



Roma Heroes Workshop – Methodology

The Methodological Publication of the
Project *Roma Heroes in Theatre and
Everyday Life –Trainings and Non-formal
Education for the Empowerment of Roma
Youth – Volume I*

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Roma Youth – Volume I

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1. Background and Beginnings

The Role of Theatre and Dramatic Heroes in Promoting Active Citizenship

The development of theatre and citizenship has always gone hand in hand, from ancient Greece through Elizabethan England, Enlightenment-era France, and the 19th-century nations of Central and Eastern Europe up to the age of the 20th-century American classics. Dramatic heroes – much like active citizens – respond to the challenges surrounding them with (value-based) decisions and active responsibility; and whether their journey ends in success or failure, their actions influence their immediate and broader environment.

Consequently, we are convinced that plays and performances depicting active Roma heroes contribute to the development of Roma citizenship, to the empowerment of members of Europe's largest and most disadvantaged ethnic minority to take control of their lives and shape their surroundings.

The Importance of Minority Theatre Self-Representation

In order for members of any minority group, together with those of the majority community, to get a true and diverse picture of the phenomena and stories defining their communities as well as of the specific and general human values crucial for members of these communities, it is essential that their unique perspectives and creations are featured in different segments of culture and education, including theatre.

As an old saying goes, until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter. As long as the Roma are only known through the external perspectives of non-Roma narratives, it will be impossible to break the vicious cycle of stereotypes. If a growing Roma nor non-Roma child cannot find books, performances, or films showcasing value-driven stories of Roma people, neither of them will have the opportunity to see beyond the stigmatized image of the Roma. As long as works about Roma fail to portray anything beyond criminals, beggars, and sex workers, the perception of Roma by both groups – and consequently their mutual self-image as well as the image of their relationships – will remain confined within a cage.

It is our view that this cycle can only be broken by ensuring a platform for Roma self-representation in dramatic literature, theatre, libraries, and schools.

The Beginnings

These thoughts have inspired the staff of Independent Theatre in their artistic and educational work for years. For many years, we created plays and performances while also working to ensure that as many disadvantaged Roma youth as possible could become cultural and educational professionals through our educational programmes. Despite our successes, we felt we were alone. However, this belief was disproven for us when, nearly 10 years ago, we began researching European Roma theatres. We discovered that the roots of European professional Roma theatre go back 150 years and that even today there are professional Roma theatre creators and companies working in numerous European countries. Upon getting to know these plays, it seemed they could serve as a great foundation for launching educational programmes. In 2017, we invited some Roma and Traveller artists to create educational materials based on their works. The works of Richard R. O'Neill, Alina Șerban, Mihaela Drăgan, and Dijana Pavlović were all monodramas that showcased active heroes – notably, all four dramas featured female heroes.

The International Roma Heroes Festival began in 2017 with the presentation of these four plays, and since then we have organized five consecutive international festivals. At each festival, we showcased productions from different Roma theatre artists – from Sweden to Italy, from Ireland to Bulgaria. Alongside the performances, we also translated the plays and filmed focus videos that served as the basis for entire performances and educational materials, which we have carried out annually.

Working with international Roma artists and the growing network of Roma and non-Roma trainers, we developed an educational methodology in 2017, which has greatly evolved and enriched over the past seven years. We have also shared this methodology with our international partners. In Italy, Spain, Romania, and, through this project, in Slovakia, we have conducted training for contemporary trainers and implemented workshops.

During this period, our workshops have reached thousands of young people, both in Hungary and in several European countries. In the framework of this methodology, we share the key elements and structure of the workshop, provide a sample of the materials used, and present the training for contemporary trainers who lead these workshops.

2. Objectives and Target

Groups of the Workshop

The objectives of the Roma Heroes workshops are manifold. On the one hand, they aim to showcase the values and diversity of European Roma drama and theatre to a broad range of target groups. On the other hand, through the stories of the plays, we aim to highlight the diversity, challenges, and values of European Roma communities, as well as to bring visibility to social issues and historical events relegated to the back seat in education and culture. For example, who has heard that in Switzerland, as late as the 1970s, members of the Jenisch people became victims of organized genocide? Or that, thanks to the active participation of theatre creators and civil organizations, a police officer was sentenced to prison during a court trial concerning the murder of a Roma man, which was a case of police brutality in Romania? This could be expanded further, as a significant portion of the plays address contemporary and historical themes. A complex understanding of historical memory and current events is indispensable for us to consciously and responsibly shape our future as active citizens.

The aim of the workshops is to strengthen Roma youth with new knowledge, the broader European community presented in the plays, and primarily the stories of value-driven Roma heroes. These stories not only help them strengthen their self-esteem and positive Roma identity, but through the example of Roma dramatic heroes driven by different values and walking diverse paths, their perspective on choices and potential life journeys expands as well. And by coming across heroes who take different paths in narratives representing members of one's community, they, too, are given a broader sense of possible futures. While some heroes choose to oppose traditions and pursue further education, others decide to start families. Some stand against politicians, while others write books based on their experiences, becoming writers, despite the path that society may have expected for them.

However, the workshop does not only aim to influence Roma youth but also those from the majority group. These workshops aim to shape the knowledge and attitudes of the majority group towards the Roma. Additionally, through the analysis of the plays, the dilemmas faced by the dramatic heroes, and the sharing of participants' related views, every participant has the opportunity to realize that any given situation or story has multiple interpretations. Whom one of us sees as a hero, another one might not. It is important for young people, regardless of their background, to think together about what they would do if they were a dramatic hero in a specific situation. This not only develops their empathy but also their communication skills and critical thinking. While the stories, challenges, and dramatic heroes are connected to Roma people, they fundamentally embody universal human characteristics. Through the exploration and discussion of these stories, we aim to highlight the differences in the situations of Roma and non-Roma people (e.g. facing institutionalized racism) as well as the recognition the similarities (e.g. anyone can have conflicts with family members or fight for goals that are important to them). We believe that once we recognize the similarities in other individuals and groups, we become much more motivated to reach out to one another and build a more inclusive society.

Beyond focusing on dramas and dramatic heroes, the workshops also turn attention to the stories of the participants' own heroes and moments when they themselves acted heroically for others. Recognizing that heroes exist within our immediate environment – whether family members, friends, or teachers – and acknowledging that our own decisions in difficult circumstances can bring about changes can have a deeply empowering effect. This fosters a sense of pride in our community, the people surrounding us, and ourselves. Moreover, if participants can recall instances where their ancestors, friends, or they themselves behaved heroically or acted as responsible citizens, it reinforces their belief and determination to dare to act similarly in the future. This influence extends not only to individual levels but also to group dynamics. Once participants are introduced to the heroic figures and stories of their peers, the workshop experience transforms their perception of their fellow group members.

Sharing personal narratives is followed by the final segment of the workshop, where participants collaborate in small groups to creatively interpret or present a story or theme they find meaningful. This could involve staging a scene, composing a song, or drafting a letter. The process of collective creation and a shared sense of achievement foster team-building, enabling youngsters to draw on their own and their fellow participants' creative potential and cooperative abilities. It feels good to create together, to work together – additionally, they can experience the satisfaction of co-creating within a framework they chose themselves. This participatory process mirrors the foundational principles of democracy: a group of active citizens devising and actualizing their vision. While the initial result may be as modest as a short scene, a successful collaboration fosters openness to future cooperative efforts. In addition to experiencing a series of creative collaboration, we prioritize fostering positive, inclusive group dynamics. Although the target group may not always consist of both Roma and non-Roma participants, the workshops are invariably led by two trainers – one Roma and one non-Roma – to exemplify successful interethnic cooperation. Even in homogenous Roma or non-Roma groups, this structure provides an opportunity for positive intercultural interactions between group members and a trainer of different heritage.

As with our wide-ranging objectives, the target groups we work with are very diverse. In 2017, we mainly delivered sessions to Roma students, and in the following years we have increasingly targeted mainstream university groups and secondary schools. The workshop has been a success with groups of diverse age, ethnicity, social background, and education, and we evaluate the workshop based on feedback forms filled in by participants, among other things. We have been invited to several communities where workshop participants were made up of primary school students. In accordance with the characteristics and interests of the target group, we are able to select 3-4 focused dramas from our collection of more than 20. At the same time, reading literacy and comprehension skills are important for a meaningful joint processing of subtitled videos and written drama passages. Unfortunately, this is not the case for an increasing number of children – especially

in primary school groups, we were often faced with the need to process the dramas in other ways with the participants (e.g. shared reading or storytelling).

Besides student target groups, we have also held workshops for university teachers in the framework of our complex training, during which teachers of different fields of expertise developed a methodology for thematic seminars related to some aspect of Roma drama. These trainings have contributed to the development of courses related to the interdisciplinary context of European Roma drama in several universities in Hungary and Romania, in various fields of study (e.g. literature, theatre, media, cultural anthropology, art history). Most of these courses have also included Roma Heroes workshops for groups of university students who have studied the topic in more depth.

3. A Brief Summary of the Teaching Methodology.

Workshop Scenario

First Session of the Workshop

Introduction to the Workshop

At the beginning of the workshop, the session leaders introduce themselves, present the main themes, tools, and objectives and establish the framework for cooperation with the participants.

What Makes a Hero a Hero?

Then, participants write down on a post-it note a word or phrase that comes to their mind about a hero in general. What characterizes a hero and their environment, what do they do, what makes a hero a hero? One by one, participants introduce themselves and read out the aspect they have written down, which they stick on a shared flipchart. The facilitators then summarize the main points made, grouping them together. The main aspects of heroes are that they respond to a difficulty, make a choice, and take responsibility, along the lines of certain values, thereby making a difference in the lives of their immediate and wider community. If some of the main points are not made by the group members, they are first formulated by the trainers through facilitating questions, but if not, they add them as their own insights. During the collective reflection, discrepancies may arise (e.g. heroes have super powers – ordinary people can be heroes; or that a hero can succeed or fail); these contradictions need not be resolved, but only noted that there may be differences in the way they think about heroes. The aim in gathering the main points is to cluster those characteristics (mentioned above) that are true of every hero's journey.

The Importance of Drama and Gypsy Theatre

After the heroes, we turn to the dramatic heroes. Depending on time constraints, this may be discussed at length, or there may be shorter frontal communications.

The key information is as follows:

- Theatre and drama always go hand in hand with the development of citizenship.
- Romani theatre has existed in Europe since 1887, and there are still professional Romani theatre-makers working in many countries, yet we hardly know them.
- Several works have been presented at the Roma Heroes Festivals. We will now take a look at some of them in detail.

Videos

Subsequently, we present some three-minute videos: a sample of each of the 3-4 pieces chosen. After watching the videos, we decide together who would like to work on which drama in a small group.

Group Work

In conformity with the above, after watching the videos, we divide the participants into four groups based on their interests. (Should there be too many people interested in a certain drama and too few or none in others, we can try to provide some attractive information about the less chosen plays, or we can decide to have different sized groups or not to discuss a certain drama and have two groups working on others.)

Each small group will be given materials (play excerpts, background materials, occasionally photos) related to the play. They should then work together to formulate what the story is about and answer the following questions about the protagonists:

- What difficulties do they encounter?

- How do they react to them? How/what do they decide, and what do they do?
- What effect do they have on their environment?

(Here, reference can be made to the aspects that are generally collected in relation to the hero.)

Following group work, each group should present the play and the hero they have studied, sharing the questions and dilemmas that have arisen during the group work on the play.

Presentation, Joint Processing

Each small group presents the play they have worked on, its social context, the considerations and any questions or dilemmas they have raised about the dramatic hero. After the presentations, if any important details were missed or something was not clearly presented, the facilitators will ask about it or add to what was said.

In case there is enough time, in addition to quick reflections and questions, the other participants can also reflect at length on the play and the issues raised by it. Here, similar themes and issues that have arisen in their own lives can also be brought up.

If there is a question or dilemma that many people in the group are concerned about, this can be addressed separately. When there is not enough time to listen to everyone, the question can be formulated as a statement and participants can be asked to stand on one side of the room if they agree with the statement and on the other side if they do not. This way, everyone can take a position in the discussion and some people can be interviewed on their points of view on why they agree/disagree with the statement.

Closure – If the Two Sessions Take Place on Different Days

At the end of the first session, each participant will give feedback on the workshop, the plays they have seen, and the issues raised. What did you take with you? What thoughts and feelings did you have?

If the two sessions are on the same day, there is only a break.

Second Session (Or After the Break)

Lead-up

This stage includes: summarizing the dramas analysed in the previous session, the main issues raised, and the findings about the plays and heroes in general; recalling the common framework and then introducing the current focus: our own heroes and heroic deeds. (If the two sessions take place on the same day, this recap is, of course, omitted.)

Introduction to ‘My Hero and My Exploits’

Since in what follows we will work with the participants’ own stories, it is important that the trainers also open up, sharing a story about their own heroes and, even more so, their heroism – thereby encouraging participants to do the same in the future.

Small Group Discussion of Heroic Stories

Participants are asked to come up with a story of one of their heroes or, later on, a story in which they themselves have been a hero – the idea is that there should be a story of hardship, a decision, an action that led to some change, even if to a small one.

The sharing of stories, however, should be done in pairs or small groups. On the one hand, a full circle might stretch the timeframe, while, on the other hand, a smaller group can create a more trusting atmosphere, and when putting together these groups, we can take into account who in the group might, for example, inhibit each other's expressions.

Each member of every small group briefly tells their own stories to the person sitting next to them, so the pairs get to know each other's stories. Each participant then chooses one of the two stories they have heard from their partner and tells it to the group in the first person singular, i.e. as if it had happened to them or was their own heroic story. In this way, they can get a taste of the genre of storytelling.

Creative Processing

The facilitators thank the small group members individually for sharing their stories. They will ask them what they are most interested in, either from the stories they have just heard or from past plays, that they would like to continue to work on. If the group is indecisive, the trainer can help them make a decision by asking facilitating questions or offering a vote. Once they have a story or theme, the trainer can ask them to develop it through some creative means (e.g. sketch, writing, video) and then present their work to the whole group. The trainers will participate as little as possible in the creative group work. For example, if someone is relegated to the background, they point out that everyone should take part in the joint creative work, or, if they get stuck somewhere along the process, they help them out with facilitating questions and, ultimately, suggestions.

Joint Presentation of Creative Works and Reflections

The small groups present their creative work (e.g. reading out of writings, presenting the scenes, showing the films) one after the other, and the rest of the group and the trainers can reflect on it with questions and comments. If time permits, this can take place after each production, otherwise as a single common section after the presentations.

Closing

In the closing circle, each participant will share what they have taken with them from the workshop and what ideas they have had during the sessions. The trainers can offer to share their creations and other creative products featuring Roma heroes on <https://romahosok.blogspot.com/>.

After the closing session, participants should fill in a feedback questionnaire, if possible, to help us improve our work in the future and make similar workshops even more effective.

4. Example of a Drama Adaptation – Richard O’Neill: *The Hardest Word*

As explained in the previous section, a major focus of the first part of the workshop is the elaboration of some details of certain Roma dramas, selected according to the characteristics and needs of the group.

Richard O’Neill’s monodrama *The Hardest Word* was presented by Independent Theatre Hungary at *Roma Heroes – 1st International Roma Storytelling Festival* in 2017. The production was directed by Rodrigó Balogh and starred Edina Dömök as Jess Smith, the Scottish Traveller writer at the centre of the play. The following focus video linked to the performance is the first step in the process, which will be shown to all workshop participants together with two or three other focus videos related to the performance. The video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/aidFQzfp9wo>.

During the introduction of the video, the workshop facilitator will say one or two sentences about the topic of the drama, which may arouse participants’ interest. For example, ‘In this play, we learn the story of a Scottish travelling writer who one day decides to write a letter to the First Minister.’ It is important that the opening sentence or two should not contain too much lexical information and should not be a ‘spoiler’, revealing how the story will end.

After three or four focus videos have been shown to the whole group, the session leaders suggest that from now on work will continue in small groups, with each group getting to know one of the plays better, from which a scene has just been

shown. Participants will be divided into small groups, preferably of similar size, according to their interests, and each group will be given a drama scene related to the play in question.

Each group will be asked to read the fragments (either together or separately), then to share their meaning orally, and, in the process of working through the story of the drama, to seek answers to the following main questions (reflecting the aspects of every hero's journey identified at the beginning of the workshop): 1. What difficulties did the dramatic hero come up against? 2. What decision did they make? 3. What activity(s) did they undertake? 4. What was the effect of this? In discussing all these, they should formulate whether they themselves consider the dramatic character to be a hero and why / why not. If any other considerations or dilemmas arise during the group work, they should also share them following the group work, when they will briefly summarize the story of the play and their main thoughts on it in response to the above-listed questions.

Drama Excerpt

Richard O'Neill: The Hardest Word

Words, words, words eh?

Have you noticed how some of them are easy to say, in right mood and moment, words like 'I love you' or 'I promise' and 'of course' just seem to trip from the tongue so easily. Then those very words which were so easy to say are so very hard, if not impossible, to put into practice or live up to. Just like the promise I made to my father.

Increasingly I found I had words boiling up inside me, really boiling up like steam in an old pressure cooker and I just had to get them out. Whilst it was often inconvenient, it's actually a really useful thing for a writer it's how I make my living. I have quite a reputation as an angry person as my work can be quite dark apparently and I can always be relied upon to speak my mind in person and in print. Which can be therapeutic as well as allowing me to earn a good living. But these words weren't good saleable words, these words weren't helpful to me at all, these words were going to be trouble, I knew that.

Try as I might those words I couldn't keep down, those words were like a dodgy curry rumbling and grumbling away, threatening to come rushing up at the most inconvenient or damaging time.

Whenever we were feeling like that as children, my old mother used to say, 'better out than in, you'll feel better when you get it all up'. She was right of course, she always was.

My mother was a practical woman, whatever life threw at her, she made the best of it and it killed her, no Walton-esque happy little endings for us. I can't remember what I had for my dinner yesterday but I can remember everything about growing up, every little bit. We were all sick that year and through the winter on and off, we were picking strawberries, eating a few as we went along just like we always did. That year though was the year they started using DDT, a horrible pesticide that killed birds and everything else that came into contact with their precious fruit. No one told us, we ate them as usual and only found out when we were all throwing up the next day and couldn't work. It was serious, the farmer was really concerned, those fruit were desperately needed for Wimbledon.

Can you imagine an employer being allowed to let workers, especially children, work amongst that stuff? But of course we were only Tinks, scum – we didn't matter, we hardly existed until harvest and picking and wars, of course.

Those words burned, they burned like the strongest acid you can imagine, they were burning within me day and night, they never went away. But then I decided no longer, I will not allow them to burn any longer.

It was a Tuesday, I'd just watched the new first minister get elected, the new great hope to steer Scotland the brave to even greater success, to become a real player in Europe. Scotland would be a land of opportunity for all, we would build on the rich history and diversity of our people. That sounded hopeful even to an old cynic like me.

So I composed a letter and sent it to him. I felt a whole lot better when I'd written it and better still when it was safely in the post box. I could even imagine him reading it.

Dear First Minister,

Today the Aboriginal people of Australia were apologised to, and rightly so. Can I, as one of Scotland's Aborigines, ask my parliament for an 'apology' for the dreadful and inhuman treatment administered to Scotland's travelling people?

After a report undertaken in 1895 by Sir Charles Cameron in the city chambers in Glasgow, aimed to educate the rural poor and deal with tinkers and vagrants in Scotland, many of my people were forcibly removed from their camp sites and put into industrial institutions. Some were given to childless couples and also sent to Australia, boys of twelve and over were sent to the armed forces, girls sent into service.

Night censuses were undertaken which resulted in forced removal. Those left grew up in a land where fear of law, church and authority was the norm. All this information will be held in archives.

I have a copy of this report, and if you wish, will forward one to you.

Scotland cannot afford to harbour racism, but sad to say, it is a cancer which eats her from within.

We are almost extinct as a culture, but there is still enough who would see a healing if we were recognised as individuals.

My Uncle died for this land and my father fought for it.

My father called us 'white niggers' and could never grasp why such a small country could treat its own people with contempt. He sent a manuscript to Hamish Henderson which was not published. He died a miserable man.

We don't need the hag's soup to survive these days, so let's remember the bard's words – 'a man's a man for a' that!'

Sincerely yours,

I thought he wouldn't reply, but I was wrong, I had a phone call from an aide, (that's what he called himself) which went along the lines of, 'is that Mrs ???' He then proceeded to tell me just how much the minister had enjoyed my letter and how it was very timely....blah blah... something about being a fan of my work, culturally important, and their vision for Scotland being based on the values of equality, tolerance and mutual respect....blah, blah, and how the first minister would love to meet with me and talk about the issues raised in my letter.

We arranged a mutually convenient date and time and off I went to have a nice chat with the nice first minister, we had a cup of tea, he talked about my work, he'd obviously been very well briefed. I asked about the letter and the apology and before he answered, I was checked to see if I was carrying any recording equipment. It was as I expected – a load of blather about how he couldn't do it but could refer it to a colleague and it would start its journey through the proper channels. It's amazing how politicians like things to go through the proper channels, isn't it? Unless of course there's a war or an election to fight, or expenses to claim.

I was so angry, there I go again the angry woman, but I was and I just let him have it straight, did they go through the proper channels when they did all of that to my people? I want an apology and I want it now, not later.

And then I walked outside to give an interview to the local papers, a couple of nationals and BBC radio, if you could have seen his face and the face of his smarmy little aide, two mouths making perfect little O's.

I had a good idea what his answer would be before the meeting, so I'd come prepared to publicly launch my campaign. Of course, there was a fair bit of negative feedback, because everyone knows that Travellers are responsible for every crime and ill to befall Scotland according to angry of Aberdeen, incensed of Inverness and gobsmacked of Glasgow, I made the last one up, have to keep a sense of humour. But there was a few encouraging remarks from the more intelligent and fair-minded people here and south of the border.

Then I had the phone call, crank from Cowdenbeath? Threatening from Thurso? Menacing from Montrose? No, a bit closer to home.

The call came from my own sister, she was very animated which is unusual for her, she said 'you need to stop this stupid campaign, you are showing me and the family up.' Showing her and the family up if you please, this is the person who has conveniently rewritten the childhood of her perfectly scripted life; this is the person who has made a determined and very successful effort to eradicate any trace of Traveller heritage from her life. Not compatible with golf club membership, for starters, and where would Gerry – sorry, 'Gerald' – be without his deals at the golf course.

I just let rip: 'How bloody dare you! You disgrace our family every time you deny who you are, and for your information, I will not stop this campaign. In fact, you've made me even more determined to see this through.' And I put the phone down. She has always done that to me in the past, I should have done it years ago, it's very empowering.

My sister is a fantastic networker; she's connected to just about every person worth knowing, including the first minister. She's always had the knack of spotting people who are going to be somebody and helping them on their way, and then never letting them forget it. Hence Gerry's – sorry, Gerald's – very nice job in the arts, which even I used to support; oh, the old heritage bit has its uses sometimes.

The next day I had another call from my sister using a different tack altogether: 'Sorry about yesterday, I've been very busy, my nerves were just a bit frayed, and you know that Gerald is up for the new combined arts and

heritage post. We've all been working hard, if you fancy a bit of a break, the villa in Mallorca's free for the next three weeks.'

I knew exactly what was going here, so I told her, 'nice try, sis, but you don't get rid of me that easy, I'm seeing this campaign through.'

Instead of shrieking like she usually does when she can't get her own way, she very quietly and deliberately said, 'look, you don't know who you are dealing with here, take it any further and I can't protect you, no one can.'

The next day I was invited onto *Scotland Speaks* which is a live discussion programme; I had promised them a controversial show if they could get the minister on. They did, it was rather a shock to him when he saw I was also on the panel, but as the consummate professional he is, didn't try and leave; well, how could he on a live programme without looking ridiculous? The interviewer raised the question about my campaign and the minister answered it with the same one he gave me.

When I had the chance to reply, that's when I really gave it all I had, in fact what I said was printed in full in the next day's papers.

I said, 'first minister, you have the responsibility now to act on this terrible part of Scottish history and you can do it now live on air just by saying "sorry" to Scottish Travellers.' He wouldn't.

'All those people who come to bonnie Scotland to see the lochs and monster, shortbread and Greyfriars bobby. They probably think that the worst crime we've ever committed is the deep-fried Mars bar. Well I'm going to make sure that as many people as possible around the world know the truth. My father and his father fought for this country, even though they were treated like dogs, they did their duty, they were man enough and first minister, it's clear you are not man enough to do what needs to be done – just say sorry.' Then I threw a glass of water at him and was wrestled to the floor by his security, taken to the police station, a statement was taken and I was locked up. There was a deal on the table, sounds so LA Law, doesn't it? The first minister's office was prepared to drop it if I dropped my request for an apology; I wouldn't so I was charged, I wanted my day in court.

As I stood there the magistrate said to me, 'I believe that this case didn't have to come to court, is that so?' I'd promised to tell the truth, so I answered yes. He said, 'well in that case, why is the time of this court being wasted?' I said, 'I did something wrong when I threw water in the face of the first minister and I'm prepared to be punished and apologise.' 'Well', he said, 'why don't you apologise then?'

So I said, '*I will if he will!*'

(Roma Heroes - Five European Monodramas, 2019, published by: Rodrigo Balogh, Independent Theater Hungary, idézet oldalszáma: 129-135.)

In addition to the drama excerpts, the workshop facilitator also provides background information to members of the small group involved in processing the drama, either by handing out a shorter text or by sharing the information verbally. The method of sharing should be considered in accordance with the group participants' reading and interpretation skills, interest in the topic, and knowledge as well as the time available for them.

Background Information on Richard O'Neill's Drama

***Travellers in Scotland:** According to a 2008 census carried out by the Church, there are 1,500 Travellers living in Scotland, but this is probably not an accurate figure. Travellers themselves estimate the Scottish Traveller community at 20,000. Another survey in 2000 found that 61% of the Travellers surveyed had experienced some form of discrimination in the previous year.*

One of the aspirations of the 19th century was to settle the gypsies leading a nomadic lifestyle. In 1838, the Church of Scotland set up a committee aimed to reform the Travellers: they wanted to teach them how to live a 'normal' life. In the early 20th century, it became common to set up special, segregated schools for Traveller children. One such school was the Aldour Tinker School near the town of Pitlorchy in Perthshire County. In the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, it was common for children of compulsory school age who did not attend school to be separated from their families and be settled in Australia or Canada.

The 1970s saw a change in the situation of Traveller communities, as the Church of Scotland began to increasingly support Traveller children's access to education.

After the Second World War, Travellers typically made their living by picking fruit, fishing, or repairing various household items. Today, these jobs have been replaced by road and roof construction and other construction or agricultural work.

The story of Jess Smith was adapted into a play by Richard O'Neill and performed at the Edinburgh Storytelling Festival in 2008. The issue of Travellers

came to the attention of the Church when Pastor Russell McLarty heard Jess Smith's performance at the festival. At the presentation, Jess Smith met with church leaders, and the introduction to the 2011 Church Report makes it clear that this encounter triggered a reflection in the Church on the centuries-old grievances of the Travellers.

In 2011, the Scottish Churches Racial Justice Group issued a report acknowledging that Travellers had been persecuted for centuries and that some members of the Church, following the social trends, were also guilty of this, either by discriminating against Travellers themselves or by failing to prevent infringements when they had the opportunity. At the same time, they rejected the institutionalization of discrimination in the Church of Scotland. In the report, the Church of Scotland condemns this behaviour and advocates that the state should recognize Traveller communities as an ethnic minority, support the preservation of Traveller culture and way of life, improve the quality and accessibility of services provided for Travellers, including ensuring that members of the Traveller community can vote (now difficult in the absence of permanent residence).

The situation of Scottish Travellers is particularly disadvantaged within the United Kingdom, as both Wales and England recognize Travellers as an ethnic minority. In the 2011 census, Traveller identity was one of the possible responses for the first time.

During small group work, the facilitators will check in from time to time to see how the group is progressing, what they would like to say in response to the questions asked about the drama, what they think about the dramatic hero and why. If they perceive that the group needs further assistance – either with reading, interpretation, or focused collaborative work –, they will spend more time with them, as otherwise they will only check in with the small group every 5-10 minutes. Five minutes before the end of the time allotted for small group work, they ask a few questions to make sure the group has managed to piece together the gist of the story and to see whether they have any opinions or insights related to it. Further, they ask them to decide who will present what they have come up with to the others in 3-4 minutes. Should the group make any factual errors during the presentation, it

is important for the facilitator to add to these, correct them, or, if there is a value-based dilemma, open up the discussion to the large group.

In the context of a focused play, for example, the question often arises: is it acceptable for the protagonist (or anyone in general) to use even symbolic violence (throwing a glass of water at someone) to achieve their goals? Another question that often arises is as follows: to what extent is it right to do something important to us against our own family members?

Unlike most plays, this one is half real (Jess Smith is a real person) and half fictional. Jess really did want to write a letter to the Scottish First Minister to apologize for the past humiliation of the Travellers, but Richard, the playwright, said it would have more impact if she did not actually do that but instead wrote a play about it, which he did, and Jess performed it. In terms of impact, it is not an everyday occurrence that after the performance the Church of Scotland actually apologized to the Travellers and that Travellers gained minority status shortly afterwards, which was an essential basis for taking action against discrimination against them in the future.

5. Facilitating the Sharing and Creative Processing of Heroic Stories

While the first part of the workshop is generally about heroes and the treatment of some specific European Roma dramas and their dramatic heroes, the second part will be about participants sharing their own stories and creative group work. While in the first part the focus is more on collective reflection, analysis, and discussion of the issues raised, the second part gives centre stage to participants' self-disclosure and creativity. While some young people feel more comfortable with the cognitive challenges provided by the first part, others may find sharing their own stories and creative group work a more fitting task. It is important that young people with different skills can experience both pleasure and success in some part of the workshop. At the same time, personal expression requires a climate of trust, which the first part of the workshop provides, setting the stage for the more personal and intuitive part.

As explained above, the sharing of heroic stories can take place in pairs, small groups, or plenary sessions – depending on the size of the group and the relationship between participants. What is essential, however, is that trainers also 'put their skin in the game' when asking participants to share stories that are important to them. Thus, trainers are always the first to share the story of a hero important to them, taking care to present a situation in a brief, concise manner but with the right emotional charge, where someone in their environment made a decision, took responsibility, and made a difference by taking action under difficult circumstances. If the story is too light and superficial, there is a risk that participants' stories will not be adequately deep either. However, opting for a story they have not yet sufficiently processed emotionally, one that might make them become emotional in the process of sharing, may not be a wise choice either.

Therefore, it is a good idea to choose a heroic story that is truly meaningful to the trainer, but one that they have processed properly so that sharing it will not make them emotionally unstable in front of the group. After the sharing of the trainer, the next step is to share stories about the heroes of the group members. Most of the time this is done in pairs, so we will now discuss this version in more detail. If the group has an odd number of members, one of the trainers will be paired up and share a story that is important to them. We usually give participants a minute to prepare, and then they have a minute or two to share their own heroes' stories. Halfway through the time allotted, the trainer in charge of the group tells the pairs to swap, with the person who has been listening to the other's story to start telling their own now. Indicating the time is crucial because some participants would otherwise go on talking for much longer about their own stories.

Stories of one's own heroes are quite a personal topic, but a story featuring oneself as a hero is even more so. Therefore, we invite participants to share this in a second round. At this point, they are already past a sharing experience and are more relaxed. Likewise, it is one of the trainers who starts the sharing. If the group is odd-numbered and one of the trainers has had to pair up, then the same trainer tells the story as before, otherwise the other trainer follows. Here again, it is vital that the story is one that truly resonates with the person sharing it but has already been emotionally processed.

Also, it is important to note that if trainers, by virtue of their age and experience, share more 'serious' exploits than the 'weight' participants' stories are likely to have, it may discourage them from sharing. 'I was never a hero', many may think, which can paralyse storytelling. In this exercise, similar objections are often raised, so it is worth adding a few more words of encouragement: 'A little heroism is still heroism. Have you ever done something in a difficult situation? Have you ever helped someone else? Have you ever had someone see you as a hero or thank you for something?'

After sharing stories of their own heroes and stories featuring themselves as heroes, we ask participants to each choose one of the two stories they heard and tell it as if it were their own story. If someone's partner does not wish to share one of their stories in plenary should let their partner know about it beforehand. When retelling the story, it is not necessary to reproduce the original story point by point, but the person should feel free to mould it to their own image. Participants briefly share one of the two stories they have just heard from their partner in plenary for one minute each, as if it were their own story. Applaud each story shared. After the full round has been completed, ask for brief feedback from the participants. How was it sharing the stories? What was harder, finding a hero or your own hero story? Have you ever before wondered who your hero is? What was it like to hear your own stories back? We listen to some feedback on these questions and then move on.

Ask the participants which story or theme – either from what they have just heard or from the dramas – has touched them the most and which they would like to explore further? Write down the stories and themes raised in one or two words on a flipchart paper. If they really cannot come up with any ideas, you can ask a few more questions (e.g. What hero has appeared in several stories? Which story was surprising? Etc.). If ideas are hard to come up with, we can stop brainstorming after 3-4 ideas and work on only these later. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with a flood of ideas, it is still recommended to stop brainstorming after 10 ideas and then use a vote (e.g. everyone writes down on a piece of paper the number of the two stories/topics they would like to work on) to choose the 3-4 most popular ones. Along the themes, participants can also divide themselves into small groups – making sure that one group is not disproportionately large compared to another.

However, if the involvement is not so strong, we may even suggest that the previous drama groups work together again and each choose one of the 3-4 topics raised. (The topics are allocated in the order of the choices – accordingly, the most motivated group can work on the topic they really want to, and the undecided group may have the remaining one.) It is essential not to drag out the process of choosing and splitting up the groups. If someone really wants to change (work on a different

topic, go to a different group), however, we should give them the opportunity to do so.

After choosing the theme, each group should be asked to create a small piece of artwork related to the given story or theme. This could be a scene, a piece of writing, they could draw something, write a song, etc. Coming up with the details of the theme, the choice of genre, and the creative work are done in the small groups. One trainer usually works with two small groups – this way, they can facilitate the work of both groups while giving them the opportunity to work independently. Some of the groups tend to have long consultations on what the topic should be and how they should work it up. If they are unable to reach a decision on this within 5 minutes, it is worth weighing in. If more than one idea has come up, suggestion should be made on how these could be linked. And if there is a strong ‘fault-line’ within the group – divergent ideas, cliques not cooperating with each other –, we may even suggest that they could create two separate pieces of work. The trainer should provide the group with tools (e.g. felt-tip pens for drawing a picture) if they need them. In creative work, some groups finish very quickly. For such groups, it may be worth asking questions or throwing in ideas for improvement so that they can spend the time available actively and productively. For those who are really stuck on details, it is worth encouraging them, telling them that it is fine, that they should keep going. It is all right if they do not work out all the details. If the trainer finds that, for example, a character or situation in a scene is presented in a very one-sided or stereotyped manner, it is recommended to ask facilitating questions and make suggestions to help them create a more complex and less stereotyped piece. Another thing that often occurs during group work is that some participate actively while others do not. For them, it is worth suggesting tasks that can complement the work of others (e.g. ‘Can you look for a costume for the others or a piece of music that goes with the mood of the scene?’ or ‘It’s cool that you two wrote this song – now how could all six of you perform it?’) – because it is important that everyone is part of the joint creation, even those who may not be as comfortable in the specific art form (e.g. unwilling to act, not drawing well), and that no one has the feeling of being the plus one.

At the end of all the group work, each group should present their creation to the others. Applaud the presentation of each creation. At the end of the exercise, we can ask for feedback (e.g. 'How was it working together?' or 'What common points did you spot in the creations?'), and then the trainer should also give some reinforcing feedback briefly on each group's creation. It is essential that the positive reinforcement should be able to respond to something specific in the group's work and does not contain mere generalities – general praise is unlikely to benefit the participants, and often they cannot take such 'canned' trainer feedback seriously.

6. Training the Trainers – Preparing for and Evaluating a Workshop

Peer trainers are an important part of the methodology, as they are also very likely to develop a rapport with the group members due to their age. As mentioned above, a workshop is usually conducted jointly by a Roma and a non-Roma trainer – a boy and a girl if possible. We have trained several groups of peer trainers over the last eight years. Sometimes we involved young people with whom we had worked in other educational or arts programmes before, so there has been a mutual experience of work and success to build on. At other times, we have deliberately recruited new young people to expand and strengthen the team. Occasionally, the training was conducted in the framework of a one-week intensive training course, which was too intensive according to feedback, while other times the training took place in weekly meetings for months, sometimes resulting in drop-outs. There were also times when the community creative focus was paramount and other times when an in-depth knowledge of a wide range of plays was given prominence.

However, trainer trainings include the following modules at all times:

- personal experience – participation in a Roma Heroes workshop;
- general trainer, communication, and facilitation information and exercises;
- possible conflict situations and how to deal with them;
- assertive communication;
- European Roma drama and theatre history;
- learning about and discussing the focused plays and their background.

During the trainings, we always try to have an appropriate balance between theoretical and practical tasks and to allow each trainer to try their hands at several group situations (e.g. facilitating a warm-up game, moderating a discussion on a topic, facilitating certain modules of the workshop). During these tasks, the other trainer candidates and the training leaders represent the group. Regular feedback from the training leaders and participants, including both reinforcement and developmental parts, will follow each practical rehearsal. Our training courses always end with an exam. For more details on the training of trainers in the framework of this project, see the related case study.

The aim of the trainings is to ensure that the peer trainers are not only knowledgeable but also experienced, interested and open to participants' differing points of view, and not willing to impose their own opinions. Rather, they use facilitating questions to help groups and individual participants find their own answers. A further aim is to get them equipped for possible difficulties and conflict situations that may arise during a workshop so that they can be prepared and relaxed in a live situation.

Having said that, attending a one-off training course does not ensure that they are sufficiently prepared to successfully conduct each and every workshop. Prior to a particular workshop, trainers interview the group leaders in order to obtain a clearer picture of the group's characteristics and needs based on which to be able to develop the theme of the session – which is slightly different each time – with their co-trainer. Following preliminary preparations, they always arrive at the workshop venue at least 45 minutes in advance to prepare the room and the necessary equipment and, in case of any operational disruption, to ensure that the workshop does not start late.

At the end of the workshops, feedback is not only given verbally in the closing circle but also through anonymous feedback sheets in which both quantitative and qualitative responses are collected. In addition to summarizing the feedback sheets, the trainer partners themselves evaluate the workshop in writing based on the

questions provided in the evaluation sheet. All of this is necessary to ensure quality assurance and improvement of the workshop by regularly evaluating our work and methods.

7. Feedback

Based on our quality assurance system, which has been in place for several years now, the vast majority of participants found the workshop exciting and interesting, gained new information about the Roma community, and enjoyed the projected videos of the performance excerpts. Many believe that the workshop has improved their image of the Romani people and their belief in their own active citizenship.

When asked to elaborate, many mentioned as strength that they had learned new stories, found out new things about the Roma community or about members of their own group, that they had realized anyone could be a hero. Some of them also made resolutions for their own lives and professional futures as a result of the workshop.

Since we have been running Roma Heroes workshops for several years now, we can see that in many cases the professional, human commitments have indeed come to fruition. Dozens of workshop participants have already written articles and theses on related topics. There have been several research projects initiated by researchers who had got in touch with the workshop, and many young people pursuing careers in education, development, or even the arts have gone on to work with Roma communities and various features of Roma drama and theatre.

However, we are also reaffirmed in the important work we are doing and in the right direction by the fact that in recent years Roma educational or cultural organizations in several European countries have adapted our methodology. We are very proud of Ternipe, thanks to whom Roma Heroes workshops became available to young people in Slovakia as well starting from the year 2024. We hereby wish good luck to them and to all professionals who believe that Roma and non-Roma youth can work together joyfully and successfully and shape our common future.

