

Representing Romani and Travellers: Sexualized “Gypsy” Women and (Self-)Orientalism in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Gadjo Dilo*

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Abstract

Romani (Roma) and Traveller people make up significant minorities in many European nations, but they still endure discrimination and the continued effects of orientalism. This paper analyzes representations of “Gypsy” women in two audiovisual media: the reality television show *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and the film *Gadjo Dilo*. *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* is produced by Channel 4 in Britain and by TLC in America, while *Gadjo Dilo* was directed by a man of Romani descent. Through this analysis, it becomes apparent that both the television show and the film sexualize and portray Roma and Traveller women from orientalist points of view. A comparison of these media makes it clear that while representations of an Other can be orientalist, self-representations are not necessarily free from orientalism and can in fact be self-orientalizing. The analysis of these media portrayals of Roma and Travellers illuminates the orientalist features of each and proves that orientalism can exist regardless of who is portraying whom.

Romani, Irish Travellers, and “Gypsy” Discrimination

Between 1000 and 1500 years ago, the Romani people began migrating towards Europe from their origins in Northwestern India. Today, around ten million Roma live throughout Europe (Bánfai et al. 1), and Roma populations exist in other continents as well. Although Irish Travellers, another people, share traditional nomadic lifestyles with the Romani, they constitute a separate ethnic group of Irish origin that diverged genetically around the mid-1600s (Phelan). And, as recently as 2017, discrimination towards both of these ethnic groups has been called “the last acceptable form of racism” (McGarry). Prejudice and stereotypes regarding Gypsy Roma Traveller people exist in literature, in film, and in media from both historical and more recent times. Despite their centuries-long existence throughout Europe, stereotypical or discriminatory views towards these two ethnic groups still hold strong.

“Gypsy Roma Traveller” is an umbrella term that includes several different traditionally nomadic groups of people. Some of these groups are bound together ethnically, while some represent collective lifestyle choices (Heaslip et al.). Overall, one can classify the ethnic groups under this umbrella as belonging to one of two ethnic minorities: either the Romani people, also called Roma, or the Irish Travellers. One may further delineate Romani based on their contemporary countries of origin, such as Welsh Romani and Spanish Romani, but all Roma belong to the same ethnic group that originated in India. Further, while the term “gypsy” enjoys prominence in popular culture, many consider it a racial slur. This term may refer to people of either of the two groups, or it may collectively refer to both groups at once. Not all Romani and Travellers take offense to this term, and certain policies and organizations do employ it in official discourse, but the word certainly has racist underpinnings (Gay y Blasco 297). At the same time, however, due to the prevalence of grouping Romani and Traveller people together as “Gypsies” throughout popular media, one may jointly analyze representations of these two peoples. In this paper, though, the terms Romani/Roma and Irish Traveller/Traveller will primarily describe these respective ethnic groups, while the term “gypsy” will be reserved for use in citations and in references to cultural products that employ this term.

Discrimination towards these peoples does not stop at a racist name. Although they have extensive heritage and histories in Europe, Roma and Travellers still endure prevalent stereotyping and racism at the hands of dominant populations in the countries in which they live. Some common stereotypes applied to “Gypsies” include that they are criminals and child-stealers; that they are mysterious, romantic, and seductive; that they lack education; and that Roma women tell fortunes and have supernatural powers (Sonneman). While some of these stereotypes might be perceived as less harmful than others, they all contribute to views of Roma and Travellers as inferior to non-Roma and non-Travellers, a hallmark effect of orientalism.

Orientalist Representations of “Gypsy” Women

Specifically, this paper will investigate orientalist representations of Roma and Traveller women in television and film. It will analyze representations of “Gypsy” women in the reality television show *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and in the film *Gadjo Dilo* (“*The Crazy Stranger*”). *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* is a reality show produced by Channel 4 in Britain and by TLC (The Learning Channel) in America, while *Gadjo Dilo* is a film that portrays a Romani community and that was directed by a man of Romani descent. How do *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Gadjo Dilo* represent Roma and/or Traveller women in terms of Edward Said’s theory of orientalism? Is there a difference between such representations in a mainstream reality show that portrays “Gypsies” as “Others” versus in a film in which the opposite is true? Through analysis of these two audiovisual media, it becomes apparent that both *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Gadjo Dilo* sexualize and portray Roma and Traveller women from orientalist points of view. Consequently, a comparison of these media makes it clear that while representations of an Other can be orientalist, self-representations are not necessarily free from orientalism and can in fact be self-orientalizing. An analysis of these media portrayals of Roma and Travellers both illuminates the orientalist features of each and proves that orientalism can exist regardless of who is portraying whom.

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding

Theoretical Approach

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes how representing a group of people as an “Other” implies their inferiority to a dominant group. Said’s discourse examines how the Occident has maintained hegemony over the Orient, the “Other” to the Western world, through a “collection of stereotypes, distortions, myths, and fantasies” about the Orient that characterize it as exotic and subordinate (Shabanirad and Marandi 22). Consequently, representing the Other in such a way –

from an orientalist perspective – implies that the Other is inferior to the dominant group portraying it. Furthermore, Said importantly emphasizes the nature of “such representations as *representations*, not as ‘natural’ depictions of the Orient” (Said 21). Orientalist representations of the Other do not strive for, nor do they succeed in, accuracy or faithfulness of representation. They rather serve to maintain the dominant group’s hegemony over the Other.

Said’s concept of representation of the Other aptly applies to the portrayal of Roma and Travellers in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. The ways in which members of these communities are depicted in the show align with orientalist modes of representation. After orientalizing the Roma and Traveller communities (“Gypsies”) as Others, the show portrays them in stereotypical ways that affirm their inferiority to non-members of these communities.

Secondly, the sexualization of the oriental woman has been a common feature of orientalist texts for centuries. By focusing solely on an “oriental” woman’s sexuality, the orientalist writer exerts dominance over her. For example, Edward Said describes how in his orientalist writings, French writer Gustave Flaubert takes his sexual experiences with one oriental woman, Kuchuk Hanem, and applies his resulting perception of her to all “oriental” women. As a result, “[w]oven through all of Flaubert’s Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex” (Said 188). Such continuous associations between Others and sex dampen and eventually erase their other qualities, reducing them to mere sexual objects. These representations do away with personalities or any more complex human characteristics that the Other may have and solely emphasize the Other’s sexuality for the Western gaze.

Such motifs of the sexualized female Other continue to circulate in present times. In “Picturing ‘Gypsies’: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Roma Representation,” Paloma Gay y Blasco identifies “predatory female sexuality” as one of the “master symbols in the Gadge [non-

Gypsy] conceptualisation of Gypsies” (Gay y Blasco 302). Thus, the motif of the sexually promiscuous “Gypsy” woman, a manifestation of the erotic female Other, remains abundant today. This portrayal exists both rampantly and complexly in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. Through the repetition of similar symbols or images that consistently highlight Romani and Traveller women’s sexuality, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* echoes Flaubert’s incessant sexualization of the oriental woman. The show sexualizes female Roma and Travellers both overtly, such as by steering dialogue towards suggestions of promiscuity and the inappropriateness of clothing, as well as through more covert means, including through aspects of cinematography and the repetition of certain visual themes.

Orientalizing Romani and Travellers

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding premiered as a television series in the UK in 2011, on British television broadcaster Channel 4, and ran for several seasons. The American version of the show, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*, premiered on TLC in 2012 and has since enjoyed an even longer run (“My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” [IMDb]). This reality show follows members of Irish Traveller and/or Romani communities, either in Britain or in the United States, as they prepare for weddings and also for other major events such as first communions and birthday celebrations. However, it represents Romani and Travellers in problematic ways: specifically, after establishing them as “Others,” the show perpetuates stereotypes related to these communities. It orientalizes Romani and Travellers as Others through multiple means, including on the show’s website, in promotional clips for the series, and in narration in its episodes.

For instance, on the website for the American version of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the description of the show highlights the supposed mystery and secrecy of Romani Americans: “From the most extravagant wedding gowns to explosive celebrations and the madness that follows, *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* delves into the lives of America's most elusive

communities – the world of Romanichel⁴ [sic] and Roma gypsies” (“My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding” [TLC]). Evidently, this description aims to interest the website visitor and attract viewers to the show. However, it overtly and emphatically differentiates Romani American communities from the American majority; they are made exotic, secretive, and maybe even a little frightening for the dominant American population. Furthermore, narration in promotional material as well as in the show’s episodes also conveys that Romani and Travellers’ lives are full of mystery and insanity. Lines like “A spectacle like nothing else...their lifestyle will blow your mind” and “From the makeup to the miniskirts, from the heels to the hair...it’s the outrageous, it’s the unbelievable, it’s ‘My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding’” (Darby) clearly continue to sensationalize their lifestyles and practices, simultaneously implying their inferiority to non-Romani and non-Traveller populations. According to *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the Roma and Travellers belong to a very secret and bizarre group, despite being longtime residents of Britain or of the United States. In this way, the show characterizes them in line with Said’s concept of representation of the Other. They are “negative alter ego[s], alluring and exotic, dangerous and mysterious, always the Other” (Lau and Mendes 1). Put simply, in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, Romani and Travellers are orientalized.

Sexualizing Romani and Traveller Women

Consequently, establishing a group as an “Other” facilitates stereotypical representations of that group. Distancing and differentiating oneself from another group of people makes it easier to engage in processes of simplification and essentialism regarding that group – essentially, to apply traits possessed by a few members of the group to the group as a whole. This process of stereotyping exists in several regards in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* as the show subscribes to multiple stereotypes associated with Romani and Irish Travellers.

⁴ Romanichals are a sub-group of Romani.

Perhaps the most notable orientalist feature of this reality television show, though, involves its representation of Roma and Traveller women: it continues a long tradition of sexualizing the female Other. The show is predicated on the stereotype of seductive and promiscuous Roma and Traveller women. It sexualizes women it portrays through both visual and auditory means, extensively focusing on their bodies, clothing, and overall appearances. Contrastingly, at the same time that it continuously highlights their sexuality, it talks about the strict moral codes that the women follow. These juxtapositions between physical appearance and apparent society-wide principles that forbid sexual contact before marriage create an ambiguous portrayal of the Roma or Traveller woman. According to *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, she dresses provocatively and flaunts her sexuality, but at the same time, she must follow guidelines of extreme chastity. Because such juxtapositions between sexuality and chastity accentuated by the show portray “Gypsy” culture as contradictory and ignorant, they reflect a Western hegemony over Roma and Traveller people. Correspondingly, these simultaneous but oppositional representations are orientalist in that they fulfill a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 4). By characterizing the women and their culture in this way, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* representationally manipulates their cultures’ moral codes. In so doing, it affirms dominance over Romani and Traveller groups. The show’s conflicting and sexualizing representations of women demean them and also portray them and their communities in general from an orientalist point of view.

Accentuating the Roma/Traveller’s Body

In an episode of the British version of the show that follows a twelve-year-old Irish Traveller girl as she prepares for her first communion, comments made by one of the show’s producers overtly sexualize the girl from behind the camera. In a dress shop, as the girl tries on her first communion dress for the first time, the producer remarks “That’s quite a short skirt,

would you be allowed to wear that in church?” Shortly after, she asks the girl and her older sister “If you don’t see it [the dress/skirt] as provocative, what do you see it as?” and the two Travellers simply respond “We see it as nice” (“Diamantes are Forever” 05:33-06:16). Asking these questions about the length and appropriateness of the Traveller girl’s dress without any precedent blatantly sexualizes the girl, not only drawing attention to her body but also arbitrarily depicting her as immodest due to the length of her dress. From the perspective of an outsider to the Traveller community – she is behind the camera, the Travellers in front of it – the producer sexualizes the girl, who has already been established as a Traveller Other. With this example, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* suggests that because of their ethnicity, because of their established status as “Others,” Roma and Traveller women can and should be sexualized to entertain the non-Roma and non-Traveller viewers of the show.

Additionally, the camera’s gaze also contributes to *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*’s sexualization of Romani and Traveller women. The show often depicts female Roma and Travellers in tight, flashy, and/or short clothing, making the viewer believe that they very often dress this way. In reality, these sequences all take place at special occasions. Furthermore, Jensen and Ringrose illustrate the sexualizing movements of the camera in these types of scenes:

Gypsy Wedding repeatedly lingers over footage of young girls in their communion dresses, party-wear, and wedding dresses: every episode includes prolonged visual sequences in which the filmmakers’ cameras travel up and down the girls’ bodies, pausing dramatically at platform heels, bare legs, barely there mini-skirts, exposed mid-riffs, tight tank tops, and heavily made up faces. (376)

In these visual sequences, the camera intentionally draws the viewer’s attention to the women’s and girls’ bodies, eroticizing the female body and compelling the viewer to interpret the women’s dresses as provocative. And, importantly, it is the repetition of scenes of this sort that contributes

to their sexualization. More often than not, an event depicted in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* is accompanied by camerawork that focuses on female bodies in ways depicted above. These scenes cause the viewer to associate “Gypsy” women with sexual promiscuity. Instead of focusing on these events as special occasions for the Roma and Traveller girls and women, the show causes “[t]he pleasures of playing, dancing, and experimenting with glamour at a community occasion [to be] called up for moral scrutiny” (Jensen and Ringrose 377). In *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the camera’s gaze often and deliberately objectifies female Roma and Travellers, covertly but unambiguously sexualizing them.

Contradicting Clothing and Morals

At the same time that it sexualizes these girls and women, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* contradictorily depicts Romani and Traveller culture as having very strict morals vis-à-vis sexual conduct. By orientalizing these women’s chastity, the show simultaneously strengthens the sensationalism it generates by portraying them as seductive and promiscuous in the first place. For example, in the episode titled “Born to be Wed,” dressmaker for “Gypsies” Thelma Madine tells the camera that while “Gypsy” girls and women often dress provocatively, there is “definitely, definitely no sex before marriage” (03:06-03:32). Shortly after, voice-over explains that most Traveller girls must be chaperoned when they go on dates, even after getting engaged, and it also describes strict rules of courtship in which girls are not supposed to approach boys. However, this narration is paired with shots of Traveller girls wearing tight and revealing clothing (04:18-5:55). The show’s contradictory messaging regarding provocatively-dressed, sexualized Roma and Traveller women who simultaneously follow strict moral codes leaves the viewer confused about their culture, which is characterized as backwards and ignorant as a result. This tension between eroticism and conservative moral rules serves to further orientalize the women and Roma and Traveller culture.

What's more, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* “never attempts to reconcile the sexy outfits with the strict moral code; it's simply left at being a paradox the audience can point fingers at” (Darby). By remaining emphasized but unaddressed, this contradiction between sexuality and morals clearly represents Roma and Travellers as inferior to non-Roma and non-Travellers: viewers can ridicule them for this supposed hypocrisy, which the show highlights. In an academic investigation of the show, Jensen and Ringrose clearly explain the results of this thematic contradiction. After affirming that while *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* plainly sexualizes girls and women, it offers at the same time “an account of strict moral codes around sex and of girls/women who are sexually repressed by Gypsy and Traveller culture,” they continue that “[t]he deliberate dissonance between the sensationalist voyeuristic footage from inside the communion and wedding parties and the accompanying voiceover about Gypsy and Traveller morality deliberately creates a space of contestation” (Jensen and Ringrose 376). This dissonance constitutes another way in which the show's representation of sexualized Roma and Traveller girls and women facilitates an orientalist perspective towards these groups. The show allows and even encourages the viewer to interpret the groups and their cultures as mysterious and erotic and, simultaneously, as backwards, inconsistent, and uneducated.

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding show steers dialogue to subjects of promiscuity and sexuality related to female Romani and Travellers, and camerawork often and brazenly gazes at their female bodies. At the same time, though, it juxtaposes this sexualization with references to the strict sexual morals in “Gypsy” culture, characterizing this culture as contradictory and confused. All of these orientalizing elements take place in a reality show produced by non-Romani and non-Travellers, or, in other words, by members of a hegemonically dominant group in relation to Roma and Traveller people. One might assume that, in contrast, cinematic *self*-representations of “Gypsies” would avoid such manifestations of orientalism and stereotypes. However, in an

analysis of representations of Romani women in a film by a filmmaker of Romani heritage, it becomes clear that hegemonically subordinate groups of people can similarly engage in processes of self-orientalism.

Gadjo Dilo

Theoretical Approach

While a dominant group can use orientalist modes of representation to portray a subordinate group, that subordinate group can also use *self*-orientalist modes of representation in portrayals of themselves, or self-representations. Due to the myriad effects and consequences of orientalism, one might think that the oriental subject strictly opposes orientalist representations of himself or herself, but this is not always the case. Accordingly, not all Roma and Traveller self-representations are free from orientalism. Stereotypes associated with these ethnic groups reflect centuries of oppression and discrimination towards them; so, although members of these communities have naturally worked to oppose such views and attitudes, there are certain cases in which they may internalize widely-used stereotypes about themselves. With consistent repetition of stereotypes about a certain ethnicity, people of that ethnicity may begin to normalize and embody the stereotypes and act in ways that fulfill them as a result. While self-orientalism may sometimes be used as a tool for regaining power, for taking ownership over stereotypes ascribed to one by a dominant group, “in the long run, [it] serves to perpetuate, and even to consolidate, existing forms of power” (Dirlik 114). Self-orientalism can serve as a form of resistance on the part of the orientalized as they attempt to reclaim ownership over their own representations, but it ultimately feeds into the power of the dominant group.

Correspondingly, the 1997 film *Gadjo Dilo* includes manifestations of Roma self-orientalism. The film’s director, Tony Gatlif, is of Algerian and Romani descent and grew up in a “Gypsy” community in Algiers. Some of his films explore themes and realities that affirm the

continued strong identity of “Gypsies” despite great persecution (“Biographie”). Due to the director’s ethnicity, experiences, and relationship with his Roma roots and also to his use of Roma actors in the film, one can characterize *Gadjo Dilo* as a self-representation of Romani people and culture. The film tells the story of a Parisian man who, while seeking the Roma singer of a song recording he carries with him, ends up in a Roma community in Romania. What unfolds is a story of two cultures coming into contact and aiming to understand one another. While the film does not represent the Romani in the same orientalist way as *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, it nevertheless engages in a different, more covert genre of orientalism. In terms of its representations of female Romani, it reproduces elements of the orientalized and sexualized “Gypsy” woman trope, evidencing the presence of self-orientalism.

Self-Orientalist Representations of Romani Women

If orientalism involves a dominant group stereotyping and producing discourse that affirms the inferiority of another group – an “Other” group – self-orientalism exists when a subordinate group internalizes and acts in alignment with orientalist views that a dominant group has applied to it. Self-orientalism is a result “of the East’s representation and expression of itself from the eyes of the West and with the image which the West has fictionalised for it” (Feighery 271). In the case of *Gadjo Dilo*, the Roma community is “the East” that is represented according to characteristics that have been repeatedly ascribed to it by “the West.” While aspects of self-orientalism exist in relation to multiple characters in the film, both male and female, notable examples of self-orientalism occur in regards to Romani women. At several points in the film, Roma women are sexualized in ways not dissimilar to their sexualization in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*.

Firstly, though, it is important to note the role-reversal between traditionally dominant and subordinate groups in this film to confirm that in *Gadjo Dilo*, the Roma are not “Other-ized”

as they are in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. In this film, the Frenchman, Stéphane, actually becomes the Other in relation to the Roma community. Members of the Roma community characterize him as foreign and untrustworthy and even as a thief (*Gadjo Dilo* 12:57-15:06). Because he is an outsider in this homogenous Roma settlement, Stéphane embodies the characteristics normally applied to a subordinate group in terms of the theory of orientalism. Although the French as an ethnic group traditionally possess hegemony over Romani populations, the film initially establishes Stéphane as the Other in a setting of numerically- and culturally-dominant Romani. This sort of “reverse orientalism” (McGregor 77) deliberately counters the rampant “Othering” of Roma people in popular culture and discourse. However, as analysis of the film’s portrayals of Roma women will reveal, *Gadjo Dilo* reflects certain orientalist modes of representation nonetheless – this self-representation of Roma people engages in self-orientalism.

Critics have highlighted, for instance, how, problematically, the film still represents Roma according to a traditional Western view: “Gatlif may be of Romani descent, but both the protagonist and the camera which follows him throughout are gadje [non-Romani], and it is through their lenses that events unfold and the Roma are seen” (Rutherford). Despite the director’s ethnicity, his articulated devotion to the Roma cause, and the fact that most Romani roles are filled by Romani people (Rutherford), *Gadjo Dilo* reproduces orientalist notions about Romani through its representation of Roma women. Although “Gatlif’s pedigree...assures us that this [film] is a ‘true’ picture” (Thompson), its portrayal of this group is in fact problematic in that it is not beyond the reach of orientalism. In short, the film’s self-representational qualities – which would presumably lend to authenticity – “hardly qualify as a solid defence against misrepresentation” (Rutherford). Although it does not portray Roma as “Others” to the same degree

as *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, the film reiterates orientalist stereotypes of Romani people, notably that of the sexually promiscuous Roma woman.

Self-Orientalist Sexualization

Usually, it is other characters in the film that highlight and assume authority over Romani women's sexuality. Instead of producers, other behind-camera workers, or the camera itself sexualizing the women, Roma characters in the film partake in this traditionally orientalist act. Even during a scene that depicts women bathing and includes some nudity, the camera does not focus on the women's nakedness, but instead highlights the cultural and ritualistic natures of this quotidian task. In *Gadjo Dilo*, the sexualization of women is not very overt; however, it exists nonetheless in a different, self-orientalizing way, whether propagated by Roma villager characters or by Stéphane. Villagers sexualize their fellow women through direct references to Roma women's bodies and to their sexuality, portraying them as little more than sexual objects, and Stéphane's character also ultimately commodifies the Roma woman as a sexual object near the end of the film. While these actions and behaviours are certainly patriarchal, they also reflect orientalist views in that they sexualize the Roma women for the benefit of the "Western" gaze. In these ways, similarly to *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, *Gadjo Dilo* sexualizes Romani women both explicitly and implicitly.

Sexualization through Speech

Romani villagers' sexualization of their fellow Roma women begins to occur early in the film. Soon after Stéphane arrives in the settlement, a village child refers to Sabina, the female protagonist, as a "slut" and a "whore" and says that "no one wants her anymore" because she left her husband in Belgium (*Gadjo Dilo* 31:59-32:04). In using these sexually-loaded terms to describe her, the child characterizes her as a sexually promiscuous woman with loose morals at the same time as he insinuates she is "ruined" for being a divorcée. In turn, this spoken

representation simultaneously leads to the impression that Roma women engage in indecent sexual relationships and that they are undesirable. Although he is part of the Roma community, the child's speech portrays Sabina as unchaste and immodest and sexualizes her from an orientalist point of view all the same. By highlighting and demeaning her sexuality, this speech, spoken by a Roma child himself, represents Roma women as inferior to non-Roma women by insinuating their undesirableness. In this way, this scene exemplifies Romani self-orientalization.

A little later on in the film, another scene similarly represents Roma girls and women as only worthy in relation to their sexuality. This scene involves a father worried about his daughter remaining a virgin as she prepares to travel to perform at a wedding. As she is about to leave, he “appears, flourishing ‘medical proof’ of her virginity and saying he will kill Izidor [the leader of the band she will perform with] if she does not return chaste” (Rutherford). On the surface, this segment of *Gadjo Dilo* seems intended to communicate that Roma culture follows strict morals, but it actually feeds into orientalist notions of female sexuality. The father's radicalness towards safeguarding his daughter's “chastity” conveys to the viewer that if she loses her virginity, she will lose her worth. This means of sexualization differs from those employed in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* in that it also explicitly portrays male dominance, but it orientalizes the Roma woman nonetheless. The strict emphasis on the girl's virginity as a symbol of her worth reduces her to a sexual object and in fact mirrors the dissonance generated in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* when the show portrays that “Gypsies” have strict morals in theory but are promiscuous in practice. This girl's father espouses the importance for women in their culture to remain celibate outside of marriage, but the viewer sees that not all Roma women in the film follow this moral code. This segment of the film represents another example in which this Romani-directed film internalizes the orientalist stereotype of the sexualized Roma woman and, as such, engages in self-orientalism.

Claiming a Sexual Trophy

Gadjo Dilo also sexualizes the Roma woman in a more discreet but also more insidious way. At the end of the film, Stéphane destroys the recordings of Roma music that he had meticulously produced, symbolizing the destruction of the orientalist cultural products that Westerners have historically displaced – brought home – from the East (McGregor 82). This scene therefore represents a transcending of orientalist modes of viewing and studying the “Other.” However, another fact of the scene prevents this rejection of orientalist thought. Although he destroys the recordings, Stéphane claims another cultural prize: a “Gypsy” woman. Andrew McGregor explains that “[e]ven though Stéphane destroys the recordings in an admirable gesture of cultural understanding, he nevertheless takes with him the most stereotypical cultural ‘commodity’ from the culture he has discovered and to many extents ‘conquered’ – the girl” (McGregor 82). Having entered into a sexual relationship with Sabina, one may presume that Stéphane will take her with him back to France. In this way, the film represents the Roma woman as the ultimate commodity for the Westerner to gain and use for sexual pleasure. Perhaps this commodification of the Roma woman as a sexual object to be attained by a man was unintentional, but the film nonetheless portrays Sabina “being claimed as a cultural, as well as a sexual, ‘trophy’” (82). At the end of *Gadjo Dilo*, Stéphane’s character characterizes the Roma woman as a sexual prize that he has obtained and can now bring home. Although this representation may have been unconscious and unintentional, it undoubtedly echoes historical, orientalist processes of claiming “oriental” cultural objects in addition to representing Sabina as a sexual force to be conquered. While these dual outcomes may be unintentional, they exist nonetheless, and this scene therefore constitutes another instance in which the film sexualizes the Roma woman and simultaneously self-orientalizes Roma people.

It is possible to identify instances in which *Gadjo Dilo* subverts stereotypes about Romani, but one can also recognize instances in which stereotypes ascribed to Romani, namely in terms of the sexualized Romani woman, have been internalized and reproduced. While director Tony Gatlif claims to offer an honest and real depiction of Roma life and culture, he does not succeed in avoiding stereotypes about Romani people that represent them from orientalist points of view. Consequently, as a self-representation of Roma people, the film engages in self-orientalism. In the film, Roma villagers sexualize their fellow women overtly through speech, and Stéphane claims a Roma woman as a sexual trophy of the “Orient” he has toured. While self-orientalism can sometimes serve as a strategy to reclaim power from a dominant orientalizing group, it most often ends up actually contributing to the dominant group’s power. The latter is certainly the case with *Gadjo Dilo*, as the film “leaves the viewer feeling entertained, but at the same time reassured about the centrality of his or her own personal and cultural identity, rather than feeling disturbed by the plight of the Roma” (McGregor 78-79). *Gadjo Dilo* aims to present a non-orientalist self-representation of Roma people, but its sexualization of Romani women clearly reproduces orientalist stereotypes, rendering it self-orientalist.

Conclusion

Despite the different circumstances surrounding their production, goals, and styles of representation, both *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Gadjo Dilo* engage in orientalist portrayals of Romani and/or Travellers – of “Gypsies.” After establishing Roma and Traveller communities as “Others,” *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* sexualizes Roma and Traveller women both verbally and through the silent but powerful gaze of the camera. The juxtaposition of these sexualized women with descriptions of the strict morals common to their “Gypsy” societies further disparages and orientalizes Roma and Travellers by portraying their culture as confused and inconsistent. *Gadjo Dilo*, although a self-representation of Romani people, also aligns with

orientalist portrayals of “Gypsies.” While it should theoretically portray Roma non-stereotypically, it evidences the internalization of common stereotypes about “Gypsies” and reproduces the stereotype of the sexualized Romani woman. In reproducing and normalizing this stereotype of the sexualized Roma woman, the film clearly engages in self-orientalism: orientalism in self-representation.

Analysis of cultural representations using other concepts related to Edward Said’s theory of orientalism, such as exteriority and latent versus manifest orientalism, could surely provide further insight into the propagation of discrimination and stereotypes. For instance, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Gadjo Dilo* both include instances of latent (e.g. covert) as well as manifest (overt) orientalism. Further analysis of the different effects that these sub-types of orientalism have on an audience’s perspectives and attitudes towards Roma and Travellers could provide additional insight into how orientalist outlooks can be both formed and transmitted through audiovisual media. The trope of the sexualized “Gypsy” woman holds strong in popular culture, and only through deliberately conscious, non-orientalist representations of Roma and Traveller women may this stereotype eventually begin to lose traction in favour of more authentic, non-orientalizing portrayals of these women and their communities.

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