

How to Say Bussy in Another Language: Sociolingvistička rasprava i lični osvrt

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abstract

I begin this bilingual (Bosnian-English) hybrid (scholarly-personal-fictional) essay, with my search for queer languages of my own, a fraught, complex process both due to my personal circumstances of immigration, and the larger history of suppression of queer expression in the Balkans and beyond. For the throughline of the discussion, I use the relatively recent portmanteau in English, *bussy* (boy+pussy for the anus), that has given birth to a wealth of Internet memes often featuring similar coinages, and my attempt to find its equivalents in several other languages. English and Bosnian will alternate, with their subcategories ranging from academic to confessional — so only those who read both will be able to understand everything.

I first look at the Soviet Russian gay slang recorded by Vladimir Kozlovsky and then move to a fuller discussion of the Turkish queer jargon named *Libunca*, which like its Greek counterpart *Kaliardá*, has a prominent corpus of Romani borrowings. Some of these words appear in an almost identical form, with the same or similar meanings, in a number of European languages that I am familiar with: Bosnian, English, French, and German. While my queerness does not happen to provide a sense of linguistic belonging, it does enable me to note a much-neglected postcolonial queer aspect of the European language map, the Romani element, which I happily write about in the essay. As for *bussy* and its translations, I argue that such terms — playfully confusing and reassigning holes in English and other languages, in recent and distant times — present occasions for queerer, more pleasurable and expansive imaginings of human bodies, desires, and the world around us.

keywords

bussy memes, queer jargons, Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian, Romani borrowings, *Libunca*

Introduction: Bussy Memes, Queer Joy, and a Personal Identity Crisis

To help cope with the long days of the pandemic, my friends and I began sending each other memes through social media. One of them seemed like a one-off joke, as it revolved around a recent queer portmanteau word *bussy* — built from *boy* and *pussy*, signifying the male anus. Most definitions of *bussy* pertinent to my discussion appear in the Urban Dictionary after 2017, which coincides with the burst of popularity of the term. Meanwhile the first usage is recorded in said source as early as 2004 (Dow, 2018). Along with *pussy* and *bussy*, *vagina* and *anus* respectively, *-ussy* emerged as a nonbinary, undefined hole. James Factora writing

for *them* website proclaimed “-ussy Was the 2022 Word of the Year, According to a Bunch of Linguists” (Factora, 2023). Michael Dow has called the phenomenon *pussy-blends* in his 2018 proceedings contribution, “A Corpus Study of Phonological Factors in Novel English Blends.”

In my small compilation of recent examples below, I cannot establish authorship, but merely note where I first encounter the particular *bussy*-like constructions. *Thrussy*, a combination of *throat* and *pussy*, featured in a fake advertisement for throat lozenges: an attractive man holds his throat with the inscription “Was your night a little BIGGER than expected? Soothe that sore #thrussy with a HALLS!” (shared by @dozygay on Twitter, 19 November 2022). But the neologism game has not been confined to body parts. It involves food like *pizzussy* as an alternate name for calzone (Wikipedia, “-ussy”); furniture like “Miss Couchussy 3000” (the imaginary couch sex-toy shown on @bitchyfag on Instagram, attributed to WittyGay account, 11 December 2022); features of the landscape like *gardussy* for a hole in a garden (@lizzyinthehizzy on Reddit, 19 January 2023) and *crussy* for a split crust of the earth erupting in lava (@breebunn on Twitter, 9 October 2022); and even the Southern Ring Nebula as photographed by the NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope in the summer of 2022 and described online as “the Galaxy spreading its galussy” (@heyjaeee on Twitter, 12 July 2022). “Time for some Yabba Dabba D*ssy,” announcing a risqué drawing of Fred Flintstone holding Barney Rubble from behind, both cartoon characters muscled and bedecked with earrings and porn-star tattoos (@twunkthetwink, 9 January 2023, with the art attributed to @tomtaylorillustrated). The development has come full circle. Someone on Reddit (official-mugi-two) offered *Vussy* for “vagina pussy,” which prompted a response on the same platform by another user (@azoreaneve) “finally someone invented *bussy* for girls” (my screenshot from October 2022; the website is no longer recoverable). As with identity more generally, I have a complicated relationship to queer language: I cannot claim it fully in English, or my mother language of Bosnian (Bosnian / Croatian / Montenegrin / Serbian, called Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian in Yugoslavia at the time of my birth).¹ So why am I so enchanted by *bussy*? Šta mi se to odjednom dogodilo? *Bussy* for me embodies the linguistic instantiation of the queer joy, which Rusty Barrett defines as: “that unique form of happiness produced by the discovery of a community where one may experience freedom from the solitary confinement of the closet” (Barrett, 2018: 237). And I seem not to be alone.

I find the Classicist Emily Wilson’s articulation of the relish in obscenity, its creative potential and revelation of the linguistic wealth, useful when interpreting the appeal of the *bussy* transformation in memes. She begins her review of a recent translation of Aristophanes’ comedies with a consideration of the pop music mega hit, Meghan Thee Stallion and Cardi B’s panegyric to vulvas, “Wet-Ass Pussy” (often abbreviated to “WAP”):

The song's genius lies in its inventiveness: its mastery of rhythm, and its innovative abundance of metaphors for 'wet-ass pussy' of its title. You come for the nasty, but you stay for the poetry. The two artists celebrate the power of their bodies to express desire and joy, but more fundamentally, they celebrate their gushing

waterfalls of linguistic 'flow.' The joke of the title hinges on the fact that language is both literal and metaphorical: one body part is used as a linguistic modifier for another. (Wilson, 2021: 31)

In other words, the ultimate *pussy* becomes modified through *ass*, a common intensifier in casual American English (*wet-ass*, *hard-ass*, *bad-ass*). *Ass* in the process goes from the metaphorical to closer to the literal, maybe as close as the anus is to the vulva. "[C]om[ing] for the nasty... stay[ing] for the poetry" explains the preponderance of *bussy* memes. The game of coining new forms of the portmanteau obscenity makes a statement about the potential of language to form communities of shared humor and defamiliarized, almost enchanted world view. While Wilson does not explicitly mention queerness in the quoted passage, it is there. Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B's sexual and poetic energies, their "gushing waterfalls," transgress boundaries, even if the direct addressee of the song is male ("he bought a phone just for pictures of this wet-ass pussy"). In other songs, both performers also sing about sex with women.

I feel incapable of accessing, let alone claiming, the queer idiom in Bosnian, and closely related microlanguages (Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian) belonging to people of my generation, or those from previous generations.² Young people today use a mixed idiom with much phonetically and morphologically adapted English: *autanje*, *buč*, *eldžibitiku*, *feheguša*, *feminiziran*. Takvo prihvatanje globalnog jezika nastranosti pokazuje našu povezanost sa svjetskim tokovima, zahvaljujući prije svega Internetu, ali i neotkrivanje domaćeg poimanja nenormativne spolnosti i rodnog izražaja u prošlosti i sadašnjosti.³ In English, I did not come out until my mid-twenties. I had been familiar with queer theory and literature with James Baldwin, Djuna Barnes, and Judith Butler. I had not applied many of the terms and concepts to myself until much later, and only intermittently, when I needed to communicate with others (however approximately). I sada, na engleskom dok slušam mlađe generacije kako veselo i otvoreno govore nastrano i o nastranosti, drago mi je radi njih ali znam da to nije moj jezik. Ne mogu tako lako reći *yaaas* niti se zvati *power bottom* ili *sub top*. Možda ja, jednom izgubivši maternji jezik, ne samo zbog iseljeničtva već i zbog njegovog sociopolitičkog komadanja od devedesetih nadalje, više nikada ne mogu imati svoj jezik. Nemogućnost, nelagoda, neuspjeh: sve su to odlike jednog nastranog iskustva i pogleda na svijet (Halberstam, 2011). Still, tracing a particular strain of queerness – the search for equivalents of *bussy* – in and between multiple languages allows me to claim a certain dose of queer linguistic

joy. Ako je jezik, kako tvrdi Birgit Neumann pišući o odnosu između engleskog i vijetnamskog u romanu Oceana Vuonga *Na zemlji smo nakratko predivni*, ključan kako bi se čulno doživio svijet jer povezuje jelo, osjetilo okusa i seks, što će reći omogućava doticaj sebe sa Drugima (Neumann, 2020: 283), then a plethora of tongues has the potential of several exciting, embodied and temporary bonds. After all, “[t]ranslating the language of sex or pleasure (...) is not a neutral affair but a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, registering the translator’s attitude toward existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behavior(s) and moral norms” (Santaemilia, 2018: 12). Onda započnimo!

Homosexual Soviet Argot to the Rescue

In looking for my own queer linguistic expression, I can turn to another Slavic language. A very fortuitous occasion was the conference on Eastern European literature and queerness in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2018 (for the proceedings, see Zavrl & Zupan Sosič, 2020). There I learned a lot. The cultural scene of the miniature country in the Balkans/Central Europe/Yugosphere, is understandably small; the Slovenian queer cultural scene is even smaller. It is composed of about a dozen recurring characters, two of whom, Brane Mozetič and Suzana Tratnik have been keeping the flames from the mid-eighties. They do everything: teach, write in every genre, engage in activism, translate, and organize conferences. They are absolutely inspirational. Someone at the conference must have mentioned Vladimir Kozlovsky’s dictionary *The Argot of the Russian Homosexual Subculture: Research Materials* [*Аргот русской гомосексуальной субкультуры: Материалы к изучению*] that came out in Vermont in 1986 (Козловский, 1986). I took it out of the library as soon as I returned to the States.

Queers are good with language because we have to be, especially nowadays, especially with English, which is the language in which much of our global culture gets transmitted. Što više jezika, to više mogućnosti, da ne kažem seksa. I have never learned Russian formally. My father did, while in school in Yugoslavia, then made a point of forgetting it. He worked to replace it with English through the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. (He wanted to be a DJ. Does that now seem old-fashioned, or cool?) Russian came to me as I was looking through dictionaries and reading bits of things that interested me about Central Asia or food or queerness. Russian came to me when I began visiting good friends in Sheepshead Bay, the part of Brooklyn that I call the Soviet Republic of Brooklyn (along with the neighboring Brighton Beach). Russian comes to me queerly. I both know it, and don’t know it. A part of my professional deformation, I read labels, ads, signs, menus if they are around me, and in Sheepshead Bay, they are.

A sign would say they are looking for a khachapuri maker/accountant, a delightful combination of skills; another would cheekily announce: “Husband by the Hour” (“Муж на час”) – it appears for household repairs, though who knows for sure? I speak Russian only if I have to, in a Brighton Beach restaurant with a Kazakh waiter who expects me to know it, in a taxi in Batumi with an older Georgian driver who does not know English (or Turkish).

Kozlovsky provides an entry into Russophone queer life in the Soviet Union through language. Continuing my playful throughline of translating *bussy* for the essay, I am looking in it now. What delights me is the combination of native constructions, borrowings, calques, and elaborations of calques. “Homosexual Russian argot” is both local and global. It is not hermetically sealed from English, French, and other European languages, but it is not unthinkingly copying them. One cannot say that queerness was imported with English and Western popular culture. But equally, one cannot say that it is unrelated—a fully homegrown phenomenon—because nothing exciting and worthwhile is ever that simple.

Pogledajmo nekoliko primjera. From Kozlovsky we find out the Russian translation of *glory hole*: *телевизор*, or television set, a native construction. Citiraću Kozlovskog u cijelosti:

ТЕЛЕВИЗОР м. Отверстие в перегородке между кабинками общественного туалета, используемое для орального (а иногда и анального) сношения между партнерами, которые чаще всего так и остаются совершенно анонимными друг для друга.

[TELEVIZOR m. Otvor u pregradi između kabina javnog toaleta, korišten za oralni (a nekad i analni) snošaj među partnerima, koji obično radi toga ostaju savršeno anonimni jedan drugom.]

Three expressions for *sixty-nine*, the sexual position, demonstrate the local and global interactions in the idioms. Kozlovsky gives a transliteration into Russian Cyrillic from English, not even a calque but a straight (!) borrowing: *Сиксти найн*. He also offers a specifically Soviet expression *Бабаджанынка*, after the Armenian composer Arno Hartuyunovich Babajanian, while admitting to not knowing the reason behind it. I would venture that it might have to do with imagining the position as an artful composition. Then we have an elaboration of the original image in *семьдесят один* meaning “seventy-one, defined in the dictionary as “Babadzhanyanka (...) plus two fingers [i.e., digital or dactylic stimulation added to the mutual oral]. Also, in the labor camp slang.” $71 = 69+2$: The libidinal equation signifies the one-upping of the original concept. Soviet queers could add more pleasure to the already elaborate erotic act. Kozlovsky’s

side note about the use of the term in Gulags casts a darker shadow on our discussion of sexual vocabulary. In the context of labor camps, and extensive literature about them, the language along with the practices it describes usually arises of constraint (carceral same-sex environment), and violence (establishment of hierarchies among the inmates, and between the inmates and the guards). At the same time, I wonder if there could also have been incidental, small, fleeting moments of queer creativity, expression, and even joy.

How would we translate *bussy* into Soviet Russian gay slang? Easy. *Влагалище*, which in standard Russian refers to “vagina, vulva,” in Kozlovsky means both “mouth” and “anus.”

Lubunca, Its Possibilities, and Its Romani Elements

Being exposed to Lubunca, the queer jargon of Turkey, has helped me in my ongoing search for a proper idiom. I like being able to have a secret code to use in public with my husband (then boyfriend), and our queer friends. Lubunca functions as an added secret code for diasporic communities of Turks for when they do not want to be understood in standard Turkish. By “secret” I mean that the linguistic variety protects its speakers from the homo- and transphobic majorities in power. Because of its numerous Romani borrowings, Lubunca may not seem secret to Romani speakers. That could indicate that non-Roma queers in Turkey understand the Roma as a fellow marginalized group who would not wish to persecute them. Or, seen in another way, would not be in a position to persecute them. Raffaella Biondo bilježi da u berlinskom narječju lubundže postoji izraz kojeg nema u istanbulskom, *balık*, što na standardnom turskom znači riba, a u dotičnom nastranom žargonu heteroseksualna/i govornica/k turskog. Mjesto koje vrvi takvim ljudima se zove *akvaryum*. “Ovo je ovdje akvarijum, govori lubundžu.” “Burası akvaryum, Lubunca alık!” (Biondo, 2017: 131). Lubunca to me signifies a promise of a queer language that does not center English or the Western (European/North American) experience. Of course, like other related linguistic varieties (Barrett, 2018: 223ff.; Montoliu, 2005), Lubunca borrows from Western European languages, as well. But it does not rely on English for such basic terms of queer life as:

Çark for cruising (the word is of Persian origin, and in standard Turkish means wheel),⁴

According to the most up-to-date comprehensive Turkish dictionary of slang (Aktunç 9th ed. 2014, rev. ed. 2007), the word refers to sex workers’ search for customers. Speakers of Lubunca, such as my husband, tell me that is not necessarily the case. Biondo confirms that the meaning has widened (130, 135).

It now means looking for a hookup. The phrase *beldeli çark* would specify that we are in the realm of sex work. *Belde*, another borrowing from Romani, means money, and *-li* is a common Turkish adjectival suffix.

Digin (of Romani descent) for *vers*, i.e., versatile, or someone who equally enjoys the penetrative and receptive sexual roles.

Gacı (of Romani descent) girl, woman; bottom. *Gacıvari*, femme.

Koli (of possible Romani descent) hook-up in both English sexual senses: activity or partner.

Laço (of Romani descent) a hunk (aged 20 to 40 years); butch; top. *Laçovari*, butch. And naturally, *lubunya* itself is from Romani, best translated as queer. I have checked all these meanings in both Aktunç and Biondo, and I can attest to their accuracy from my Lubunca-speaking husband, and friends.

Mnoge od ovih riječi, među kojima su često posuđenice iz romskog jezika, se nalaze i u kalijardi, grčkom ekvivalentu *lubundže*, t.j. nastranom tajnom grčkom žargonu. Navodim primjere iz rasprave Césara Montoliua, u njegovoj transliteraciji.

Belde (lubundža); *berdé* (kalijarda) lova.⁵

Laço; *latsós* (l.) mlad mužjak (od 20 do 40 godina), frajer; aktivac; (k.) dobar / dobra / dobro, lijep/a/o.

Lubunya; *lubína*, *lubuniá* peder; kvir, nastran/a/o.

Drugi naziv za kalijardu je *lubinístika*, a njene govornice i govornici su, da prevedem sa zastarjelog rječnika koji koristi Montoliu, pasivci, seksualni radnici i radnice, kao i trans osobe (302), dakle širi krug pripadnika/ca zajednice koju danas nazivamo LGBTQ+, ne samo homoseksualni muškarci. Kad se uzme u obzir povijesni kontekst, prisustvo istovjetnih riječi u kalijardi i *lubundži* ne iznenađuje. Dva su se govora razvila u istom vremenu i prostoru, jedan pokraj drugoga, u doba kasnog Osmanlijskog carstva (Montoliu, 2005: 316). Zanimljivo je da je posuđenica iz romskog *lublin*, *lubni*, *lubno* zabilježena i u njemačkom žargonu sitnih kriminalaca, Rotwelsch-u, gdje znači seksualna radnica, *Hure* (Aktunç navodi Wulfov rječnik [Wulf, 1956]).

This presence of the same Romani borrowing in multiple European languages brings us to the likeliest translation for *bussy* in Lubunca: *minço*. Biondo traces the term to the Romani *minch*, “vagina,” and says that even though this is the original meaning and attested in Aktunç’s dictionary of slang, her informers on Lubunca gloss it exclusively as “culo” or “ano” (Biondo, 2017: 118). Indeed, in Kaliardá *mun(t)zó* still means “vagina” (Montoliu 2005, 307). The same is the case with *mindža* in Serbian slang (Gerzić & Gerzić, 2002). The word also pops up further north and west. *Mindža* appears in Czech and *mindzsó* in Hungarian, both terms for “female genitals” (Krinková, 2015: 283). *Mintsch*, “Vulva,” has been recorded in German as early as 1822 (Wulf, 1956). *Minge* surfaces in written sources in English around 1903, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, which labels it as “slang and regional (chiefly British).” Not surprisingly, it was used in Polari, occurring in the phrase “minge and binge” (“pussy and booze,” i.e., “women [seen as sexual objects] and alcohol”), but Paul Baker, usually attentive to Romani borrowings, wrongly traces it to “the Army or Navy” (Baker, 2002: 181). In his more recent history of Polari, *Fabulosa!*, Baker reports that, as a part of the larger dynamic of “gender switching” in Polari, “a man might be referred to as possessing a *minge* (vagina) or might even be given the nickname *Minge*” (Baker, 2019: 101). In this case, through the power of camp, a penis or even an entire man would be subsumed into a term typically reserved for female genitalia.⁶

Minge has been claimed by multilingual Roma feminist artists, the rap sister duo from former Yugoslavia based in Vienna, Sandra and Simonida Selimović, who call themselves Mindj Panther and perform in English, German, Serbian, and Romani.⁷ The *panther* part of their appellation refers to their skin color and the history of global activism by people of color (specifically, the Black Panther movement in the United States). African-American queer feminist criticism has recognized the hole, whether vaginal or anal, as a place of subversive and pleasurable potential, not only patriarchal oppressive reduction. Evelyn Hammonds states, while acknowledging her discomfort with the phrase “black hole” from physics and astronomy, that “it is not empty; it is a dense and full place in space” (Hammonds, 2004 [1994]: 313, 310). Building on Hammonds’ work, Jennifer C. Nash looks at the Black female anus, often imagined in mainstream heterosexual pornography as an entryway to the ghetto – threatening and excessive – arguing that it also functions as “a space of play, pleasure, desire, and delight for black subjects” (Nash, 2014: 456).

Another candidate to translate *bussy* is a well-known Romani borrowing in Serbian slang *bulja*. In his early article on Romani borrowings in slangs of South Slavic, Rade Uhlik provides an extensive entry, which I excerpt below. But first I should add a note on the nomenclature. Writing in the fifties of the last

century and for largely non-Romani audiences, Uhlik uses the ethnonym now avoided in public discourse in BCMS and English. Even today, the situation is not always clear: the Roma have different understandings of what they call themselves that do not always map to Ciganin / Ciganka / ciganski (masc. / fem. / adj., Gypsy) being offensive and Rom / Romkinja / romski (Romani) being acceptable. In addition, multilingualism helps to take the edge off. The English term currently perceived as pejorative can be comforting when imported into Serbian. Jovan Živadinović, a young queer Romani pop music artist from Serbia, took on the artistic name Džipsii (the transliteration of the English with the campy added i) because other people – including his parents – were uncomfortable with Ciga, a diminutive form which could range in tone from affectionate to derogatory.⁸ Because I am a Gadjo, this is not my debate to have, and I consistently use the term Romani/Roma in English and Rom / Romkinja / romski in BCMS. However, in the auto-fictional vignettes in Bosnian below, I make an exception twice, employing Ciganka and Cigani (pl.) to signal the past context: those were the terms that people used then when expressing a folkloric belief or a racist stereotype. I include the fraught ethnonym not merely for realism, but also in order not to sanitize, but to acknowledge in a small but visible way, what the Serbian Romani feminist thinker Jelena Savić calls the European Gadjo supremacy (Savić, 2023: 102).

Uhlik writes in his entry for *bulja*:

Bulja, buljiška, buljina, bulina, buljahe, buljahet, podex. Kod gepavaca nailazimo i na ove riječi: **buljahi**, stegna, zadnjica, **bulj**, **buljina**, stražnjica sa butinama, u značenju objekta za homoseksualno zadovoljavanje. (...) U izrazu *dav bule*, *obljubim*, riječ *bul* stoji u jednom arhaičnom padežnom obliku koji je već davno van upotrebe. Tu *bul* nema značenje podex-a, već se odnosi na *pudendum muliebre*. Karakteristično je kod Cigana da razne sramne dijelove nazivaju istim imenom. (Uhlik, 1954: 10)

[*Bulja, buljiška, buljina, bulina, buljahe, buljahet, podex*. Among the Gepavac group [of Roma in the Balkans] we also encounter these words: *buljahi*, thighs, backside, *bulj, buljina*, buttocks with thighs, meaning as an object for homosexual gratification. (...) In the expression *dav bule*, 'I fornicate' [lit., I do ass], the word *bul* appears in an archaic declension which has long been out of use. *Bul* there does not mean *podex* but refers instead to *pudendum muliebre*. It is characteristic of the Gypsies to call different private parts with the same name.]

The multilingualism that automatically activates when a scholar discusses private parts stands out in the passage. The obscenity becomes polite and scientific as it appears in Latin (*podex, pudendum muliebre*). Notice also the queer context: "u značenju objekta za homoseksualno zadovoljavanje." For my purposes here, it is most intriguing that *bul* can mean both ass and pussy, though the later

only in the common phrase literally translating: “to do ass.” Compare to our contemporary American expressions, “to get some ass” and “a piece of ass” that deal with sex in general, and can have gay resonances despite the Oxford English Dictionary’s claim that they have to do with women as sexual objects (though with the gays the expressions might have a more literal valence). Uhlik states that the Roma use the identical terms for different body parts. We have already seen in this essay, with the popularity of *bussy* and the stand-in of *ass* for another sexual part in American English, that the Roma are not the only ones to engage in such linguistic practice.

In the Serbian slang of Belgrade, *bulja* has served for making (derogatory) terms about gay men, associated as we predominantly are with anal sex. A dictionary from early in this century records expressions like *buljaš*, *buljaroš* (ass-fancier, ass-bandit) for “homosexual” and *buljokolj* (ass-slaughter, mASSacre – see how quickly we turn homophobia into camp, darling!) for “homosexual activity” (Gerzić & Gerzić, 2002). The same borrowing exists in French as *boule*, familiar to me from Fatal Bazooka’s 2007 song “J’aime ton boule” that contains homoerotic lyrics and mocks homophobic rappers.⁹ *Bul* features in the Czech jargon *Hantýrka* (Fałowski, 2013: 100), as well as in Spanish (via the Iberian Para-Romani language *Caló*), in the same form and as *bullate* (Krinková, 2015: 283). Finally, *bul* appears in *Kaliardá* in the form *púli*, glossed by Montoliu as “arse” (307); it forms compounds in the queer Greek variety as *pulo-* (308). An example of such compound is *πουλομουσάφιρο*, meaning “κλύσμα” (enema, anal douche), literally “ass-guest,” from *pulo-* and the Turkish borrowing *misafir* (Πετρόπουλος, 1971).

What Uhlik calls “the Romani verba turpia” (Uhlik, 1954: 30) are not only represented in South Slavic slang varieties. As we have seen, they also appear in some registers of Turkish, Greek, German, Czech, Hungarian, Spanish, French, and English. When scholars speak about internationalisms or words that many languages have in common, they mostly mean words borrowed from Classical languages like Greek and Latin, or constructed from their elements in later periods (and more recently, French and English). In South Slavic languages such as Bosnian, we have borrowings from our two imperial languages: the Ottoman Turkish and the Austro-Hungarian German. But I have never heard of the Romani thread, because the Roma are very much marginalized all over the European continent. As such, their words appear in the speech of petty thieves and entrepreneurs, musicians and theater actors, sex workers and queers. In other words, those whose idioms exist in the oral, ephemeral, and often secretive form. These vocabularies are recorded in much later historical periods, if ever (cf. Baker, 2002: 24).

Tri digresije o Romima, jeziku i nastranom identitetu u životu autora ovog rada ili nekoga njemu sličnog/ Three Digressions about the Roma, Language, and Queer Identity in the Life of the Author of This Article or Someone Like Him

Neka ili sva mjesta su promijenjena.

Neke ili sve okolnosti su promijenjene.

Sva imena su promijenjena.

Priča je, međutim, ista i istinita.

Kažu da mi je trebalo dugo da progovorim. Mama se brinula, sve ostalo je bilo baš prema knjigama u to doba, i prohodao sam i prestao sisati i nicali su mi zubi. U dijaspori znamo da djeci koja odrastaju u porodičnog okruženju gdje se govore dva ili više jezika treba malo duže da progovore, a to često koriste ksenofobi/nje koji tvrde da se djeca useljenica/ka ne razvijaju kako treba, kako bi nam oduzeli sve osim njihovog hegemonijskog jezika. Kod nas se u kući u B. govorio samo jedan, tada sa dvodijelnim imenom, pa ipak. Mamina tetka N. je znala narodni lijek za zakašnjelo progovaranje kod mališanki/a: ukrade se od Ciganke komad kruha i da djetetu da pojede. Gdje je našla N. Romkinju i kako je od nje ukrala komad kruha, ja ne znam. Ne zna ni mama. N. ne mogu pitati jer je umrla od srčanog udara u Nizozemskoj prije nekoliko godina. Ne znam ni bi li mi kazala. Možda bi me navela da posumnjam u istinitost priče. "Đana svašta izmisli, na nju si se bacio," reče mi jednom kad sam joj bio u posjeti u Leidenu prije više od deset godina. Ali sama mogućnost da sam progovorio zbog komada kruha ukradenog od Romkinje meni nešto znači. Naš jezik nikad nije samo naš, u njega je uvijek upleten/a Drugi/a, često na nejasne i nedopuštene načine.

*

Osam mi je godina, igram se sa R. iza zgrade. R. i ja samo najbolji drugari. Mnogo godina poslije postaće jasno zašto. Njegovi su se tokom rata preselili u Kanadu i mene je nekako pronašao u Americi, javio se, ispostavilo se da smo obojica pederi, bili i ostali. Tu riječ još nisam prisvojio kao osmogodišnjak, tu riječ su tada drugi koristili protiv mene. Ovaj mali je peder, rekao je jednom o meni zloglasni mladi razbijač od trinaest-četrnaest godina, jebaće se kao štuka. Maltretirao je često mene i R.

Vodim razne razgovore sa R. On mi kaže da je najbolje da naučimo italijanski. A zašto italijanski? Imam osam godina i već znam nešto engleskog, uplatili su mi roditelji časove, pjevamo pjesmice, učimo boje i imena životinja. R. mi govori da Cigani krađu djecu i prodaju ih u Italiji. Ako se nađeš u Italiji, a znaš italijanski, možeš otići u miliciju i reći im šta se desilo, oni će te poslati nazad u Jugoslaviju. Ta užasna priča što odražava predrasude česte u to doba a i danas, još je jedna veza iz mog djetinjstva između Roma/Romkinja i jezika.

*

Izbjeglički centar u G., Hrvatska, devedeset i neka. Preko razglasa traže moga djeda, majčinog oca, koji je bio s nama u baraci sa još dvije porodice. "Neka se javi Džemaludin Osmanbegović!" Zvao ga je neko preko telefona. Djed Džemo nije otišao ni deset minuta, a već se vratio. Nisu njega tražili. Bio je tu Rom, negdje njegovih godina, sa istim imenom. Bijeli Džemaludin Osmanbegović i tamnopusi Džemaludin Osmanbegović su gledali jedan u drugog dok glas preko telefona nije pojasnio.

Poslije, kad je došao Google, guglao sam vlastito ime i prezime. Samo u dijaspori ima nas najmanje osmorica imenjaka i prezimenjaka. Jedan od njih je Rom transrodni muškarac, živi u I., u istospolnom braku, stručnjak za seksualno obrazovanje i borac za pristup kontracepcijskim sredstvima i pobačaju.

Is Bussy Even Older?

The examples I have looked at above are at the earliest attested from the nineteenth century. But my exploration of more contemporary instances of the confusion of the bodily openings of the vulva and the anus, and their imprinting on other body parts, food, furniture, landscape, and the cosmos (*thrussy*, *pizzussy*, *Couchussy*, *gardussy*, *galussy*) has led me into the past. I am, after all, a medievalist. Queerness in language and queer multilingualisms are not recent phenomena. They reach back into deeper history: they have not been recorded for obvious reasons, or if recorded, they tend not to be recognized by modern scholars because of their heteronormative perspectives. I will give in this section two examples of queer imprecision of language regarding lower bodily orifices, one from the oldest recorded layer of English, Old English, and the other from reconstructed Proto-Indo-European roots that etymologize one of the taboo Croatian (Bosnian, Montenegrin, Serbian) words for "vulva."

In her essay on sex in the Dictionary of Old English, Roberta Frank argues against overly precise translation of the term *ende* in an early-medieval vernacular penitential manual. The text deals with an animal that was touched by a person's *ende*; it should be killed while the person should repent, and the manual specifies how. In the past, scholars underplayed sexual meanings, or at

least used broader words, such as “part of the human body” for *ende* in T. N. Toller’s Supplement to Bosworth’s *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Frank, 2003: 304). *Penis*, the choice of the Dictionary of Old English, is too specific, however. The medieval author selected

ende ‘bottom, extremity, tail-end,’ discreetly suggesting the intended sexual part by naming the larger area of the body (groin, abdomen, buttocks), within which it is located. (...) Like most scholars, the compilers of the *Scriftboc* probably regarded [bestiality] as a male activity. Nevertheless, unlike subsequent commentators and translators, the Anglo-Saxons’ terminology does not exclude the possibility of female agency, or, indeed, of a man taking the passive role (Frank, 2003: 305).

In other words, a person of any gender preferring any erotic positionality might commit the sin of bestiality. *Ende* does not narrow down the possibilities but rather expands the category of zoophilic defilement. Maybe *bussy* is not an exact equivalent of *ende* here. I can think of something better to render *ende*: the common American colloquialism *junk* has similar ambiguity.

Going deep into the reconstructed history of Indo-European, we could see that the ancient linguistic imagination connected the holes, too. Here is the etymology of *pizda*, “cunt,” in the most recent etymological dictionary of Croatian (Matasović et al., 2021):

Postalo od psl. **pizda* (sln. *pizda*, rus. *nužda*, stčes. *pizda* ‘stražnjica’ < **pey-sd-* (stprus. *peisda* ‘stražnjica’, alb. *pidh* ‘vulva’, možda i stnord. *fytta* ‘vulva’). Ako je prvotno značenje ‘stražnjica’ (kao u stčes. i stprus.), moguće je izvođenje iz ie. **h₁pi-* ‘na, uz’ (v. **ep-**, **epi-**) i korijena **sed-* koji je u **sjesti**; **h₁pey-sdeh₂* (> psl. **pizda*) bi značilo ‘ono na čemu se sjedi.’

[From the Proto-Slavic **pizda* (Slovene *pizda*, Russian *nužda*, Old Czech *pizda* ‘buttocks’ < **pey-sd-* (Old Prussian *peisda* ‘buttocks’, Albanian *pidh* ‘vulva’, maybe also Old Norse *fytta* ‘vulva’). If the original meaning is ‘buttocks’ (as in the Old Czech and Old Prussian), it is possible to derive it from the Indo-European **h₁pi-* ‘on, by’ (see **ep-**, **epi-**) and the root **sed-* which appears in **sjesti** [‘to sit’ in BCMS]; **h₁pey-sdeh₂* (> Proto-Slavic **pizda*) would mean ‘that which one sits upon.’]

When a wide-spread South Slavic word for vulva appears to develop from the word for buttocks, *bussy* does not look like a playful extravagance of our meme-obsessed *Zeitgeist*. It is not only us on the Internet who unsettle the gender binary and corporeal coherence, and not only the Roma who “razne sramne dijelove nazivaju istim imenom” (Uhlík, 1954: 10). Regarding the latter, we should not conclude that the Romani language is somehow obscener because of the borrowings for sexual parts and act in slangs of European languages; this is yet another case of projecting the universal human preoccupation with sexuality, especially of non-normative types, onto the racial and ethnic Others. Everyone

can do *bussy*. The oldest layer of written English and the reconstructed Indo-European would allow for *bussy* as a concept even if an exact translation may not be recoverable. (Just because we are missing much of recognizably queer vocabulary¹⁰ from these historical varieties does not mean that it did not exist.) The oldest and the newest forms of linguistic expression queerly touch across time (Dinshaw, 1999).

Obscene queer wordplay does not only give occasion for the type of fun that encourages others to join by generating terms that, for instance, reduce nearly everything to a hole (or an opening.) It also presents a view of human embodiment and desire — beyond the hegemonic binary of masculine / feminine, insertive / receptive, expulsive / absorptive, and front/back. This ludic, imaginative impulse that occurs in English, and other languages (Russian, Romani), in our own time of mass communication with memes and in the distant reconstructed linguistic past, can help reconfigure our thinking and actions regarding gender and sexuality. When the author of *Les culs énergumènes*¹¹ presents his fantasy in which “notre hétérosexualité (...) notre homosexualité (...) notre transsexualité (...) s'accrocheraient dans le même lieu corporel, si fondues ensemble qu'il n'y aurait plus besoin de plusieurs mots pour les distinguer,” a utopia that he admits never occurred, nor will, but to which we can reach nearer, I wager that the popularity and ubiquity of *bussy* suggest that at least some of us have been approaching such a world (Maurel, 1973: 152-153).

Digresija u vezi autorova otjelovljenja / A Digression Regarding the Author's Embodiment

Otprilike sam tako (samo bez navođenja Maurela, za kojeg tada nisam znao) završio predavanje koje je za osnovu imalo raniju verziju ovog rada. Jedno od meni postavljenih pitanja nakon toga se odnosilo na mržnju prema ženama. Jesam li ja ženomrzac jer ne samo da izjednačavam rupe nego i svodim osobe na rupe? Pokušao sam objasniti da nisu samo žene rupe, nego svi mi, i muškarci i ostali rodovi jer svi ili većina nas imamo čmar, pa i usta, a i oni među nama sa spolnim udovima i otvore na glavićima.¹² Poslije sam razgovarajući s prijateljem shvatio da pitanje vjerovatno ima veze sa mojim identitetom, pederskim, i otjelovljenjem, više-manje muškim i muževnim. Pomislio sam da kad neko odraste kao cisrodna žena (sa otjelovljenjem koje društvo doživljava kao žensko), onda često osjeća od malena da je mnogi heteroseksualni cis muškarci vide kao rupu, to jest predmet za seksualno izivljavanje. Mene se u današnjem otjelovljenju, u mom uobičajenom rodnom izražaju, može doživjeti kao aktivca. Neki aktivci vide pasivce samo kao rupe, dakle u ženskom položaju unutar patrijarhata, a sebe kao muškarčine. Takvo stajalište je, naravno, odbojno koliko i opasno. Tumačenje mene kao aktivca izjednačava javnu izvedbu roda sa

seksualnom ulogom. Bez obzira kako se oblačio ili ponašao, ja mogu biti pasivac ili možda univerzalac, ono što se na engleskom naziva *vers* i na lubundži *digin*, a u sovjetskom homoseksualnom žargonu *двуснастный, комбайнер/ша, мужчинка, синтетика, универсалка* i *унисекс* (Козловский, 1986: 50). (Mogu i da budem nesklon analnom snošaju, pa da isključivo upražnjavam ostale erotske činove, da budem *side* kako kažemo na engleskom.) A što se odrastanja tiče, sjetimo se da Eve K. Sedgwick piše da su odrasli gejevi često bili ženskasti dječaci, nezavisno od njihovog današnjeg rodnog izražavanja (Sedgwick, 1991: 20-21). Da, zaista, bio sam ženskasti dječak, svjestan da u očima mnogih muškaraca mogu postati rupa. Zar nije onaj mladi razbijač iz naselja rekao da ću se jebati kao štuka? Zašto je to njemu bilo važno ako sâm nije zamišljao kako me jebe?

Biti rupa je samo po sebi neutralno. Zavisno od okolnosti, to iskustvo može biti ponižavajuće ili oslobađajuće, nekad čak istovremeno i jedno i drugo. Seksualnost je složena, kao i jezik i identitet. Nothing exciting or worthwhile is simple.

Conclusion, or nastrana i nestalna jezička pripadnost

Bussy, влагалнице, minço, buljina. Moja me nastranost nije dovela do osjećaja lingvističke pripadnosti ali mi jeste omogućila da primijetim jednu postkolonijalnu i nastranu stranu evroazijske jezičke karte, romsku sastavnicu o kojoj sam sa zadovoljstvom pisao u ovom radu. Na koncu, svesrdno se slažem da mi nastrane/i, izopačene/i, izopštene/i nemamo svoju otadžbinu kao uostalom ni radnička klasa prema *Komunističkom manifestu*. Jezička pripadnost je nestalna poput svake druge, mijenja se, preoblikuje, protiče. Kako piše Anna T.: "I understand these registers as having more in connection to fantastic communities and support networks whose frameworks are fluid and ever-changing. Further...the idea of the nation (i.e., the nation state) is one that is fiercely mocked and participation in it does not seem to be an appealing idea for the speakers... Members of these [queer] communities, having experienced marginalisation, mockery, lack of civil rights, and precarity are not so willing to embrace the idea of a (national) community worth dying for" (T., 2020: 48). Nekad progovaram i počinjem pisati na engleskom, nekad na bosanskohercegovskom, nekad na lubundži. A nekad ni na jednom.

notes

- 1** I use BCMS from time to time in this essay along with the individual appellations such as Bosnian. The question of whether there is a single Central South Slavic language or several distinct languages has been a rather tiring sociolinguistic trope. If you pressed me (against a wall of dictionaries), I would say queerly that it is (that they are) *both* one language, *and* multiple languages.
- 2** Still, that there is much to discover is evident in diverse scholarship dealing with, for example, the medieval Serbia (Bojanin 2014) or the period of time between the two world wars in Yugoslavia (Petrović 2014). For a comprehensive account of LGBTQ+ activism and culture in five former Yugoslav states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) and Albania, from the middle of the past century to August of 2020, (see Čaušević and Gavrić, 2020).
- 3** Na portalu lgbti.ba, u nedavnom, korektno napisanom i pomno istraženom članku o kodovima i znacima raspoznavanja pripadnika/ca seksualnih manjina nema niti jednog primjera iz bivše Jugoslavije, a sa šireg balkanskog prostora pominje se samo postojanje žargonâ lubundža i kalijarda (Husić, 2023).
- 4** My etymologies are from Aktunç.
- 5** Ovdje prevodim jednu posuđenicu iz romskog drugom (Uhlik, 1954: 21).
- 6** Bussy is camp; *bussy* is also masc. Mentioning the use of *pussy* and *cunt* for the receptive partners (and their orifices?) among the barebackers in the United States, Tim Dean points out the paradox that “masculinity may be bolstered rhetorically by the use of terms that refer pejoratively to the female genitals” (Dean, 2009: 51).
- 7** See the information provided at <https://events.ceu.edu/2023-06-01/mindi-panther-live-ceu> (accessed 21 September 2023), announcing their concert at the Central European University on 1 June 2023.
- 8** See the interview with Džipsii (in Serbian and Serbglish), “Biti Rom i gej: iskustva dvostrukog identiteta,” available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDs_xNGBd7s (accessed 20 March 2023). The performer discusses his self-naming starting at 00:42. He says that he heard the English term “Gypsy” for the first time in a song by Shakira.
- 9** The video is available in high definition at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M4X2_KT1Ss (accessed 20 March 2023).
- 10** There are some exceptions. For a general discussion of the Old English term *baedling* and complete bibliography up to 2014, see Christopher Monk’s blog entry “Medieval ‘Gender Trouble’” (1 September 2014), <https://www.themedievalmonk.com/blog/whats-in-a-word-the-anglo-saxon-baedling-and-gender-trouble> (Accessed 22 March 2023).
- 11** The text used to be attributed to Guy Hocquenghem, but the new edition of Noura Wedell’s English translation *Screwball Asses* (forthcoming in April of 2024), indicates that the author was Christian Maurel: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9781635902006/the-screwball-asses> (Accessed 22 September 2023). I thank one of the anonymous readers for drawing my attention to this early work of queer theory.
- 12** Više o rupama na penisima u staroengleskim zagonetkama i starofrancuskim humorističkim pripovijestima (*fabliaux*) pogledajte (Ferhatović, 2021).

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