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## Arguments on the Empowerment of Sinti\*zze and Rom\*nja Through the Resource of Social Space in Travelling Communities

### Abstract

This article explores elements of Sinti/Manouche culture, featured in anthropological research as *avant-texte*, and, more specifically, as auto-representations by Sinti\*zze. The line of argument pursued in this article seeks to expound, emphasize and critically engage the vital traditional role of women in the respective travelling communities. The potential for empowerment of Sintizze and Romnja is predicated on practiced forms of social organization which will be elucidated through an analysis of gendered space and poetics of space with respect to horse-drawn living wagons. Based on a sociopoetic approach and on the anthropological conception of social space (Lefebvre), as well as on space and gender research (Massey), the article examines feminine auto-representational literary texts and the cultural context to which they remit.

### 1. Introduction

The present study focusses on the production of space in travelling communities in Western Europe, especially Sinti\*zze and Manouches. Piasere (2009, 19) has outlined a model that shows the populations of principally peripatetic Sinti\*zze, Manouches and Rom\*nja at the time of the Second World War. The travelling communities were then spread across large parts of France, Northern Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, whereas prevailing settled communities were and still are found in Spain and the Balkan countries. There are today as well as historically Rom\*nja, Sinti\*zze as well as Manouche families attached to a rather itinerant or semi-travelling lifestyle. In France, the presence of Rom\*nja, Sinti\*zze, and Manouche does not exceed 0,5 percent of the population (Piasere 2009, 14).

The minority in itself is not homogenous, but rather composed of its member groups as a dynamic kaleidoscope (Liégeois 2019, 82). It is crucial to emphasize the heterogeneity of Rom\*nja and Sinti\*zzei-communities, as well as their regional, national and, more rarely, transnational attachments (Sutre 2021). Proposing a transversal study of gendered space may therefore appear as a quite unprofitable purpose. I will therefore proceed as follows. First, a clearly defined community will be demarcated. Their production of space will be explored from an ethnological perspective, with a particular focus on gendered spaces. The family, as a representative example, will then be set into relation with literary representations of gendered spaces in Romani-literature produced by the respective community. Here, my primary focus will lay on French Manouches, encompassed in the Sint\*izzi-Manouche perimeter. The results can consequently only concern the community under scrutiny. Within the modern political use of Romani writing (Toninato 2016) and the politically formed European Romani movement (Liégeois 2019, 93), the heterogenous groups of Rom\*nja, Sinti\*zze, Manouches, Calé et al. converge in order to attain more political strength for the scattered and oppressed communities. The transnational networking has, for example, led to the constitution of the European committee of the Romani Union (founded in 1991), whose task consists in coordinating the cooperating associations of Romanies across Europe. The arguments deployed in this article are intended to unfold as a synchronic mosaic, the precious stones that contribute to the Romani mosaic as a whole. The aim is to foreground cultural elements that illustrate the vital importance and strength of women in the Sinti-Manouche societies of itinerant tradition. The approach is predicated on spatial analyses instantiated by Henri Lefèbvre in his *Production of Space* ([1974] 2000). In Lefèbvres work, space is a mere social product. Doreen Massey, in her *Space, Place, and Gender* ([1994] 2001) accentuates the gendering of space and its implicit, but nonetheless forceful, impact on sexuality and gender roles. Space and gender, following her argument, are inextricably interlinked. I will venture to relate the gendering of a particular space to a corresponding gender relationship in everyday-life.

## 2. The Prominent Position of Sintizze

In literature, the most famous “Gypsy” figures are feminine. Not only the physical beauty and foreignness of “Gypsy” women are factors for

attraction, but from the ‘gitanilla’ of Cervantes to Mérimées Carmen, Sand’s Moréna (*La Filleule*), and Apollinaires “tzigane” (“La Tzigane”), the sovereignty, strength and liberty of the feminine figures are striking features. Often, the profession of “bohémienne”, as synonymous with fortune telling, endows Sinti\*zze and Rom\*nja with a special irreducible power, similar to the Greek sphynx. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that young attractive girls are often accompanied by old women, serving as their protectors or protectors of tradition. Associated with sorceresses, the old women are usually subject to negative connotations: such as Preciosas’ grandmother in *La Gitanilla*, “la Vougne” of *Miarka fille à l’ours* and Azucena in Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*.

After a secular era of mere hetero-representation, Roma literature emerges after World War II (Blandfort 2015, Eder-Jordan 2015). The emerging writers are principally women, from Bronisława Wajs (‘Papuzsa’), to Philomena Franz, Ceija Stojka (French 2015, 3), to Sterna Weltz, Sandra Jayat, and Louis Helmstetter (‘Pisla’). Their *œuvres* delineate the outstanding role of Romani elders and grandparents. Jayat’s autofictional *La longue route d’une Zingarina* (Jayat 1996) insists on the importance of grandfather Narrado, a painter, just as Franz dwells on the character of her grandfather Johannes Haag, a recognized musician (Franz 1985, 2016, 2017). Ceija Stojka highlights the role of her Mama Sidi and her “Tante Gescha” (sister of Ceija Stojka’s father) (Stojka 1992, 19). Pisla’s narration *Sur ces chemins où nos pas se sont effacés* (Helmstetter 2012), conversely, is transcribed from oral narration to the fixed form by her daughter Marie Weltz, who, in turn, opens her *Secrets Tziganes* (Weltz 1989) with a depiction of her beloved and honored grandmother:

Ma grand-mère avait encore un gros poêle à bois émaillé et décoré de fleurs irisées, haut et rond [...]. Quand elle prenait nos mains dans les siennes, une chaleur nous envahissait qui nous faisait monter le rouge au visage. Elle se prénommeait “Madone”. [...] Avec ses marmites émaillées, ses porcelains, ses timbales chiffrées elle avait l’allure des “grandes dames”. Je sus plus tard que c’en était une.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> My grandmother still had a big wood stove, enameled and decorated with iridescent flowers, high and round [...]. When she took our hands in hers, a heat overcame us which flushed into the face. She called herself by her first name “Madonna”. [...] With her enameled pots, her porcelains, her galvanized cups, she had the allure des “grandes dames”. Later on I knew she was one (Weltz 1989, 10, my translation).

The British Romanies also manifest a special warmth and grace regarding the generation of the grandparents, particularly to the grandmothers, such as “nan” for Damian Le Bas in *The Stopping Places* and Zilla Boswell in *Zilla Smith. An English Romany*. The attachment to the older generation arises not only from efforts to conserve the cultural memory of a time when peripatetic lifestyle was attached to horses and thus to natural environments, professional places, such as fairs, and a vivid community life, which had almost disappeared by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, especially in the areas dominated by the Nazis, few survivors could actually relay cultural information. Furthermore, the act of honoring the ‘old’ people, the grandparents’ generation, is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition. One status that is especially highlighted amongst Romani writers and anthropologists is the role of the *phuri daj* (old-wise-women):

la qualification de reine traduit peut-être une réalité: il est certain qu’une femme âgée [phuri dai], par ses conseils plus que par ses orders, peut exercer son influence. Sa propre famille, mais aussi un entourage plus lointain, peuvent faire appel à sa sagesse, à son expérience, à sa connaissance des coutumes et des traditions du clan. (Vaux de Foletier 1983, 30)<sup>2</sup>

The wisdom of the old person asserts her (or his) sovereignty over reforms of traditional norms. However, her (or his) role often seems to consist in the opposite, namely transmitting and conserving tradition in a sclerosed manner rather than transforming or reforming traditions. In this sense, an old woman also appears as the witch *dhrabarni* (selon Matéo Maximoff) from the point of view of the reformer (Voso in *La Septième Fille*). The sovereignty of the *phuri daj* over all other group members seems to be a relic from an ancient form of matriarchy, contemporarily preserved especially in ‘nomadic’ ways of life (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112). Consequently, social hierarchy, inasmuch as it is still premised on these few ancient relics, does not only hark back to a patriarchal system (cf. French 2015, 4). Social weight is attained on the one hand by age, and on the other hand by gender (in one older age group, the man attains the public/civic rights, for example within the *kriss*) (vgl.

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<sup>2</sup> The qualification of a queen might translate a reality: it is certain that an elderly woman [phuri daj], more by her suggestions than by her orders, can exercise her influence. Her own family, but also a wider environment can appeal to her wisdom, to her experience, to her knowledge regarding customs and traditions of the clan (Vaux de Foletier 1983, 30, my translation).

Maciejwski 1994, 43). Further, hierarchy is attained by intelligence (moral, social, practical and cognitive intelligence, and integrity have to go hand in hand) (cf. Williams 2022). The social capital is also determined by the surrounding society. Within the patriarchal system of French and German society from the *Ancien Régime* to the Modern Nation State to the National Socialist regime, women, even the wise older women, the *phuri daj*, would not have been taken as a serious negotiation partner by the political interactors of the majority society.<sup>3</sup> The travelling groups have therefore organized their bands according to their contemporary European system, appointing kings, queens and dukes, as well as military degrees: captains, lieutenants and colonels. According to the *sintizza walchi* Philomena Franz, eldest woman of her tribe, men and women are equal in contemporary Sinti society.<sup>4</sup> Field research has revealed such equality in a private speech circle, for instance, if the head of a family is male, the mother's or wife's opinions are equally valued. Before committing a decisive verbal act, a good Sinto has reflected and discussed the subject matter with his wife and come to a harmonic result, which he will address within the wider circle. We can thus assert that the aphorism "Behind every wise man stands a wise woman" would be a norm in Sinti culture, to which has to be added, that the old wise woman (and the status of grandmother can easily be attained at the age of forty) does not necessarily have a partner at her side. On the contrary, she proves to be single and thus sovereign (such as the *dhrabarni*, if in the context of Roma Kalderash): "Si le chef de tribu assure la cohésion du groupe, la phuri-daj en assure l'unité, elle en est la mère. C'est la grande initiée"<sup>5</sup> (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112). Stoyanovitch emphasizes that the supposed matriarchal origin reaches back to a period when women were normally equal to men, with its prevalence in travelling communities i.e., in Germany and, consequently, in France:

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. "You could not imagine the lieutenants, marshals and intendants of Alsace, Lorraine and Trois-Évêchés negotiating with an old woman called *phuri-daj* in order to resolve judiciary and territorial conflicts". (Vaux de Foletier 1961, 212)

<sup>4</sup> Personal remark in 2022. The *phuri daj* and head of dynasty was then 100 years old.

<sup>5</sup> If the tribal chef assures the cohesion of the group, the *phuri-daj* assures its union, for she is its mother. She is the great initiated one (Stoyanovitch 1974, 112, my translation).

A l'origine, elle [la culture tzigane] aurait été matriarcale. La preuve en seraient certains vestiges de ce régime là même où elle est aujourd'hui nettement patriarcale: l'existence de la phouri-daï (chef de tribu féminin), la place qu'occupe la femme dans le foyer conjugal, certaines pratiques dans le mariage. Nous avons déjà montré le rôle éminent joué par la phuri-daj dans un domaine des plus délicats, à savoir celui de la tradition, domaine dont dépend en grande partie la préservation de l'individualité ethnique de ce peuple. (Stoyanovitch 1974, 17)<sup>6</sup>

Maciejewski stresses the subordination of the men under their mothers, calling the gender organization an “inwardly directed matriarchy” (Maciejewski 1994, 43, “nach innen gestülptes Matriarchat”). Therefore, according to Maciejewski, the ruling Sinti, according to their psychosexual structure, are less fathers, but rather “sons of their mothers” (Maciejewski 1994, 44) and can evade the constraints of patriarchy. If analyses of social structures and the prevalence of Sinti\*xze and Rom\*xnja in public writing hint at the importance and status of women in travelling Romani communities, albeit in the general communitarian arrangement of the respective communities, we should direct our attention to an empirical study that allows us to gain a precise insight on that status.

### 3. Manouche's Production of Gendered Space

The concept of space's gendering and gendered space leads us to the works of Doreen Massey and her predecessor Henri Lefèbvre. Already Lefèbvre stated that “the existence in space of the phallic verticality (which comes from far, but has the tendency to increase) requires an interpretation” (Lefèbvre 2000, 46). He ventures to analyze this verticality in modern architecture. The “forceful sexuality” expressed by representational means (Massey 2001, 184) is the “phallus” as the “dominant form of space” (Lefèbvre 1991, 302), which for Lefèbvre, as for Massey,

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<sup>6</sup> In its origins, it [Romani's culture] would be matriarchal. Proofs of this would rest in certain parts of this regime where nowadays it is clearly patriarchal: the existence of a phouri-daï (feminine chef of the tribe), the place that the woman occupies in matrimony's home, certain practices of marriage. We have already shown the eminent role the phuri-daj plays in one of the most delicate domains, that means the tradition, domain on which the ethnic individuality of this people principally depends. (Stoyanovitch 1974, 17, my translation)

“in short” means “violence” (Lefèbvre 1991, 302). The gendered approach interprets the phallic conception and production of space as a violent and dominant masculine appropriation of space. Regarding the conceived space, Lefèbvre posits: “Over abstract space [...] reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire” (Lefèbvre 1991, 309). Massey, in fact, analyses the gendering of space and its implicit but forceful sexuality in a capitalist United Kingdom throughout the 19th and 20th century (Massey 2001, 184). She studies the space’s lived practices and the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces and spatialization under a gendered perspective and concludes “that space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through” (Massey 2001, 186). Subsequently, the gendering of space and place both reflects and entails repercussions on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in societies (Massey 2001, 186). She thereby offers a construction of femininity through a feminist geography (Massey 2001, 189). The traditional sexual division of labor in social production is one argument for gendered space as economic structures play a considerable role in gender roles and relations (Massey 2001, 198). The social organisation and nature of women’s work defines, among other aspects, their gender relationship to men. The empowerment of women’s spaces outside of domestic spaces and the possibility to earn money can be reasons for a greater independence and freedom (Massey 2001, 200), in economic terms, social relations, as well as spatial and social mobility. If the dominant society is generally characterized by a vertical architecture representing the phallic principle, the construction of Romani social space seems to offer an alternative.

#### 4. Romani Construction of Space

In the field of architecture in the broadest sense (Lafitte 1972, 68), hence encompassing the composition and configuration of stopping places, Romani culture favours a horizontal alignment. The very specific and, at the same time, most famous house of Romanies is the mobile home. The horse-drawn living wagons (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 11) were, at least from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the most significant emblem of the travelling people (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 11), called wagon, *vardo* or *vurdia* in Romani. The form of the standardized *vardos*, labeled

Pont-du-Château, Spenger, Reading, or Burton, is mostly characterized by the arched roof, the bow-top, which is a roof as arched as a bow or smooth hill. Each of the conventional Traveller living vans in the U.K. demonstrates/has a circular shape, from the Reading to the Ledge, the Bow-Top, the Burton, the Pot-Cart, to the Open-Lot (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 14). The same holds true for the French *roulottes* and the German Spenger-*Wohnwagen*.<sup>7</sup> Rising from a rectangular chassis, the shape of the vehicle gradually obtains a rounded form. The gypsy caravan further features a long axis, which tends to be crafted in a streamlined fashion, a barrel-shaped roof, as well as arched windows and doors. On the outside, the van is equipped with four round and strikingly large wheels, while the interior is marked by a round stove and stovepipe. On the whole, the “Gypsy” caravan is therefore defined by smooth and round, as well as horizontal shapes.

Most “Gypsy” vans are crafted after the Reading style and its specificity of a body slung between tall wheels (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 78). Prosperous “Gypsy” families like to remember and to describe their ancient status symbols. In the chapter “Gypsy Caravan” in her autobiography *Zwischen Liebe und Hass/Between Love and Hate*, Philomena Franz evokes her ancient *vardo*:

Ich kann mich noch gut an unseren Zigeunerwagen erinnern. Das war nicht ein Leiterwagen mit einer Plane. Schon eher ein Wohnwagen. Ein herrlicher schöner Wohnwagen, von innen und außen mit Holzschindeln belegt. Mit geätzten Scheiben, auf denen Schlösser und Burgen dargestellt waren. Acht Meter lang und 2,50 Meter breit. Damals hatte er schon 2000 Mark gekostet. Soviel Geld musste man für ein Haus bezahlen. [...] Unser Wohnwagen war eine Pracht. Mit gewölbten Schränken, die vom Boden bis zur Decke reichten. Alles aus Mahagoni, mit bleigefassten Spiegeln. [...] Der Wagen war mit Linoleum ausgelegt: gelbe Rosen, auf blauem Untergrund. In der Mitte des Wagens das Wohnzimmer mit einem blauen Plüschsofa mit gelben Blumen. [...] Der Herd, verchromt. Das Ofenrohr, blau emailliert und wieder mit gelben Blumen bemalt. Die kupfernen Töpfe an den Wänden.

Schon von außen war unser Wagen etwas Besonderes. Links und rechts waren große Laternen angebracht, mit Silber beschlagen. Oben auf der Laterne, je ein großer silberner Adler auf einer kleinen Kugel [...] (Franz 2016, 14)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Testimony by Philomena Franz, October 2022.

<sup>8</sup> I can still remember our Gypsy van very well. This was not a simple bow-top. Nearly a caravan. A magnificent splendid caravan, furnished with wooden shingles, on the inside as on the outside. The glass panes were etched with drawings of palaces and castles. Eight meters long and 2,50 m wide. In those days, it cost



In a vividly descriptive manner, the Sintizza pictures the ancient emblem and pride of her family, the *art déco* “Gypsy wagon”. Her recollection of this home and means of transport resonates as a hymn to the richly detailed beauty, the splashy colorfulness and—with the triple evocation of yellow flowers—her family’s attachment to the bloom of nature. Both identifies Philomena’s writing as unpretentious, but precise and smooth, supple and born nearest to the heart (Buth 2023).

Besides the extravagant design of the *vardo*’s body connected with rich Romani families, it is basically the wheels that impress. The wheels have also been chosen as the Romani symbol for “Roma” as a political transnational community (Liégeois 2019, 91). In a recent drawing (5<sup>th</sup> November 2022) by Philomena Franz, the wheels draw noticeable attention.



Fig. 1: *Rad./ Wheel*. Excerpt. Drawing by Philomena Franz, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022, felt-pen/crayon

2000 Mark. That’s the money you had to spend for a house. [...] Our wagon was a glory. With arched cupboards, reaching from floor to roof. Everything made of mahagoniy, with mirrors framed with lead. [...] The wagon was furnished with linoleum: yellow roses on a blue background. In the middle of the wagon, there was the salon with a blue plush sofa and yellow flowers. [...] The stove, chrome-plated. The flue, enameled in blue and painted with yellow flowers too. The copper pots on the walls.

Even beheld from the outside, our caravan was something special. On the left and right, big lanterns were attached, coated with silver. On top of each lantern there was one big eagle on a little globe (Franz 2016, 14, my translation).

On the eye-level of the child she was when travelling with a Spenger wagon with her family and grandfather, her perspective focusses on the center of the wheel and, thus, the axles and the grain of the wooden wheel. Wheel and eye merge into each other in that the wheel is endowed with an eye itself, an eye surveying the road, the wayside, and the implicit spectator. The perspective is horizontal, implying the endlessness of the journey towards the (ever-elusive) horizon. The horizontal alignment furnishes a consciousness of infinity, an existential insight provided in addition to the road and the wheel—and the glance of the eye. Philomena thus tends to anthropomorphize at least the part of the wagon that is the wheel. However, the roof just like the wheels impart the cyclic (not phallic) desire that prevails in Sinti-Manouche “existential philosophy” (Liégeois 2019, 84).

The house-on-wheels, furthermore, enables a domestic mobility, a paradox for the established settled way of living in which “kitchen” and “home”, attached to female space, are synonymous to immobility and privacy. The *vardo* becomes, in fact, the paramount domestic status symbol for Romnja (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 43). Nonetheless, as in most travelling families, both men and women are working, with Romnja often spending their day, at least partially, outside of their homes. As Rodney Smith observes in 1860, a young husband is the manufacturer of goods he produces in the perimeter of the *vardo*. His young wife is the seller of the products; she often leaves the wagon in the morning and returns to a common place later in the afternoon (Ward-Jackson/Harvey 1972, 44). She thus lives a double mobility: the mobility of the home in addition to the economically conditioned professional activity of selling. As Romanies tend to travel in groups, the stopping place harbours a number of *vardos*. In the following section, we will have a glance at the composition of the mobile homes occupying stopping places. The analysis will focus on the ethnologic research of Yasuhiro Omori in the period from 1972–1976 concerning the Manouche-family of Didi Duville (Omori 1977, 31, 37).

## 5. The Example of the Duville Manouche Family

The big Duville family is part of the 28 % of basket makers who still used horse drawn living wagons at the end of the seventies. A counting of Travelers in 1961 revealed that there were more than 50.000 itinerants

on the *routes de France* (Omori 1977, 30) while by the end of 1970s, there were probably 25.000 itinerants (Omori 1977, 70). Located across the five departments of Indre et Loire, Loir et Cher, Sarthe and l'Orne et l'Eure, the Duville family included 120 family members. Their principal activities consist in horse trading and basket making (Omori 1977, 34). The field study by Omori describes the use of space with respect to the organization of everyday life on the one hand, and the functioning of the stopping places on the other hand. The descriptions pivot around the inner workings of the stopping place, as well as the interaction with the outside environment. The gendered approach places particular emphasis on the fixed functions of space in everyday life.

Omori shows that for about 40% of a day (ca. 9,5h), the living wagon is not used by anybody, as life is going on in the outside space. About 30% (7–8h) of time is dedicated to sleeping, while only 27% of a day's activities take place inside the mobile home. These activities include leisure time, changing clothes, putting on make-up, and drop-ins to pick up tools and materials for the preparation of food or work. The van further provides a resort for isolation in case of illness, for personal discussions, and shelter during particularly cold periods in winter (Omori 1977, 121). On the whole, we observe that everyday life is not taking place inside the *vardo*, but in the space outside of it. The kitchen place is installed in a perimeter of about 10 meters (Omori 1977, 144) and the meal is taken there or on the *vardo*'s drawbar or stairs (Omori 1977, 145). Basket-making is also exercised around the *vardo* (Omori 1977, 146). The surrounding space further serves as a salon for visitors (Omori 1977, 148). In winter time, the outside space is reduced and concentrated in a circle around the fireplace (Omori 1977, 148). The spaces' gendering as described by Omori does not allow us to draw significant gender differences. Women hardly spend more time inside the mobile home than men, and both domestic work and economic production take place in a perimeter of about 10 meters around the *vardo*. In addition to the quasi-shared places of home ('house'work or home-offices in both cases), Sintizze, as well as Sinti pursue economic activities in the outside communities or landscapes, selling products and providing the family with nutrition. We can even determine a pivotal place for the Sintizze in everyday life (Omori 1977, 81). It is she, who often supplies the family with vitals, who is mostly in charge of the household and the education of the children, who also maintains social contacts with *gaujo/Gorgio* (non-Gypsies) (peasants, patrons, neighbours), and who shares eco-

nomie tasks with her husband and family members or friends. Moreover, in public and juridical questions, the *phuri-daj* is generally requested. The space's almost equal gendering thus resonates with the almost equal social status of peripatetically orientated Sintizze vis-à-vis their men in everyday life.

What is more, the composition of the *vardos* generally follows a round and centered principle, according obviously to former "circles of life" (Lorier 2010, 40), rooted in military art in Punjab, the presumed original region of Sinti groups. According to Lorier, "Les tents n'étaient pas placées au hasard: ils formaient des cercles de plus en plus petits et de moins en moins denses, avec, au centre de la place, la plus grande, celle du chef."<sup>9</sup> (Lorier 2010, 35) .

Even in recent decades, the principle of placing the tent/*vardo* of the most important head of the group in the center of the gathering of *vardos*, is maintained. Weltz describes how "Les voitures se resserraient en cercle autour du feu et formaient un rempart naturel"<sup>10</sup> (Weltz 1989, 11). Omori's field research reveals the group's need for flexibility when looking for a stopping place. Sutre underlines the importance of hospitality of the target location (Sutre 2021, 142). Owing to the permanent hostility toward 'nomads', the arrival at a self-chosen place could hardly ever be certain in advance. In the best case, the *vardos* are indeed parked in circles or semi-circles (Omori 1977, 87 and 90, example of the 1974 stopping place at Loire et Cher) around a fire. But in many cases, the Manouche family has to stop on field paths in order to remain invisible and thus at rest. The linearity of the road entails an alignment of the rolling houses (Omori 1977, 89 and 91, example of the stopping place Besse-sur-Braye, Loir et Cher). Even thus aligned, the position of the *vardos* exposes social relations: Didi's *roulotte* is placed in the center from where the line extends to the most distant relatives at the ends (Omori 1977, 90).

We can therefore postulate the horizontal and circular alignment of Sinti-Manouche architecture and production of space in everyday life. The preponderance of spaces connoted as feminine leads us to conclude

<sup>9</sup> "The tents were not assembled arbitrarily: they formed circles, getting smaller and smaller and less dense, while at the center of the place there was the biggest one, the one of the chief" (Lorier 2010, 35, my translation)

<sup>10</sup> "[t]he wagons surround the fire in circles and form a natural fortification" (Weltz 1989, 11, my translation).

a social background in which women play an eminent role regarding the organization and guarantee of life. As the creative force, it is the woman who primarily assures the survival of the next generation and, therefore, of her ethnic group. If the figure of the man evolves in the foreground for many reasons (from the warrior to the lieutenant, from the artist's model to the virtuoso in the orchestra, from the marginal robber to the political negotiator), the acting Sinti\*zze and Manouches perform in the background of a family life directed and kept alive essentially by women. And they have, in fact, performed this way throughout hundreds of years of persecution, repression, reclusion, and extermination.

To counter Lefèbvre's statement "Over abstract space [...] reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire" (Lefèbvre 1991, 309), we can posit that in the Sinti-Manouche's everyday production of space the "reign" is exerted through a sociability (co-)produced by women (and men), which favours female co-construction, perpetuation, and fulfilment of desire. It is only logical that through the transfer into sedentary life, the mobile, open, sociable culture cannot live on. For this reason, matriarchal elements are especially present in peripatetic communities, whereas in sedentary families, the feminine background of the culture tends to vanish and to be substituted by a mere patriarchal pre-eminence, that corresponds to traditional gender concepts of the major societies.

## **6. Horizontal and Circular Production of Space as Social Circumspection**

The use and production of space in travelling Sinti\*zze and Manouche communities is tantamount to a central place attributed to women within Romani societies. The overwhelming circularity in spatial formation and production, from the composition of wagons at a stopping place to the architecture of horse drawn living wagons, can be related to an underlying premise of matriarchy in peripatetic lifestyles. Feminine mobility, economic strength and social equality within the domestic perimeter of the mobile home are in this way foregrounded and resist a patriarchally organized lifestyle as a more recent social organization. Such qualities are further favoured through living in settled houses and the loss of ancient economic activities (i.e., selling, fortune telling, dancing, singing, healing, seasonal work such as fruit harvest, acrobatics, showbusiness performed by Sintizze). The round, smooth, flexible, open style of Sin-

ti-Manouche production of space can moreover be linked to the art of dancing, as Sterna Weltz (Weltz 1989, 12) and Philomena Franz, in the following passage, illustrate:

Wenn ich im Bett lag und sah hinaus wie sich die Bäume weich bewegten, beugte ich mich in sie hinein, verband mich mit ihren Bewegungen. [...] Wie ich tanzte als Tänzerin, so bewegten sie sich, schüttelten die Finger wie eine wunderbare Tänzerin auf der Bühne, die nach Gefühl tanzen muss: Frei die Formen, die Figuren. [...] Wenn die Herbststürme aufkamen und die Bäume sich bogen, kam die Natur mir weich vor: Weiche Beine, sie taten sich gegenseitig nicht weh. Die Bewegung war ohne Schmerz, umsichtig. Blätter tanzten im Wind wie Kinder. (Franz 2017, 28)<sup>11</sup>

Attributing the movement of the trees to a dance and conflating that movement with the Sinti's expressive dance evokes notions of freedom of movement, suppleness and softness, flexibility, elasticity, and cautiousness to pre-empt sorrow and the hurting of others. In fact, the round forms express the desire for analgesia, one that resists the "phallic" desire that is synonymous with domination and the emergence of violence.

Here, the importance resides in the Sinti\**zze*' and Manouche's acceptance of these values as constituting the basics of their proper cultures, at least whilst living the peripatetic lifestyle. This aspect should not only be conserved unconsciously by tradition, but be highlighted as a conscious value to be preserved and deliberately chosen. In a renewal of the Sinti, Manouche and Romani lifestyle, one that will have the courage and power to convert the culture instead of perpetuating sclerosed rules and laws (Liégeois 2019, 85), the feminist arguments, based on the traditional production of space, are substantial and valuable resources to be mobilized once again. A self-aware empowerment can thus base its arguments on resources from within.

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<sup>11</sup> When I lay in bed and saw outside, the smooth movements of the trees, then I merged in them, connected to their movements. [...] Just like I danced as a dancer, they moved, shaking their fingers just like a wonderful woman dancer on the stage, having to dance by following her feelings: liberty of forms, of figures. [...] When the autumn storms emerged and the trees bowed, then nature seemed smooth to myself: soft legs without hurting each other. The movement was without sorrow, cautious. Leaves dancing in the wind just like children [my translation] (Franz 2017, 28).

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