

To the Chair of the Faculty Board Peter Dobers and Pro Vice-Chancellor Nils Ekedahl

Associate Professor Jan Selling: Additional reflections regarding the awarding of Dr Honoris Causa. 26/11 2019

The one side, which would speak in favour of nominating Marushiakova to Dr Honoris, is that she undoubtedly is a very productive scholar, who has completed a significant amount of ethnographic research within the research field of Romani studies.

The other side is that she is hardly ground-breaking or innovative in her research approach. On the contrary: she stands firm in the continuity of traditional Romani studies, which is also reflected in her leadership of the *Gypsy Lore Society*.

From our perspective, a decision to appoint her to Dr Honoris, is controversial and perhaps indefensible. The reasons are the following:

- 1) As the President of the GLS she actively worked against a confrontation with the racist, colonial and antigypsyist past of the organization. She also actively silenced all criticism of gypsylorism (orientalist and essentialist perspectives on Roma), and acted against Romani critics around the GLS-conference in Istanbul 2012. We have already adduced these reasons by referring to evidence presented in Selling 2018.
- 2) Her appointment would cause damage to the University's ongoing strategic work, since her polemic approach creates problems in international research collaboration. [See below, especially the note by Professor of Romani Studies Kimmo Granqvist]
- 3) Additionally it should be noted that the internationally highly respected *Central Council of German Sinti and Roma* in 2015 declined cooperation with her in a major, later award-winning European project (RomArchive, www.romarchive.eu). She was rejected for two reasons: a) that her ethnographic and essentialist research perspective was not in any way devoted to ending stigmatization of Sinti and Roma, b) that she has had substantial research collaborations with Professor Bernhard Streck and the *Forum Tsiganologischer Forschung* in Leipzig, which was positioned in a racist and antigypsyist research tradition. These cited reasons are important to consider as such, but it should also be noted that the fact that a leading Romani organization, with which we collaborate, has come to this conclusion, is an indication to reflect upon, especially since the Government assignment to Södertörn University of Romani studies ultimately is linked to the task of safeguarding the interest of the Romani minority. (See below.)
- 4) It should also be considered that Marushiakova has been involved in genetic research on Roma since 2001 (latest publication in *European Journal of Human Genetics* 2015) which by scholars in Freiburg (Lipphart & Surdu) has been criticised as unethical and linked to biological essentialist discourses. In short, the problematic dimension of this is: a) genetic research with the aim of delimiting and categorizing ethnic groups stands in direct descending line of racial biology, which is particularly serious when it comes to one of the groups which the Nazi racial science aimed at exterminating. (Cf. Ethno-geneticist Kaledjieva et al 2001, who thematises this link, but without critically reflecting about the implications for their own research.) b) it seems to be a difficult, and perhaps an impossible research task to obtain informed consent in such research, when conducted upon Roma who has had limited access to education and live in extreme poverty.

MARUSHIAKOVA, STRECK AND THE GERMAN “TSIGANOLOGIE”

According to several antigypsyism-critical analyses (among others Benz, Opfermann, Wippermann) there is a scientific historical continuity between Streck's “Tsiganologi”-research, the racial biological “Zigeunerforschung”, who was carried out even after WWII, among others by Hermann Arnold (printed in *Journal of Gypsy Lore Society* 1961, see Selling 2018.) and all the way back to the father of “Ziganologie”, Heinrich Grellmann (1787, for an analysis of Grellmann, see Selling 2013).

This problematic continuity leads to, among other aspects:

- **A consistent reluctance to reflect racism and antigypsyism** in one's own research tradition.
- **The consistent use of the exonym “Zigeuner”**, which has been publicly criticised by members of the Romani community since 1971. The term is especially harmful in Germany. It is indicative that Marushiakova & Streck's book *Zigeuner am Schwarzen Meer* (2008) already in the introduction links the “Zigeuner” to Indian “Paria-castes” (s. 9), consistently use the notion “Zigeuner” and therefore by the publisher is presented as a “welcome taboo-break”. In a review quote used for marketing the book it is claimed that “Zigeuner in unserem Sinne zu domestizieren ist das eigentliche Verbrechen an ihnen” (www.eudora-verlag.de)
- **Essentialist perspectives on “Gypsies”**, whereby especially Streck's direction links this to essentialist, inherited antisocial characteristics. This is particularly serious in a German context, since this discourse was used until the 1980s as a motive for denying Sinti and Roma rehabilitation and compensation for Nazi persecution and genocide. The essentialist thesis about “Gypsy antisociality” appears in the research report by Streck and Marushiakova 2005. In this, Romani migration from the former East Bloc westwards is described as an “invasion” and it is speculatively argued, without any evidence or source, that “Even theft is part of the Dobrudsha-Zigeuner repertoire, even though we did not get many concrete accounts about this” (p. 20-21).
- In a contribution to an anthology of Streck (2011) Marushiakova (and Popov) attach themselves to an East European discourse on Roma: “everyone knows here ‘who the Gypsies are’. Therefore, problems in this respect can only arise from the identification of certain individuals, outside the social environment in which they were born and bred, but not in regard to the community/communities on the whole. In Eastern Europe the Gypsies, similarly to any other community of that kind, are considered only in **primordial terms** [i.e. inherited characteristics and identity, JS], and in an ethnic discourse (as any other ethnic community). In other words, one is born a Gypsy, one cannot become a Gypsy, and one remains a Gypsy for life (as do one's ancestors)” (s. 87). Another aspect, which may be of particular importance for us at Södertörn University is that the article argues against the value of including Roma as co-researchers, since this would merely be an expression of “political correctness” or “native science”. (In the Swedish version of this dictum, I translated the authors' term “Gypsies” with “zigenare”, since they explicitly state that to them, the term Rom is nothing but a politically correct term without relevance to Roma and to the political discourse around Roma. Marushiakova (and Popov) thereby disregard all post-colonial research, the will of Sinti and Roma, and the right to self-identification and self-denomination with is stated by the UN and by Swedish law.)

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