant a bitter luck, as work could cover only the necessary basic living expenses, which still for many people was just an unreachable dream.

On the base of book publishing statistics, I have previously emphasised the crucial bond between the first and the second five-year plans for the development of the national economy of the Soviet Union, and how it had affected the Romani language books' planning (Shapoval 2020:352). We know very little about the first five-year period. There is an undated list of the average fees signed by A. Ryabinina, then head of the National Sector

of the Leningrad branch of the State Publishing House for Fiction Literature (GIKhL). Apparently, soon after 1933, the author of prose in a language of a nationality of the USSR received 150–250 roubles for one printed sheet with a print-run of 2000 copies (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 14).

Later, Ivan Rom-Lebedev and Mikhail Alekseevich Ilyinskiy, “acting jointly in relation to rights and obligations,” as authors of the book “Stories from the life of Gypsies before the revolution and under the Soviets (in Gypsy),” under the agreement No 1873 of July 31, 1936 received 350 roubles for one printed sheet with a print-run of 1000 copies (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 6). As an additional difficulty and lack of many things on sale, the so called ‘commodity famine’ was imposed on this money devaluation. It was impossible to buy the most ordinary things without coupons which were set up for regulating distribution. They are mentioned in the literary works of the Roma author as a sign of the everyday life. Bezlyudskiy for instance proudly wrote that he was able to obtain coupons for clothes for Roma schoolchildren:

Нарара сарэ тыкнэ чяворэ савэ сыклёна дрэ романы школа гынэ манца дро Мосторго и пиро ордеры льям ваш кажнонэскэ тривики калошэнца. (Безлюдско 1931:26)

Recently all the little children who study in the Roma school have come to the store Mostorg with me and we, on coupons, bought everyone boots with galoshes.

The state organised nationalities’ projects were rarely profitable. According to Contract number 1568 (of April 13, 1936), Nikolay Pankov had to get for the Romani translation of the story *The Stationmaster* by A. Pushkin (about 110–120 pages) 875 roubles (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 28). In this case the profit could be only 50 roubles (500 copies, 0.10 roubles each). It is obvious that book production costs were significantly higher. Unfortunately, we have no information about other books. Often in contracts was indicated a (twice) higher number of copies than in the issued book itself. How this affected the translator’s and author’s fee is unknown. On the one hand, in the standard contract form we find no mentions of compensation to the author in case the publishers did not fulfil their obligations: “6. The publishing house undertakes to publish the work indicated in clause 1 in the amount of 1000 copies” (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 23 об.), the option “If not ...” is omitted. On the other hand, in 1932, the high-ranking Soviet writer Boris Pilnyak received 5,000 roubles as a compensation, since the publisher did not have paper to print his book (Чуковский 1991:59).

One of the last books published in USSR, in 1938, was a collection of prosaic works by Aleksey Aleksandrovich Svetlov (1897–1961), a member (since 1936) of the Union of Writers of the USSR. There is a note about him in an official document, the author of which is not indicated in the copy: “a modest (almost wordless) in life, but a significant writer in Gypsy literature, Leksa Svetlov – Aleksey Aleksandrovich.” (RGALI Ф. 631, Оп. 6, Д. 617, Л. 44) The main and initial part of his book was the novelette *Ром Хвасю* (Светлово 1938:3–117). Svetlov had a contract with the State Publishing House for Fiction

Literature signed on June 28, 1937 and the manuscript was submitted to the publisher on December 1, 1937 (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 7). This confirms our hypothesis that in 1938 only Romani language books planned for the previous five-year period (1933–1937) were published. Further publication of Romani books became impossible due to organisational and institutional problems: “However, in 1938, when some Moscow publishing houses closed their national sectors and transferred the publishing of national literature to the respective republics, Gypsy writers lost all opportunity to be printed in their native language.” (RGALI Ф. 631, Оп. 6, Д. 617, Л. 33)

The last Romani language books were ordered for printing in June 1938. One of them was the Gypsy-Russian dictionary compiled by Aleksey Barannikov and Maksim Sergievskiy (Баранников & Сергиевский 1938). This dictionary was in preparation for several years and its concept changed few times. In 1931 the journal *Нэво дром* (New Way) informed its subscriber A. Putiata that “[t]he Gypsy-Russian dictionary will be printed this autumn” (Нэво дром 1931:24). Later, the edition was promoted in different format to be published by different publisher that, in fact, was never issued:

Дрэ издательство “Советско Энциклопедия” авэла вымэкно лынаскиро баро “Романо-руско-английско словарё”, саво стховэна профессоро А. П. Баранниково и профессоро М. В. Сергиевско. (Романо- 1932:23)

This summer, a large *Romani-Russian-English Dictionary* will be published at the *Soviet Encyclopaedia* Publishing House, it is composing by Professor A. P. Barannikov and Professor M. V. Sergievskiy.

This is the only mention of this publishing house in connection with Gypsy book publishing. The dictionary was published in a hurry and not in a final and fully prepared version, which led to some criticism (Черенков 2013:9; Шаповал 2013).

The 1920s and 1930s were an interesting era in the USSR: the visual arts went through the evolution from revolutionary intoxication with freedom and extreme formal experiments to severe dogmatic and militaristic laconism. At the same time, the printing technique improved markedly. Unfortunately, very little is known about the designers of the Romani language books as only few names were indicated in the 1930s. For example, in 1932, Arkadiy Ivanovich Shcherbakov (1901–1971) made five drawings in black ink for the novel by Bezlyudskiy *Грай* (Horse) (1933: front page, 9, 33, 7, 27). All five sheets with illustrations were later used in the book (Безлюдско 1932), which had been printed and available in libraries now. The name Shcherbakov is provided in the book (Безлюдско 1933:2). In many other cases, the names of the designers remain unknown. It is noteworthy that on the reverse side of the sheets there are pencil notes signed by I. V. Shishkov which read “pay two times” (note one) and “60 rubles” (note five). The reasons for such method for payment are unclear to us, but at least these documents help us understand how the book design and pictures were paid.

The state support for Romani language publishing also determined the relatively low retail prices of books. The total price of the whole Romani collection (counting one copy of each printed book) in 1938 has reached a bit more than a monthly salary of a mid-qualified worker. In another scale it costs no more than five–six pounds of green coffee beans in 1938 Moscow, that is a rare food item which had never been under rationing limitation in the USSR.

However, these books' prices did not include the price of distribution. Distribution was generally very poorly organised: "Much attention was paid to the very weak work of the National Sector of the *Knigotsentr* (a united state bookseller) for the Gypsy books distribution." (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 33) The problem is obvious as sellers had a lot of troubles and almost no income from these books. Readers might have been looking for them in vain.

When publishers were correcting thematic plans for the first trimester of 1934, discussions arose, for example, on the atheist books (*What Do Gypsies Believe in?* and *What Is Superstition*), between publishers who were interested in politically correct topics (obviously in the scale of that time) and booksellers who were more worried about book distribution and sales: "The representative of the Book Selling Centre KNIGOTSENTR Rybak objects to the publication of an anti-religious textbook in the Tat and Gypsy languages, [although] in the annual plan these names were approved and agreed upon with the National Sector of the KNIGOTSENTR." (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 23) Comrade Rybak knew those books are very hard for sale, although their prices were low.

In a letter of June 1941, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy asked the employee of the Gypsy section of the Writers' Union Elizaveta Muraviova to buy for him a "little book of my songs" in Moscow. He was informed about it by the composer Semen Mikhailovich Bugachevskiy (1903–1968) but had not seen it yet himself (RGALI Ф. 631, Оп. 6, Д. 617, Л. 115). If this was a book published in 1934, Bezlyudskiy could have gotten it, for example, when visiting Moscow in 1935–1936. The exact details of this songbook are not mentioned in the letter. But this example is very illustrative for the fact that for some reason an author living far from Moscow was unable to buy a copy of his own book. Romani books distribution was a very serious problem in a big country.

One can conclude that the figures of print-run were quite satisfying (one copy of any Romani language book for 60–120 persons was a very good index of supplying for that time), while the Romani books' distribution was poorly organised. A document from 1935 shows that Romani books were sold very slowly, e.g., 767 out of 1000 copies were still unsold of Stalin's *About Technique* (Сталино 1932) and 854 out of 1000 copies from Amosov's *The Struggle against Religion and [for] Socialism* (Амосово 1932) remained unsold as well (RGALI, Ф. 1810, Оп. 1, Д. 514, Л. 79–81 об.).

On the one hand, there were schools for Gypsy children, for instance, in the village of Serebrianka near the city of Smolensk, and they have probably received Romani textbooks from Moscow for free. That is why there was no data about school textbooks in

the document mentioned above. A document from 1936 shows similar problems and explains the slow selling of Romani language handbooks because of the small number of students, estimating the need for Romani textbooks in four regions from 15 to 100 copies per year (GARF, Ф. Р 1235, Оп. 123, Д. 27, Ч. 4, Л. 95–96).

At the same time, there were places where Roma were waiting for handbooks in vain. An unnamed Gypsy girl with the penname *Kolkhozaritsa* (a Kolkhoz woman) wrote, envisioning Moscow as a book paradise:

Дрэ Москва лывларитко бандза зачиды романэ лывларьенца, а адай дро романо гавытко совэто нанэ ни екх лывлари прэ романы чиб... Бут моля РОНО и товаришшѐ Безлюдско чиндя дрэ Москва папири соб тэ выбичавэн романэ лывляря савэ исы, нэ уса жэ лывларитко бандза на камэл тэ выбичавэл. (Колхозарица 1934:1).

In Moscow, the bookstore is littered with Romani books, but here in the Roma rural district there is not a single book in Romani ... And the district education department and comrade Bezlyudskiy wrote letters to Moscow many times asking to send Romani books, which are for sale, but still the bookstore does not want to send.

This unequal distribution of textbooks was indirectly caused by a fixed price for nationalities' textbooks, which included the cost of delivery, including distant transportation of small lots of relatively inexpensive books unprofitable for merchants. The other reason was the weak advertising system. In the Russian State Library were discovered only four reference and informational publications (of very modest format) that helped bookstores and libraries to order books for nationalities in 1935–1936. In 1935, two catalogues included two pages of Gypsy books (План 1935:19–20; Новые 1935-I:19–20) and one page referred to them in a similar publication in 1936 (Новые 1936-II:7). In 1935, a 23-page catalogue of textbooks and other books for students in Romani language was published (Стабильные 1935). This was not a lot at all. And, thus, it was especially important that Romani language journals in 1927–1932 regularly published reviews and announcement for newly published books in Romani. In addition, the subscribers of *Нэво дром* journal received 12 items of books as a bonus to the edition in the period from January until October 1931. One of them was written by an unknown Smolensk Roma activist de visu: “Мурачковский [Василий], Ваш со ракирла нэво гавитко хулаибнытко артельно уставо.” which translates as “Vasiliy Murachkovskiy, What does the new [Standard] charter of agricultural cooperative farms say?” (Нэво дром 1930:21)

6.3 Roma Press in the USSR

Roma periodicals in the USSR between the two World Wars were formally divided into journals and newspapers. The Romani journals were more numerous than the newspapers, although they were more expensive to produce. This imbalance is quite unusual as typically newspapers are more numerous than journals. Copies of the Romani language

journals are much better preserved and available in libraries, while copies of the newspapers are less preserved. For this reason, as well as in order to follow a chronological order, it is natural to start from the journals.

Viktor Shklovskiy noted in 1924 that “[p]olitical journals block the perception of a journal as a literary form. But they also have their own history.” (Шкловский 1990:386) The Romani language journals appeared only ten years after the formation of Soviet Russia, in a time when the balance between literature and politics on the journals’ pages was clearly inclined towards the predominance of political topics.

Two Soviet Romani language journals are known. They were published sequentially by approximately the same circle of persons and the communist Andrey S. Taranov was executive editor: *Романы зоря* (Roma Dawn, 1927–1930) and *Нэво дром* (New Way, 1930–1932). The editorial staff was not personally announced, but it is known that Alexander Germano, the most productive Romani language author of the time, played an important and main role in the preparation of the journals’ issues.

The first journal was distributed free of charge, as it is shown on the back side of the wrapper. The second journal was sold at a fairly modest price of 15–25 copecks per issue. For comparison purposes, one can consider that in this period a visit to the bath house, a movie, a tram ride, and a pay-phone booth tariff were a *dime*, or 10 kopecks (Жолковский 2010). According to the posters of the Gypsy performances of the Leningrad Ethnographic Theatre under the direction of Vsevolod N. Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, which were extremely popular for decades, at the end of 1930 had “the price of places from 25 kopecks up to 1 rouble 50 kopecks” (RGALI: Ф. 2640, Оп. 1, Д. 130). In 1931, the prices of tickets for the First Moscow State Circus varied from 1.40 to 4.90 roubles (Вся Москва 1931:247). See Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Romani language periodicals in the USSR: price per year

In addition, another difference between the two journals was that *Романы зоря* journal was actually an annual periodical (three issues were published during its four-year existence, the last one being a double one, see Table 6.1), while *Нэво дром* journal was a monthly one (during 24 months there were 19 issues, five of them were double, see Table 6.2).

Table 6.1 *Романы зоря* (Roma Dawn) journal: issues and number of pages

Year	1927	1928	1929	1930 (August)
Романы зоря	Issue 1, 35 pp.		Issue 2, 50 pp.	Issue 3–4, 64 pp.

According to preliminary announcements and advertisements (Германо 1930:32; Лебедево 1930:31), the second journal was named *Бутяритко ром* (A Working Rom).

Table 6.2 *Нэво дром* (New Way) journal: number of issue, number of pages and price in kopecks

Year	1930	1931	1932
January		Issue 1, 36 pp., 25 kop.	Issue 1, 24 pp., 20 kop.
February		Issue 2, 36 pp., 25 kop.	Issue 2–3, 32 pp., 30 kop.
March		Issue 3, 32 pp., 25 kop.	
April		Issue 4–5, 32 pp., 25 kop.	Issue 4, 24 pp., 20 kop.
May			Issue 5, 24 pp., 20 kop.
June		Issue 6, 32 pp., 25 kop.	Issue 6, 24 pp., 20 kop.
July		Issue 7, 24 pp., 25 kop.	Issue 7, 24 pp., 20 kop.
August	Issue 1, 16 pp., 15 kop.	Issue 8, 24 pp., 25 kop.	
September	Issue 2, 20 pp., 15 kop.	Issue 9–10, 32 pp., 25 kop.	
October	Issue 3, 24 pp., 15 kop.		
November	Issue 4–5, 25 pp., 15 kop.	Issue 11–12, 24 pp., 25 kop.	
December			

A subscription was announced to the *Нэво дром* journal. However, the visible decrease in the volume of issues, as well as the publication of double issues at the end of the year, indicate constant difficulties in the journal's publishing. At the end of 1931, the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR (*Tsentrizdat*) was reorganised and included

into the GIZ (the United State Publishers). For this reason, the last double issue of the *Нэво дром* journal in 1931 and its first issue of 1932 were already published by the National Sector of the Educational Publishing House *Uchpedgiz*, the institution under the People's Commissariat for Education (*Narkompros*), although formally it was published at the old address of the previous publishing house *Tsentrizdat* (10, Nikolskaya St.). The next five issues of the journal, until July 1932, were prepared at the new editorial office: GIZ, 16, Kuznetskiy bridge, 16, *Uchpedgiz*, National Sector.

After the seventh issue of 1932, the publication of the *Нэво дром* journal suddenly stopped. Unexpected closure and no official comments from the authorities was a pattern repeated regularly in the Roma cultural projects. This time also, no explanation was given about the closure of the journal. It must have been a surprise for the editorial board too, since in the very last (seventh) issue for 1932, on the second page of the cover, as usual, was published an announcement about subscribing to the journal for 1.80 per year for 12 issues (which was a very solid discount as the retail price of an individual issue was 20 kopecks, $12 \times 0.20 = 2.40$).

It is logical to think that the editors had several planned and unpublished issues at different stages of readiness. However, no traces of them have been found. Perhaps the decision to close the journal was provoked by the publication of a critical piece about the attitude of the authorities to the first Gypsy school in Moscow, located, since the end of 1925, near Taganka square. It was related to the visit of a delegation of foreign workers, probably proletarian writers, who were fascinated by the singing of the Roma school-children's choir. The delegation then visited the cramped basement in which the children were studying (*Нэво дром* 1932:10). This very serious 'political mistake' could have caused scandal and the closure of the journal. The place was anyway also endangered of being closed as the authorities had a different plan for its use:

Дрэ Москва сы романы школа, нэ джибэн лакиро дрэван и дрэван сы на мишто. Адая школа камнэ тэ пирильдзян палю дэшудуй километры э штэтостыр, кай дживэна тыкнэ чяворэ. Камнэ тэ пирильдзян одолэстыр, со штуба романы школа, дрэ сави ёй (школа) бутякирдя шов бэрш[,] ачъя треби ваш позбуглякир[и]бэ руссконэ школа. (*Нэво дром* 1932:9)

There is a Roma school in Moscow, but its life is very, very difficult. The authorities want to transfer this school 12 kilometres from the place where Roma children dwell. They want to replace it because the building of the Roma school in which it (the school) has been working for six years has become required for the expansion of the Russian school.

The content analysis of the journals shows the dominant position of political topics, as can be seen from Table 6.3 and Table 6.4. At the same time, the variety of forms and themes condensed in a small issue is striking.

Table 6.3 Contents of *Романы зоря* (Roma Dawn) journal, 1930, issue 3 and issue 4

Author	Title in Romani language and in English	Genre	Theme	Pages
A. S. Taranovo	Ваш колхозно строительство (On the organisation of collective farms)	Instructive article	Politics of sedentarisation	1–3
G. Lebedevo	Ваше политико-воспитательно буты (About the political education)	Analytical article	Need for ideological education	3–5
D. Savvov	Рома и коллективизация (Roma and collectivisation)	Opinion article	Benefits of collectivisation for Roma	6–9
N. Dudarova	Романы школа (Roma school)	Opinion article	Pros and cons in a concrete Roma school	10–13
Prof. M. V. Sergieviskiy	Сыр треби тэ чинэс чячепнытко романэс (How to correctly write in Romani)	Educational article	Phonetical principle of spelling in Romani	13–14
Prof. M. V. Sergieviskiy	Соскэ треби тэ скэдэс сарэ романэ лава (Why do we need to collect all the Romani words)	Educational article	Linguistic discussion	14–16
No author (G. Lebedevo)	Дрэ СССР (In the USSR)	Poetry	Successes of Soviet Roma	17
Alexander Germano	Япра Yarga [a Gypsy Chief]	Prose, short story	Criticism of Roma traditional way of life	17–35
G. Lebedevo	Стихи (Poems)	Poetry	Roma youth and the new life in collective farms	35–36
Maria Pol'akova	Линка Linka [a Roma girl]	Prose, short story	The old 'unhappy' vs new happy life	36
G. Lebedevo	Мулы рат (Dead blood)	Poetry	Critique of old nomadic habits	43–44
G. Lebedevo	Сыр дживэна рома (How do Roma live)	Opinion article	Glorification of the new life in collective farms	44
G. Lebedevo (Indo–Rom)	Кличё колхозостыр (Call to the collective farm)	Poetry	Propagating collective farms	46

Table 6.3 Contents of *Романы зоря* (Roma Dawn) journal, 1930, issue 3 and issue 4 (*cont.*)

Author	Title in Romani language and in English	Genre	Theme	Pages
Evdokiya Orlova	Хасиям палэ гилы (We died for our song)	Theatre-play	Young Rom imprison for theft, his fiancée marries another man	46
No author	Пирэ советско э пхув (In the Soviet land)	Reporting article	Discussion of the new way of life	58
M. Polyakova	Сыр ром Пупырка скэдыяпэ кэ рома дрэ Москва (юмор) (How a Rom Pupyrka was going to visit Roma in Moscow, humouristic comics)	Comics	Propagating the new way of life	63

In 1932, the proportion of articles published without the name of their author increases and the proportion of fiction decreased.

Table 6.4 Contents of *Нэво дром* (New Way) journal, 1932, issue 7

Author's name	Title in Romani language and in English	Genre	Theme	Pages
No author	Курсы ваш подготовка (Courses for training [of Roma teachers])	Announcement	Practical information for applicants	1
No author	Нацыонально пучибэ (The national question)	Publicistics	Historical overview and critique of Tsarist and Provisional governments	2
No author	Екх миллионо 51 тысенцо састэ (1 051 000 roubles)	News report	Agriculture, support for Roma farms	3
No author	Кай авэна инке романэ колхозы (Where will the new Roma collective farms be)	News report	Agriculture, informing about three Roma farms	3
No author	Вчивэнапэ дрэ романэ колхозы (Roma come to collective farms)	News report	Agriculture, Roma farms in four regions	3

Table 6.4 Contents of *Нэво дром* (New Way) journal, 1932, issue 7 (*cont.*)

Author's name	Title in Romani language and in English	Genre	Theme	Pages
E. Popova, M. Bril'o.	Рома дрэ Союза ССР (Roma in the USSR)	Analytical article	National politics toward Roma	4
No author	Тхойбэн Сарэкоопромсоюзос (Decree of the Union of Cooperatives)	Official information	Economics, Roma policies	12
No author	Со бангэ тэ рипирэн штэты (What local authorities need to remember)	Instructive material	Recommendations how to involve Roma into kolkhozes	13
Gusarovo	Дрэ Цыгхимпромо (In a Gypsy chemistry cooperative in Moscow)	Analytical article	Economics, propaganda	14
No author	Ваш выкэрибэ промфинплано (On the implementation of the industrial and financial plan)	Economic report	Reporting on fulfilled plans	14
No author	Промфинплано дро Маё (Industrial and financial plan for May)	Economic report	Economy	14
No author	Промфинплано дро Июньё (Industrial and financial plan for June)	Economic report	Economy	15
No author	Со кэрла арминистрац, пиро ракхибэ састыпэ (What the administration is doing to save [workers] health)	Final report	Health issues of chemistry Roma workers	16
No author	Ловэ ваш романэ колхозы (Money for Roma collective farms)	Economic news and reports	Economy	15
No author	Кролико дэла камло тэ чяло мас, куч цыпа (A rabbit gave tasty and nourishing meat, valuable fur)	Instructive material	Agriculture	16
M. Bezlyudsko	Пашка (Pashka [a male's name])	Prose, short story	A Rom horse dealer in a tough time	17
O. Pankova	Коминтерно (Comintern [an anthem])	Poetry, song verses for choirs	The Comintern anthem's text	21

Table 6.4 Contents of *Нэво дром* (New Way) journal, 1932, issue 7 (*cont.*)

Author's name	Title in Romani language and in English	Genre	Theme	Pages
M. Bezlyudsko	Миро литературно дром (My literary path)	Prose, memoir	Bezlyudskiy's story of becoming a writer while in prison	23
A. Maksimovo	Лылваря ваш ромэнгэ (Books for Roma)	Book review	Romani language books reviews	23
No author	Выгынэ нэвэ лылваря (Newly published books)	Announcement	Advertising five books on agriculture and atheism	25

If we consider the slow and labour-demanding technologies, the unpredictability of censorship requirements and the lack of literate correspondents, the existence of these Romani journals at that time must be considered a miracle.

Romani language periodicals were generally notable for their marked instability: after the release of the first issue of the *Романы зоря* journal in 1927 (see discussion on the accurate release date in Шаповал 2019), a year-long pause in 1928, and three years of relative activity, the Romani language periodical press continued its dotted existence further, but on the periphery and in the more modest format, as newspapers.

After almost three years of complete inactivity of Romani language press publications (1932 and 1933), in 1934, Romani language newspapers emerged, which marked the history of the Roma newspapers in the USSR. They appeared relatively later than the journals which were more expensive and slower to produce. In 1934 and 1935 only four newspaper pages were published in the town of Mineralnye Vody. Such an imbalance and domination of journals' production over newspaper publishing contradicts the approaches and theoretical positions of the leaders of Bolshevism. Stalin's formula "the newspaper as a collective organiser" (Stalin 1923) was not duly implemented in practice in the Roma periodical press. All in all, three issues of Roma newspapers were published and we have reasons to believe that other newspapers existed. Quite a lot of print and archival sources have been preserved from the decade under study (1927–1938). These materials contain a lot of cross-references, reviews, announcements and links, and if other newspapers were published, they would have been mentioned there.

Nevertheless, some obscure mentions of Gypsy newspapers are sometimes found until 1934. An unknown newspaper is mentioned in the first issue of the journal *Романы зоря*: "The Roma newspaper was published and will continue." (Мырзев 1927:3) However, nothing is known about such a newspaper. Perhaps the author of this information meant Vol'frid Viksne's note / article of about 150 words published in 1927, in the seventh issue of the newspaper of the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR (*Tsentrizdat*). The newspaper was entitled *За верстаткой* (Behind the Layout) and a short text "Our Holiday" was translated into 52 languages, including Romani (Викснэ 1927:3). The newspaper did not indicate the name of the author of the Russian text, neither of its Romani

language translator. The article was listed in the bibliography of books and articles about Gypsies by Alexander Germano: “324. Вискнэ В. Р. Амаро свэнко...” (Герман 1930:74). The surname of the author of the solemn note was often written differently: Вискне, Viksne Wolfrid Reyngoldovich (1899–1938). He was Latvian proletarian and revolutionary, and his last employment was as head of the technical section of the national department of *Uchpedgiz*. He was later convicted of terrorist and fascist activities, shot at Butovo training ground, and rehabilitated in June 1959 (Фамилия Вискне 2020).

The name of the Romani language translator of this text is given only in the manuscript of Germano on Gypsy literature of 1927–1937: “translated by N. A. Pankov” (Германо n.d.:3), see also the Romani language text’s analysis and discussion in my article “A translation into the literary language of the period of its formation as a breakthrough” (Шаповал 2020a:275).

The second mention of the Gypsy newspaper is less clear. Paul Vaillant-Couturier (1892–1937), a French writer and well-known figure of the Comintern, in an article about visiting a Gypsy collective farm in 1931, mentions, among other cultural achievements, that he was shown a newspaper in Romani. The Gypsy man proudly addresses the French guest: “Подыкх... амэндэ исы газета прэ романы чиб” – “Look ... we have a newspaper in the Romani language.” (Кутюрье 1931:8; Германо 1933:43) It is not possible to find out which newspaper was shown in this case, but the accented fact is very significant as a cultural achievement. The First International Brigade of Proletarian Writers, including comrade Paul Vaillant-Couturier, had the important task to show to the world the Soviet paradise in all its glory. Perhaps a Gypsy newspaper was published before their visit in order to be presented during the very visit, but there is no newspaper copy from 1931 preserved until today.

Another mention of a Gypsy newspaper can be found in an article criticising chauvinism against Roma workers on the construction of a bridge over the Tvertsa river (now named after its constructor P. Bogomolov) in the city of Tver: “The public prosecutor [in the court process against chauvinism] was a representative of the national Gypsy newspaper, comrade Dorano; he spoke with applause.” (К. 1931) It is quite sure that the name *Dorano* is the Romani adjective *Darano* ‘scared’ used as a ‘Roma name’. The case was briefly described (Таранов 1931:3), but there was no new information about it.

Before moving on to the characterisation of the preserved issue of the third newspaper, it is worth describing the contrast between the two five-year plans in relation to Romani periodicals. What is the most important difference between journals and newspapers? In the Roma project in question, the most important difference is in their official status. The second half of the studied pre-war decade (the second five-year plan period, 1933–1937) was time of digression and there was a slow but steady decline in the Gypsy cultural project. And this is clearly seen in the status of the Romani language periodicals. The total length of the Romani journals (22 issues altogether) is more than 700 pages in the first five-year planning period, while there were only eight pages of newspapers published in the second five-year period. This clearly shows declining of the project. The number of copies was changing following the same pattern, as can be seen in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 Romani language periodicals in the USSR: number of copies per year

The most impressive result has been reached in 1931, when more than 300 pages per journal were published. This was a great achievement considering the growing recession and crisis of the period. The number contrasts to the four newspapers' pages published annually in 1934 and 1935 which is just a symbolical contribution as can be seen from Figure 6.4. Paradoxically, after the proclamation of Joseph Stain's motto "Life has become better" on November 17, 1935, not a single page of a Romani language periodical was published. It is very likely that some newspapers' issues have not been preserved but it could be considered with certainty that no other newspapers were published.

Figure 6.4 Romani language periodicals in the USSR: number of pages per year

The Romani language journals of the first five-year planning period (1928–1932) were published by the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR *Tsentrizdat* and (since December 1931) in *Uchpedgiz*. Both publishing houses were part of the capital city's structures and therefore the journals passed the censorship control on the highest level of *Glavlit* (General Directorate for Literature and Publishing). All three known Roma newspapers during the second five-year planning period (1933–1937) were printed in the district town of Mineralnye Vody, thus far from the political and cultural centre of the country. These newspapers were:

- 1) *Пало большевистско колхозо* [For the Bolshevik Collective Farm]. Политотделоскиро органо Минводсконэ МТС [Mineralnye Vody MTS political department's organ]. 1934. [No. 1 ?] May 24. 2 pp.
- 2) *Пало большевистско колхозо* [For the Bolshevik Collective Farm]. Политотделоскиро органо Минводсконэ МТС [Mineralnye Vody MTS political department's organ]. 1934. No. 2. August 22. 2 pp.
- 3) *Сталинец* [Stalinist]. Минводсконэ РК ВКП(б), РИК'оскиро тэ Райсовпрофоскиро Органо [Mineralnye Vody district CPSU(b) [Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)] comity, district executive comity, district trade unions' council organ]. 1935. No. 3 (137). October 5. 4 pp.

Two of the issues that have been preserved are small newspapers of the local machine tractor station (MTS) (1934), the last issue is of a somewhat higher status, that is, the organ of a number of district organisations (1935). The last change was expected, because in 1935 all small MTS newspapers were closed and transformed into newspapers of rural districts (Петренко 2006:149). In the hierarchical system of that time, the Romani language deserved a specific perception and even obscure suspicions as a minority language but had at the same time some official support. It was quite unusual, because the censorship district authority assumed responsibility and risked publishing unique periodicals in an unknown language, in case of a 'political mistake', either real or invented. The sequence of permits' number given by the district authority shown in the newspaper issues helps us reconstruct the chronology of this apparently complex and probably highly risky process. It might be that the time needed to get the content controlled and approved was also one of the reasons why journals were more widespread than newspapers.

The name of the newspaper *For the Bolshevik Collective Farm* is typical and standard for dozens of small newspapers published by the MTS political departments throughout the country. The reason is that the XVII Congress of the CPSU(b) that took place at the beginning of 1934 set the task of turning the collective farms into Bolsheviks farms. The number of newspapers with the name *Сталинец* (Stalinist) reached even hundreds. The third newspaper, entitled *Сталинец* (Stalinist), of October 5, 1935, has a parallel regular numbering: no. 3 (137).

Such a popularity of titles makes it difficult to answer the question whether publications in the Romani language were included in the regular issues' numbering of the certain newspaper commonly printed in Russian. The description of the newspaper *3a*

большевистский колхоз (For the Bolshevik Collective Farm, in Russian) of the Mineralnye Vody's MTS is present in the Russian State Library catalogue as "За большевистский колхоз: газета многотиражка: орган политотдела Минерало-Водской МТС. с 1933 г. [For the Bolshevik collective farm. 1933. Newspaper with a large circulation: organ of the political department of the Mineralo-Vodskaya MTS. Since 1933]." It is noteworthy that in 1934 the 29th issue was published in German (for the German minority living then there). However, the Romani language issues of 1934 were, for some reason, not included in the regular numbering, and their existence is not indicated in the description of the catalogue of the Russian State Library.

At that time, each published item had a censorship permission number, which had to be indicated on the publication. This sometimes helps to clarify the actual release date. The sequence of permissions for the Roma newspapers is as follows: the May (not numbered) issue of the newspaper *Пало большевистско колхозо* had permission number 724 issued by the Mineralnye Vody district and Ivan Tokmakov was already present in the editorial staff (as well as in the third issue). The August (second) issue had permission number 44, and Nikolay Pankov, not Ivan Tokmakov, was the Moscow guest editor on the editorial board. That means that the manuscript of the second issue passed through the censor control before the manuscript of the first (unnumbered) issue. This should not be very surprising as newspaper materials of this kind were related to reporting of exact events and treated common topics.

Other Moscow activists were also among the authors of the Roma newspapers: Mikhail A. Ilyinskiy was an original writer and actor of the *Romen* Theatre, Alexander German was a writer, poet and playwright, founder of the Romani literature in the USSR.

The design of the first two issues of *Пало большевистско колхозо* was rich and noteworthy. They were printed in two colours with red headers which was rather uncommon for a small and local newspaper. Perhaps the issues were printed on the initiative of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, then chairman of the Gypsy village council, in order to present in the best light the state of affairs on the territory he led for the audiences and authorities in Moscow. He writes in his autobiography that he was called/invited to Moscow in 1935. In reality, a meeting in the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on the employment of Gypsies took place at the very beginning of January 1936 (Протокол 1936). Bezlyudskiy's dating is accurate, because preparatory meetings at different levels required a lot of time. He probably arrived in the capital with three newspaper issues in the Romani language.

The issue of the Romani language press was also discussed in 1941. In a letter dated June 1941 from Mikhail Bezlyudskiy to the employee of the Union of Writers Elizaveta Alexandrovna Muravyeva it was mentioned that there are some rumours about the opening of a Gypsy newspaper (RGALI Ф. 631, Оп. 6, Д. 617, Л. 114). Apparently, such plans were scheduled, along the publication of a collection of short stories by Roma writers in Russian, gathered by Muravyeva. Unfortunately, these plans were disrupted by the battles on the Eastern Front of the Second World War from the 22 June 1941.

In sum, the Soviet Roma media was politically oriented and ideologically overloaded. As a business project none of those periodicals was possible without the state financial support.

6.4 Books' Genres and Topics

The books published during this decade-long cultural project are the most visible and tangible result. Roma schools and public organisations' activities, even in Moscow, are less preserved in archives. On the contrary, the Romani language books of that time have been saved better. There are two collections of Romani books in the Russian State Library (in Moscow and Khimki) and in the National Library of Russia (in Saint Petersburg). In addition, the second collection is digitalised and accessible at the *Zingarica* collection of the National Library of Finland website. These books are very important as an example of Romani literature development and materials that witness the results of that project. Although the data are not yet absolutely complete and accurate we could draw relatively reliable conclusions. One could still hope for some new findings as the catalogue of the Russian State Library has been updated and now many names have been rewritten more accurately (see Annex I. Romani Literature, pp. 266–275).

The Romani language books published comprised of both original works and translations. The numbers of original and translated books were approximately equal (Shapoval 2020:352). The translations were made from the officially approved list of books recommended for translation into the languages of peoples of the USSR. The border between original and translated books is not fully certain, because translators adapted, shortened or supplemented the original texts, for various reasons (Shapoval 2020:350). In some cases, translation was not possible due to the lack of terms. In others, translation was more like a literature retelling.

There were many difficulties in creating a standard language. For instance, the word for a small prosaic form (a story) in the Soviet Romani literary language was not immediately determined. So, in 1930, Georgiy Pavlovich Lebedev (1900–1969) translated *Stories for Children* by Alexander S. Neverov (1886–1923) as *Ракирибэна ваш тыкнэ чяворэнгэ* (Неверов 1930). This choice does not allow to differentiate 'stories, novellas' and 'talks, conversations'. In 1931 Lebedev defined the contents of his book *Нэвэ глоса* (New Voices) as a collection of *гуля* 'poems' and *ракирибэна* 'short stories' (Лебедев 1931). Nikolay Pankov used *ракирибэна* in another sense 'talks, conversations' in the title of the book by Sergey V. Pokrovsko (1874–1945) *Conversations about the Reproduction of Animals* (Покровско 1932).

In 1931, his wife, Maria Yegorovna Polyakova (1904–1976) titled her book *Романэ ракирибэ* (Roma Stories) (Полякова 1931), where the plural form should be *ракирибэна*. Probably the previous title of one story was not changed properly. At the same time, *ракирибэ* 'conversation' also served for translation of the official 'speech', for example:

Pankov translated *Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Collective Farmers-Udarniks (Shock Workers)* by Lazar' Kaganovich as *ракирибэ* (Кагановичё 1933). However, after some time, this term with its three mutually interrelated and close meanings began to create some inconveniences, which changed the translating and publishing practice. The prose story *Бахт* (Luck) by Ivan Rom-Lebedev (Ром-Лебедев 1930) was defined on its title page as *рассказо* (from *рассказ*, the Russian term for 'story') (Ром-Лебедев 1930:1), though previously announced as *ракирибэн* 'conversation / story' (Нэво дром 1930:21). Thus, the trend in coining and using terms was not straightforward, though in the end quite clear: the term *рос-пхэн-ыбэ(н)* as a calque of the Russian *рас-сказ* 'story' finally won, and the year 1931 was a crucial point for this process.

The narrow circle of industrious people successfully created diverse and rich literature and many other cultural projects. The starting date of this project in the USSR can be considered 1927. Actually, by 1927 there were two publications: the first one was a leaflet of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies explaining the benefits of sedentarisation and benefits for Gypsies who wish to engage in farming (Таранов et al. 1927), and the second one was a short article on the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution in the November issue of the newspaper of the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR (Викснэ 1927:3). The third published item was the first issue of the journal *Романы зоря* (Roma Dawn) although its real year of release should be approached with serious hesitation (Шаповал 2019). In the years that followed, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of books published in a language that did not have a literary tradition: one book was published in 1928, four books were published in 1929, nine books were published in 1930, and in 1931 were published 31 books. In the starting period, 1927–1931, the *Tsentrizdat* was the only place where all Romani literature titles were published. This publishing house published Romani language books for five years.

The topics of the first books are very telling: three ABC-books for adults and two books on political literacy and communist ideology. For example: *Нэво дром* (New Way) was a ABC-book for adult people (Дударова & Панков 1928). The difference between these books is almost insignificant. Thus, the texts for teaching literacy consisted of political declarations, and texts on political literacy were composed simply to further progress in reading.

In the next years, school handbooks (two published in 1930 and two in 1931) and political books (one and nine respectively) still prevailed, but fiction books started to appear as well (three in 1930 and four in 1931), along Romani language children's books (two in 1930) which were published for the first time. For example, Maria (Masha) Polyakova warmly wrote about a little Roma girl going to school (Полякова 1930). This topic was brilliantly continued by the Czech Roma woman Tera Fabiánová later (1992).

Clear boundaries between genres and themes were blurred by the dominant motive of class struggle. For example, the Romani language version of the political essay "If the enemy does not surrender, destroy him" by the famous fiction writer Maxim Gorky was created and published too (Горький 1931). The Romani language books of various genres

focused on the 1917 Revolution and the upcoming struggle against world capitalism. For instance, the stories for small children were about the revolution and the war with a strong dose of correct Soviet ideological markers (Невепов 1930). This thematic looks monotonous and dull and is monolithic in its inner intention. In this regard, all Soviet Romani literature is a syncretic discourse on the revolutionary trauma. Lidia Osipova later wrote about this feature of Soviet literature, giving a critical assessment of this simplicity from an aesthetic point of view, in a book symbolically titled *Explicit Slavery and Secret Freedom* (Осипова 1960). She knew this subject as an insider as in the early 1930s, called also 'lean years'. She was the author of a couple of training books on agriculture, one of which was translated into Romani and was entitled *What a Milkmaid Should Know* (Осипова 1931). This book is an example of new topics which appeared in Romani literature in 1930–1931. Agriculture had become extremely popular due to the successes in organising collective farms which lead to a shortage of food. Thus, in 1931, 12 books on the topic of agriculture and farming were published, including the previously mentioned book by Osipova.

Another new topic was aggressive atheism (three books were published), including informative non-fiction publications on biology and historical anthropology, for instance *Did the Man Come from a Monkey* (Гремячко 1931).

Medicine and hygiene were also popular and two books by well-established authors were translated into Romani language (Российский 1930; Берлянд 1931). There are two details worth mentioning. Firstly, the terminology was created ad hoc in a very short time but, in principle, these new publications successfully transmitted important and new pragmatic information. Secondly, the authors of books that were translated into nationalities' languages, including Romani, were the most significant experts in their fields, for example of medical science: professor Dmitriy Mikhailovich Rossiyskiy (1887–1955), Soviet therapist and medical historian and MD Berland Abram Solomonovich (1897–?) who was the author of books on various aspects of medicine published until 1963.

Thus, it can be said that, until 1931, one publishing house successfully worked in various thematic areas, and since 1932 several publishing houses performed these functions. The 1932 state order to provide nationalities with books was implemented by obedient state publishers. Over three years, their activity in Romani language books production was visible, but gradually weakened. For instance, the publishing house of the People's Commissariat of Industry (*Наркомтяжпром*) (from 1931 on, this was the Joint Scientific and Technical Publishing House – ОНТИ) had published five Romani books in 1932, four books in 1933, and three books in 1934. The Publishing House of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) (*Политиздат*) was active for three years too: it published two Romani books in 1932, nine books in 1933, and seven books in 1934. The same trend is visible in the publications of the Komsomol Publishing House *Тэжны гвардия* (Young Guard): it published seven Romani books in 1932 and the same number in 1933, and two books in 1934. One of the books was the Romani translation of the memoirs of Lenin's sister about his childhood (Ульянова-Елизарова 1933). And, finally, an essential contribution

was made by the agricultural publishing house, which had many variations of its name in Romani: Гавитколхозгизо, Гавитко-хулаибнытко издательство, Гавиткохулаибнгизо, Сельколхозгизо, Сельхозгиз, etc. It published eleven Romani books in 1932, four in 1933 and the same number in 1934. None of those houses published any Romani books after 1934. Thus, the activities of the publishing houses of the People's Commissariat of Industry, of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture, Partizdat, and Young Guard coincided chronologically, and Romani books were only published in 1932, 1933 and 1934.

Obviously, the publication of a loss-making little print-run and difficult to distribute literature was not a dream order for publishers. Some publishers escaped this obligation more or less successfully. Only in 1933 the publishing house of the trade unions Profizdat gave its very modest contribution to the Romani literature by publishing three books. The Moscow authorities' publishing house (Московский рабочий), being formally a state property, issued a single Romani book: *Can the Dead Come to Life?* (Киселево 1932), which increased its scores both in minority publications and in atheistic literature. Other state publishers were either more industrious or less lucky.

The state atheistic publishing house (ГАИЗ) published ten Romani books which appeared quite evenly in a five-year period, from 1932 to 1936. Among the state propaganda of primitive atheism, there was a bright spot: a very sympathetic book on nature called *The Animal and What Surrounds It in the World* (Шэйнисо 1935).

The law publishing house (Советское законодательство, since 1937 Юридическое издательство) used to publish regularly two Romani books per year from 1932 to 1934, increasing its activity to four in 1935, and later declined to four books per year being published in the later years, after 1934. One of its publications was the Romani translation of the biography of the formal Head of the Soviet State Mikhail Kalinin (Шотмано 1935) which is difficult to consider scientific or codifying work, but at that time the official biographies of the still living revolutionary leaders could adorn the production raw of any publishing house. A problem arose two years later when the biography's author Alexander V. Shotman was accused of participation in the anti-Soviet Trotskyist organisation and shot dead. Unsold copies of a book by a discredited and then unwanted author were usually destroyed.

The publishing house of the People's Commissariat of Education (*Учгиз, Учпедгиз*) was responsible for publishing school textbooks. Twenty-four books in Romani language were published in 1932, eight in 1933, fourteen in 1934, nine in 1935, two in 1936, and four in 1937. Along with textbooks, this publishing house published fiction and non-fiction. For example, stories about the revolution for the children (Олейниково 1932) by the poet and member of OBERIU avant-garde group Nikolay Makarovich Oleynikov (1898–1937), who was later accused and shot as a 'Japanese spy'; a story about the car construction (Крюндель 1932) by a luckier author, Kryundel' August Frantsevich (1897–1967), the future head of the Soviet Parliament of Estonia. Authors of the translated originals were notable and famous figures in their field and they were not Roma.

Compared to this unanimity, the chronology of Romani language publications in the children's publishing house (*Детиздат, Детгиз*) seems anomalous: one book was published in 1933, no books were published in 1934, three books appeared in 1935, eight in 1936, and one in 1937. The peak activity in the Roma publications of this publisher was not in the first half of the 1930s but in the mid-1930s.

Little is known about Roma posters, but they were printed in several colours. The songbooks are somewhat better preserved, but not all of them are known either (Германо et al. 1932; Германо et al. 1934). The reason for the poor preservation is that the clean backside of the poster was often used for drafting, and songbooks were usually published in small format on thin gray paper that was ideal for cigarette rolls.

Both books and periodicals were very important for the Roma activism of that time. Few simple topics were repeatedly appearing throughout various genres: a terrible past of the Gypsies in contrast to their bright future in the USSR, after their inclusion in the brotherhood of workers, the inevitability of the war against capitalism, and, for this reason, the need to survive temporary difficulties. Soviet literature was considered a means for transmitting such beliefs to the reader, and thus was only a tool of propaganda with quite narrow set of tricks and lack of independent significance (Осипова 1960:11). An important difference should be noted, however: while this stage was a degradation for Russian literature, for the emerging literatures, as Romani, everyday achievements of new heights of expressiveness were reached, and new poetic forms and prosaic images were created. This fact should not be underestimated when assessing the significance of Soviet Romani literature.

6.5 Authors and Readers of Books

The new literature was created by people of various backgrounds, more or less educated. Some of the very productive Roma authors were not Roma by origin, and some others developed their Romani language ability relatively late, e.g. Alexander Germano (Marushiakova and Popov 2020:153–154). Roma authors came to writing literature in different ways. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy wrote that he started to learn how to write poetry and prose fiction in the amateur literature circle while being imprisoned and under investigation in the famous Moscow Taganka (Безлюдско 1932b:22–23).

Making Roma Writers

Roma writers and poets worked extremely hard, and it is worth noting that there were a lot of creative young Roma who enthusiastically wanted to join artistic ranks in order to take part in the national culture's building and development. That was a very unusual time, very hard and full of new opportunities for young Roma. The training of young writers was very popular. Famous masters such as Viktor Shklovskiy (Шаламов 2004:74), and a modest Roma writer, already very noticeable in his branch, Nikolay Pankov (see

about *rabkors* – workers’ correspondents schooling in Shapoval 2020:350) were involved in this cultural activity. New talents were growing and learning technics of writing prose and poetry in amateur circles, be it a navy club (a Baltic fleet’s literary club has promoted Semen Mikhaylov’s book on Roma issues in Russian: Михайлов 1932), or a prison spot for cultural work.

Women’s Contribution

Women’s participation was very important. The gender balance in the Romani literature and the language building project was somehow unusual. It is worth underlining that women were also active in the Roma cultural project, as well as in the new Romani literature in particular (Shapoval 2020:352–353). Olga Pankova was a Roma woman, who was one of the most productive translators, translating 32 books. The other woman who translated at least six published books was Maria N. Lebedeva. Evdokiya Orlova was a very talented poet and also served as chief of a mobile Romani theatre. Many other Roma women of that time and their contributions to the project deserved further studies too.

Aleksey P. Barannikov wrote that, after 1917, Roma artists joined unanimously the trade union of cultural workers Rabis: “In the revolutionary times, almost all Gypsies who were linked with singing and other forms of artistic activities joined up in the union of artists.” (Баранников 1931:45) For instance, the singer and poet Yevdokoya Orlova became a member of Rabis in 1918 (RGALI Ф. 675, Оп. 2, Д. 464, Л.1).

Collective authorship was a socialist ideal, though hardly achievable. The new Romani literature was developing under the same conditions as other national literatures in the USSR. The slogan of collectivism found its application in artistic work and creativity. Thus, the resolution on the Report of the Nationalities Sector ONTI by comrade Shapiro declared on December 19, 1931: “5. The Sector’s orientation to the compilation of the original book by brigades [of the authors] ... is right.” (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4720, Л. 1) Collective literary works in Romani language translation took place for instance during the work on the book *Состыр амэ ачъям бидэвльтка* (Why We Became Unbelievers) (Бригада 1934).

In principle, an individual authorship as a concept contradicts, to some extent, the highest degree of collectivism. A change in authorship for political reasons was quite usual. The journal article “Ваш сапо романо дрэ Москва” (About everything that is Romani in Moscow) reported: “Профессоро М. В. Сергиевско, Н. А. Дударова, Н. А. Панково кончают буты пэ букварё ваш ромэнгэ” – “Professor M. V. Sergievskiy, N. A. Dudarova, N. A. Pankov are close to finishing their work on the primer for Roma.” (Романы зоря 1927:33)

The first Soviet Romani ABC-book for adults was published as a work of two authors – a Gypsy woman, an educated teacher, on the one hand, and a Gypsy worker, a genuine autodidact and poet, on the other hand (Дударова & Панков 1928). The contribution of professor Sergievskiy’s (a non-Roma) who also worked on this publication cannot be

assessed, as it was not indicated in the book. The political reasons behind this was that the idea to have a genuine Roma book created by genuine Roma authors for working Roma was great, even though it was not the whole truth.

Authors of Translated Books and Other Non-Roma

There were also non-Roma contributing to the Roma 'Cultural Renaissance' without being part of it, such as Petr Serafimovich Patkanov (stage name Istomin, 1869–1930). His Roma handbook was a unique early description of the Moscow choirs' variety of Romani (Патканов 1900). Vladimir N. Dobrovol'skiy (1856–1920) gathered his collection of Smolensk Romani language texts (Добровольский 1908) used as a source of dictations in Moscow Roma schools. Prof Yevgeniy Platonovich Ivanov (1884–1967) started Roma folklore studies before the 1917 Revolution (Блюменау 1927:24–25). His Roma collection is not described, though it is believed to be rich.

Russian authors involved in Romani language publications sometimes provided no information about this. The painter Vasiliy Vatagin (1883/84–1969) did not give any information about a Romani language version (Ватагин 1936) of his book for children *Animals Big and Small* (Ватагин 2017:337). Zinaida Kokorina (Смелкова 2016), the first Soviet woman to graduate from a military aircraft school, left no mention about her book about women's military training translated into Romani by M. N. Lebedeva (Кокорина 1932). Olympiada Georgievna Polyakova (pseudonym Lidia Timofeevna Osipova, 1902–1958), Russian journalist, writer, literary critic and public figure of the 'second wave' of Russian emigration to Western Europe, left no word about her book in Romani language either (Осипова 1960), which is preserved until today (Осипово 1931).

Since January 1938, as an employee of the Department of Nationalities' Literature, Boris Lukich Agafonov (1907–1941 / 42?), father of the famous singer of Gypsy romances Valery (1941–1984), renewed the Catalogues of Mongolian, Dungan, Kalmyk, and Gypsy literature (Соколинский 2003:41). It is clear where he had gained knowledge of oriental languages. The place of Boris's birth is the village of Khoronkhoi (in his biography mistakenly named 'Kharoshchay'), near the border town of Kiakhta (former Troitskosavsk). But where he became acquainted with Romani has not been reported anywhere.

As for the authors of the translated originals, their names were not always indicated in the Romani language books. An additional source of frustration was the risk of political repressions. As victims of repression, some authors became undesirable and their names were not mentioned. So, the book on scabies (Эфрон 1933) does not have any indicated author, though there is an editor (Andrey S. Taranov) and a translator (Mikhail T. Bezlyudskiy). The author of the Russian original (Эфрон 1931) Professor Nikita Savelyevich Efron, a famous specialist in dermatology, who was arrested on October 20, 1932 and shot dead on August 21, 1933. He was a cousin of Sergei Yakovlevich Efron, husband of the poetess Marina Tsvetaeva. The Romani translation was accepted for printing

on November 23, 1933 (Эфрон 1933:24), obviously, after the author's death by execution. The author's name is omitted in the brochure, probably for this reason.

Another author died before being sent into exile and that was the reason why his books escaped prohibition. It was Nikolai Konstantinovich Lebedev (1879–1934), historian, geographer, very talented writer of scientific books for children, and a member of the Anarchist party, which was the reason for his exile (Материалы 2020). His books for elementary school and for illiterate adults have been translated into many languages of the peoples of the USSR, including Romani (Лебедево 1935a, 1935b, 1937).

Sometimes the names of the Romani books' editors appear only once. The Tatar poet Ahmed Fazylovich Erikeeв (1902–1967) was indicated as an editor of the book by Bezlyudskiy (Безлюдско 1932); the Polish writer Domskey (Stein) Genrikh Grigorievich [Germanovich] (1883–1937) was mentioned as editor of a book by Orlova (Орлова 1933). The last case is very interesting. Before 1933, the honest Polish communist had already had a couple of conflicts with the Soviet centre. In 1920, he had protested against the Red Army invasion of Poland in the *Rote Fahne* newspaper (Regula 1995:35; Дойчер 1957). "Henryk Stein, also known by his revolutionary pseudonym L[eon]. Domskey or Kaminski, was one of the few leaders [of Communist Party of Poland in 1925] not arrested ... Soon Domskey fell from Soviet favour, and the Comintern dismissed him ..." (Busky 2002:3) As for Domskey personally, the period of 1930–1935 was relatively quiet and comfortable, between two arrests. As far as it is known, he did not know the Romani language. Who was the real editor, then? Evdokiya Orlova could hardly be an editor of her own poems. She was a singer, dancer and oral poet. Literacy wasn't a special skill of hers. A propos, the edited text is not ideal, e.g.: "Мэк кудренца тэлэ дуга, Прастала амэндър пхурано..." – "Let the old life run away from us with curls [instead of *кудуненца* 'bells'] under a [harness wooden] arc." (Орлова 1933:5) The reasons for such oddities are not entirely clear.

Some names are not given in the Romani translations. But in one case it is not even clear that RIM on the cover is a pseudonym (Рим 1932), the abbreviation R.I.M. means Reshud [Ignatievich?] Magidovich (Масанов 1958:31). Perhaps this was the son of Ignatiy Petrovich, an employee of the publishing house *Gosmedizdat* (Вся Москва 1930: 442).

Censors

Censorship was a very important factor in Romani language books' publishing. Censors were attentive readers. Printed publications in Romani language had been published in the USSR since 1927. By this time, the system of control for publications in nationalities' languages had already developed sufficiently, although it continued to improve. Due to the numerous renamings and restructuring, it is easier to talk about these institutions using the abbreviations *Glavlit* and *Glavrepertkom*, keeping in mind the instability of their official status and names.

Who were the censors of Romani language texts? This might sound unbelievable, but publications for nationalities were controlled by a clerk on duty. He read a brief Russian

summary, a review by a political editor, expert opinions, and then prepared a draft decision approved by his/her superior. It was a responsible function, which was paid much better than the work of a metallurgical engineer. Persons who signed the reviews and expert opinions acted as hostages. If they missed a 'political mistake', they were punished together with the author. For this reason, all official readers, including the political editor, executive editor and, finally, editor *sensu stricto*, were sometimes overly attentive.

Collective responsibility extended to the publishers. The standard contract of the writer with the publishing house in the early 1930s contained a note, that "If the Publishing House has concerns that the submitted work will not be allowed to print under censorship conditions and the Author does not find it necessary to amend the questionable place of the manuscript, the publisher is given the right to delay the payment ..." (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 2, Д. 27, Л. 4) This financial control led to enormous caution and self-censorship.

In the second half of the 1930s, mentioning of censorship disappeared from the text of the contracts: "2. Submission of the manuscript for review to the appropriate authorities shall postpone the moment of acceptance of the manuscript ..." (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Д. 4777, Л. 23)

This is a quote from the contract for the translation of Pushkin's poem *Цыганы* (Gypsies) accepted for printing February 1, 1937 (Пушкин 1937:28). On the translation's manuscript a stamp with *Glavlit's* permission dated January 28, 1938, not 1937 (obviously a mistake) is visible (RGALI, Ф. 613, Оп. 1, Л. 7501:1).

Glavrepertkom looked for then forbidden Gypsiness (*цыганищина*, essentially a folk melodramatic style) in the texts and music of Gypsy choirs and theatres. In the meantime, Russian *Tsyganshchina*, as well as Gypsy performances of musical classic, was quite popular abroad (Kuźniak 2013:41; Бурматов 2018). The main enemies of the censor were human feelings related to eroticism and religion. The first was the suspected sin of the Gypsy songs and dances. "Chastity placed at the service of communism is socialist realism," Lidia T. Osipova summed up ironically (Осипова 1960:43). Religious hints were expelled from the literature of nationalities even more severely than from Russian texts. For instance, Vladimir Bakhmetiev's description of the young hero's joy "he was ready ... to sing this fine morning, [as a prayer of a child in church choir]," never changed in Russian editions, but in the Romani translation was cautiously cut out in order to avoid a religious mention: "ёв могискирдя ... тэ багал дрэ адава гожо злоко" – "he could ... sing this fine morning." (Бахметьев 1935:7)

Glavrepertkom, which emerged as a department within *Glavlit*, later followed it in the principles of control, being a separate institution. As part of it, comrade Averchenko wrote on December 15, 1931 ideological claims criticising the play of Alexander Germano *Джиибэн прэ роты* (Life on Wheels) for an excess of songs and dances (RGALI, Ф. 656, Оп. 1, Д. 754, Л. 4) and evaluated the music of the Abkhaz folk choir, allowing recording on plates on June 2, 1930 (RGALI, Ф. 656, Оп. 1, Д. 754, Л. 4034, Л. 14). It was an important and well-paid function. Each year, the choir paid 2–3 roubles to renew the permission of the repertoire.

Looking for Roma Readers

The alphabet was created and officially approved, writers were found and trained, books were printed, but it was also necessary to find readers. The writers were thoroughly looking for readers' feedback. As a typical sample of a message to readers can be seen in a text printed at the end of the fiction book *Грай* (Horse):

Бутари ром и колхознико
Прогин ядая лылвари и прибирав дрэ
редакция лыл со исы шукар дрэ лылвари
и со на шукар. Усыкаванте, со на ухтылла
дрэ адая лылвари. Дро лыла чинэnte
пэскири вурма, лав, кицы бэрш, бутари
или колхознико и пэскиро адресо.

Ромалэ, тумарэ лыла бангэ тэ дэн
редакциякэ дром, савэ треби тэ чинэс
романэ лылваря ваш бутитконэ ромэнгэ.
Лыла обмэкэnte би маркакиро пиро
адресо:

Москва, центр, Никольская, 10
нацотдел сельхозгиз'а
Мих. Безлюдскому

Roma Worker and Collective Farmer
Read this book and send the letter to the
editors what is good in the book and what
is bad. Show up what is missing in this
book. In the letters write your last name,
first name, your age, if you are worker or
collective farmer and your address.

Roma, your letters should give the editors
the way to write Romani books for Roma
workers.

Drop letters without a stamp at:

Moscow, centre, Nikolskaya, 10
National department of Agricultural pub-
lishing house
Mih. Bezlyudskiy

(Безлюдско 1933:39)

There are a number of important details which are worth discussing. For example, addressing only working Roma, both urban and rural. Their opinion was valuable and interesting to publishers. A letter without a stamp was paid by the recipient. This book's illustrations were saved at the children publishing house *Detgiz* (RGALI, Ф. 630, Оп. 1, Д. 2193), then the book was transferred to the *Young Guard* publishing house, and the author was waiting for readers' reactions and reviews at the agricultural publishing house *Selkhozgiz*. Such requests for readers' feedback were common and were made also in publications by the atheist publishing house the GAIZ (Бригада 1934:40), by the agricultural *Selkhozgiz*, or, in the Romani language, *Гавитко хулаибнытко издательство* (Варламово et al. 1933:2), as well as by the political publishing house *Politizdat* (Кагановичё 1933:93). This practice of contacting the reader for an assessment of the topic and language of books is characteristic for Romani publications, but does not seem common for literatures with older tradition.

Students as Readers

Roma school students were obviously the most active and numerous groups of readers. Considering the general context of organising the education system for nationalities it is noteworthy that the system's activities, as any Moscow institution at the time, included a big dose of constant renaming, structural shifting and reorganisation, including moving from one place to another, changing addresses, e.g. street names and Moscow internal division by districts. The *Tsentrsovnatsmen* (the Central Council for education of

national minorities) had a very complicated structure comprising several departments (a separate one for every nationality) and authorised members in 3 main comities (*Glavk*) of the *Narkompros* (The People's Commissariat for Education of RSFSR). This institution was not flexible enough and had rare sessions (Дёнингхаус 2011:185). It is unbelievable that even under such an irrational and controversial management system of educational projects for small nationalities, it was possible to organise few schools (in particular in Moscow) for Roma children and publish several textbooks and other educational literature. It was a result achieved by Nina Dudarova and other persons. In such instability and constant changes, personal relations and personal agency were crucial for every small success in the schools' life and supplies.

6.6 Conclusion

The initial plan of the Soviet Roma project changed throughout the decade 1927–1938 and depended on the changing political and economic conditions. Being a very visible and, for some time, even a sample of the Soviet Cultural Revolution, that aimed especially at the development of so-called 'culturally backward' small nationalities, this cultural project appeared successful and the prospects for its future seemed good. During the first two five-year plan periods (1928–1932, 1933–1937) there were unprecedented achievements reached by a very narrow group of enthusiasts, especially concerning Romani books' publication.

The interrelation between Romani language book publishing and Roma activism during the period 1927–1938 was strong and there was a close interrelation: the list of Roma activists almost coincided with the list of Roma writers. The latter is typical of the process of emancipation in many other cases (Hroch 2005).

The dissolution of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies coincided chronologically with the absence of the issue of the journal *Романы зоря* in 1928. Printed texts in the specially developed Romani language created not only an image of an ideal future, but also corrected the perception of the present by shifting the readers' emotional evaluations of everyday difficulties towards either sincere, or officially prescribed, normative optimism. The boundaries between genres and themes were not clear, because the dominant motive of any book was the class struggle and revolution. Activists were mostly writers and vice versa. They reasonably evaluated the book in their native language as an instrument of ethnic emancipation and as its symbolic result.

The noticeable reduction in the number of Romani language publications and the absence of periodicals coincided (and thus might be related) with the refusal of the authorities, in 1936, to create a Gypsy ethnic territory (a rural district) in the Stavropol krai in order to concentrate Gypsy collective farms there. The latter plan was delayed for an indefinite time. Some activists then went on to pursue administrative careers outside

of the Gypsy project. Writers united around the Gypsy group in the Union of Soviet Writers worked for *Romen* Theatre and dreamed about books for the Soviet Gypsies. The absence of new Roma books diminished their significance as potential influencers on the authorities. Before the Nazi's invasion in 1941, Alexander Germano had finally published in Orel a tiny (78 small pages) book of his Romani verses in Russian translations by famous poets (Германо 1941) which was edited by his friend, the poet Vasilii V. Kazin (1898–1981), but almost all copies of the book were lost in the war calamities. This was a serious blow to the entire group of Roma writers. Each new book served as an evidence of the official recognition and helped to increase social influence.

As one of the projects of the Soviet cultural revolution, the Gypsy project was notable for its unusual success in creating a new literary language and active book publishing. Among its achievements are both original fiction and textbooks, as well as manuals in various fields of knowledge and technics. This meant that elementary school was almost fully provided with necessary books. It is noteworthy that Roma women played an active role in the creation of new literature and proved to be not only translators, but also authors of original works in several genres. As the most hardworking author, Nikolay Pankov, who was distinguished by incredible productivity, should be noted. This project was regularly supported by the state, which, apart from funding the whole creative and publishing processes, facilitated also the distribution of books at reasonable prices.

The project reached its highest successes in the period of the 1932–1934 famine, provoked by forced collectivisation in the agriculture. Its closure chronologically coincided with the Great Purge of 1937–1938. Fortunately, the Roma activists survived, though their cultural and social activities were mostly stopped or at least reduced before the Second World War. The reasons for the termination of the publications in Romani language are not entirely clear. It is important to keep in mind that new Romani language books were not planned in 1939. Further plans of the Soviet government concerning the Roma cultural project are not clear due to the lack of official documents. Nevertheless, the statement “Government bans Romani language and culture” in 1938 (Kenrick 2007:XXVI) looks like some exaggeration. There was no ban on Romani books as the remains of previous editions were available to buyers anywhere in the USSR. A new Roma generation, educated and fully adopting the new Soviet ideology, was declared as its natural product.

Thus, it would be more accurate to speak about a sharp reduction of publications. The outbreak of the war in June 1941 crucially changed all plans, but this does not mean that the continuation of Romani book publishing would not have been possible under better conditions. Otherwise, the fact that the Roma writers section kept looking for young writers even in 1941, despite the third year of lasting pause in Romani language publications, cannot be underestimated. Their contacts with the authorities were positive, and their hopes were reasonably optimistic. No one expected such a long period of coming disasters, which severely affected the entire Roma population.