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## **Gypsy Ethnic Socialization in Serbia\***

Based on original fieldwork among Gypsies in Serbia, this paper explores Gypsy ethnic socialization and argues that Gypsy social isolation, to some extent, is self-imposed through the acceptance of their traditions. Close kin, particularly parents, are found to be the primary socializing agents of Gypsy children. Gypsy children have little or no contact with children from other ethnic groups. A crucial aspect of Gypsy socialization is an emphasis on the distinction between non-Gypsies and Gypsies; that is, between gadje and Roma: Contact with gadje, especially sexual, is considered polluting. Their social isolation results also from their traditional refusal to accept, and become a part of the larger hierarchy of their host populations. The Gypsy tradition of endogamy helped individual Gypsies to survive, leave descendants, and transmit their traditions to them.

*Key words:* Gypsies, ethnic socialization, traditions, Serbia.

### **Introduction**

Based on original fieldwork among Gypsies in Serbia, this paper explores Gypsy ethnic socialization and argues that Gypsy social isolation, to some extent, is self-imposed through the acceptance of their traditions. Certain behaviors are so successful that they are purposively retained from generation to generation across all cultures. The human transmission of culture from ancestor to descendant is what is meant by tradition. Our traditions constitute the accumulated, successful behavior and knowledge of our ancestors, who not only survived and reproduced with that behavior, but left descendants who did the same. Traditions can be seen as a system of information, support and guidance, which serve as “cultural supplements”.<sup>1</sup> Tra-

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<sup>1</sup> L. B. Steadman, C.T. Palmer, *Visiting dead ancestors: shamans as interpreters of religious traditions*, *Zygon*, vol. 29 (2), 1994, 173-190.

ditions are those aspects of culture which are inherited vertically from ancestors to descendants, and which continue to be passed down from ancestors to succeeding generation because they tend to influence the behavior of the descendants in ways that increase their inclusive fitness, and in that way, the descendant-leaving success of their ancestors.

Our paper is based on the following assumptions:

- 1) Parental behavior/sacrifice is aimed at leaving descendants. Its success, therefore, is measured by numbers of descendants. An important part of this strategy is the transmission of ancestral traditions. As inheritable behavior, traditions should respond to Darwinian selection; that is, only when a tradition helps leave descendants should it tend to increase in frequency along with the descendants.
- 2) Contacts with others and their behavior can influence one's own behavior, including one's parental behavior. In simple societies, such contact is limited to kinsmen, who more or less share the same ancestral traditions. In modern societies, such contact can lead to new traditions, which when successful tend to increase in frequency.
- 3) In modern life, success in leaving descendants usually requires skills valued by others who are willing to pay for them. The main impetus behind the acquisition of such skills is parental behavior.

We suggest these assumptions may help us understand some behavior of Gypsies.

### **Gypsies in Serbia: Social and Demographic Variables**

The first written document referring to Gypsies in Serbia dates from 1348.<sup>2</sup> In Serbia, as in other South-Slavic countries under the Turkish rule, Gypsies constituted a separate ethnic group: they lived apart in mahalas, in towns, or in isolated village areas, and had to pay special "gypsy" taxes to the Turks.<sup>3</sup> In the Balkans, through centuries of Turkish rule, Gypsies were strictly endogamous: even the godfathers or best men at their weddings were Gypsies. Although some intermarriage occurred with Serbs, Gypsies remained largely endogamous and therefore a separate ethnic group.

Today, Gypsies are perhaps the most segregated ethnic group in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The same is probably true in Serbia.

In Serbia, Gypsies form a complex mixture of groups; in fact, one can identify a number of subgroups. Each group represents a historical and originally to a certain extent, localized entity. Gypsies always depended on the contacts with, and

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<sup>2</sup> Т. Ђорђевић, *Из Србије Кнеза Милоша*, Становништво – насеља, Београд 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Т. Вукановић, *Роми (Цигани) у Југославији*, Нова Југославија, Врање 1983.

<sup>4</sup> А. Mirga & L. Mruz, *Romi, razlike I tolerancije*, Akarit, Београд 1997.

needs of non-Gypsies as a source of their livelihood – they were never self-sufficient. Many times Gypsies adopted their hosts' culture in response to the differences in their social and environmental surroundings. The result is the great diversity of Gypsy tribes and their lack of identity as an integrated ethnic group. Therefore, Gypsy culture in general is extremely diverse and difficult to pinpoint. Their ethnicity is also disputed and a complex issue, coming from the fact that most Gypsies do not regard themselves as members of a cohesive group, but identify instead with the subgroup to which they belong. Within these subgroups, language and religion also remain diverse; their religion often depending on their location and circumstances.

In Europe, as in Serbia, most Gypsy/Roma tribes still emphasize a distinction between non-Roma and Roma, that is, *gadje* and non-*gadje*.<sup>5</sup> Central to this is the notion of *marime*: a distinction between behavior that is pure, *vujó*, and polluted, or *marime*.<sup>6</sup> In the past, a violation of purity rules or any behavior disruptive to the Gypsy group resulted in expulsion from the group, or punishment. A contact with *gadje*, especially a sexual one, was considered a kind of pollution. In the case of a mixed marriage, many tribes considered the children Roma only if the father is Roma.<sup>7</sup>

### **Socio-economic characteristics of Gypsies in Serbia**

The general socio-economic condition of the Gypsies in Serbia can be described as one of poverty: extensive, acute and typified by massive unemployment, poor education, inadequate health care and poor quality housing. At the same time, the Gypsies' demographic characteristics greatly differ from those of the Serbian population as a whole.

#### **a) Birth Rate**

The Gypsy birth rate is significantly higher than that of the Serbs. The average number of live born for a Gypsy is 4.34, and for a Serb, 1.80.<sup>8</sup> More than 50% of Gypsy females gave birth to their first child between 15 and 20 years of age, while for Serbian females the average age for the first child is 28. The natural increase of Gypsy population is also higher than for the Serbs; on average, it is at least double: the natural increase for the Gypsy group is 22.4%, while for the Serbs it is –0.2%

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> I. Hancock, *The pariah syndrome: an account of Gypsy slavery*, Ann Arbor, MI, Karoma Publishers, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> T. Vukanović, *op.cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Statistics for Serbia 1991.

## **b) Age Structure**

The Gypsies are a young population: 41.7% below 14 years of age, 54.4% from 15-59, and 3.9% belong to the age group of 60 and above.<sup>9</sup> Their average age is 17.2 years. For the Serbs, in contrast, only 11.70% are below 14 years of age; 54.16% belong to the age group of 15-59, and 17.32% belong to the age of 60 and up.

## **c) Mortality/health**

The Gypsy group suffers from high demographic loss of its infants and rather unbridled reproduction at the same time. Gypsy infants and children die at a high rate: they have almost a four times higher rate than the rest of the nation's infants and children—26.1% to 6.8%.<sup>10</sup> Gypsy population suffers from malnutrition, lung diseases, avitaminosis, intestinal, skin and skeletal diseases and alcoholism.<sup>11</sup> The low living standard of the Gypsy families is reflected also in their diet, which falls below normal human requirements, in terms of both the quantity and quality. Their diet is typically poor, irregular, of poor quality and hygienic standards. The daily menu of a family often consists of one meal, obtained by begging, peddling or rummaging around dump yards. Their daily diet usually consists of bread, potatoes, corn flour, seasonal vegetables and fruit.<sup>12</sup> Meat is seldom on the menu, generally only in families with a full-time employed member. A large number of Gypsies, especially their children, are undernourished.

## **d) Housing**

The average number of persons per family is 6.4 members, which is more than double the national average.<sup>13</sup> The Gypsy population mainly lives in traditional forms of different degrees. The extended family gives home for 2-3, and sometimes even 4 subsequent generations. The majority live in settlements at the outskirts of cities and villages, while houses are often built of tin, cardboard, planks and plastic sheeting. Most of the city settlements do not have access to running water, sewers, electricity or waste collection.

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics for Serbia 1981.

<sup>10</sup> В. Станковић, *Роми у светлу података Југословенске статистике*, in: *Развитак Рома у Југославији: проблеми и тенденције*, САНУ, Београд 1992, 159-179.

<sup>11</sup> Medecins du Monde, 53<sup>rd</sup> session, Geneva 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Save the Children, *Denied A Future? The Right To Education of Roma, Gypsy and Travelers Children.*, Save the Children Fund, United Kingdom 2001.

<sup>13</sup> J. Čvorović, *Gypsy Narratives: From Poverty To Culture*, The Institute of Ethnography, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Special editions 51, Beograd 2004.

### e) Employment

In 2000, just 20% of the Gypsy labor force held regular jobs, and only 5% of these workers were employed in state companies.<sup>14</sup> Some 58% of Gypsy men and 89% of women have no profession, either traditional or modern

### f) Education

The schooling situation is extremely bad. In 2001, 62% of Gypsies had not completed primary education, and 36% had no schooling at all.<sup>15</sup> 26% of Gypsies in Serbia are illiterate today. According to a recent OECD report, 75,000 Gypsy children of compulsory school age are not in school: most Gypsy children either do not start school at all, or start late and drop out after only 1 to 2 years.<sup>16</sup>

Also, a large number of Gypsy girls marry at 13-16, prompting school drop-out. On the other hand, many blame the language barrier for the poor education of Gypsies—for those whose native language is Romani. However, even for those children who speak Serbian as a mother tongue, the situation is similar, with many children falling behind in school. For example, a neuropsychiatrist working with Gypsy children on a daily basis, in the Mental Health Institute of the Novi Beograd Medical Centre in Belgrade, concluded that Gypsy children, in general

... are educationally neglected, don't know the language, and score poorly in tests. These children not only don't know Serbian, they don't know their own language either. Their parents are usually illiterate and have absolutely no appreciation of education.<sup>17</sup>

The poor education of Gypsy parents, and their attitudes are probably the main reasons behind the children's high illiteracy and drop-out rates. For parents, a formal education is not a priority or a precondition for upward mobility. For example, a survey conducted in the Gypsy settlement of Masurica in southern Serbia revealed that 36% of the parents wanted their children to finish only four of eight obligatory grades of elementary school, and that 18% were undecided as to whether or not they wanted any education for their children.<sup>18</sup> In Serbia, Gypsy parents send their children to school only if the school provides a free meal. Also, many register their children in school when they need to collect welfare/social help. There are no overall data on the number of Gypsy children attending 38 Serbia's special schools for children with mental disabilities. When data are available, however, 70-80% of the attending children are Gypsies. The data from Central and South-Eastern Europe reveal a similar pattern.<sup>19</sup> In Serbia, Gypsy parents contribute to this situa-

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<sup>14</sup> Save the Children, *op.cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The Roma Education Resource Book, vol 1, Institute for Educational Policy, Budapest 2001..

<sup>17</sup> Save the Children, *op.cit.*, 164.

<sup>18</sup> А. Митровић, А. Зајић, *Деценија са Ромима у Масурици*, in: Друштвене промене и положај Рома, САНУ, Београд 1993.

<sup>19</sup> *The Roma Education Resource Book, op.cit.*

tion: they often accept the evaluation of their child as mentally disabled, since it enables them to access various benefits such as free meals, medical care and humanitarian aid which such children receive in the special schools.

“Parents” education levels play an important role in their children’s attendance and performance. For Gypsies, parents are either unemployed, or low paid workers and their efforts are directed towards the immediate survival of the family instead of towards the education of their children, which are often left without any control. A child psychologist from Belgrade stated:

We have very little Gypsy attendance, and they perform poorly: they do not do their homework, and parents are unable to help them since most are illiterate. Also, a number of them just drop-out, at the age of 10-12. There is an anecdote, based on a true event: a schoolteacher asks children: “You are now grade II, which grade will you be next year? And the whole classroom responds: grade III. Then he asks: What about the year after that? And kids say: grade IV, but Gypsy kids responds: Then we get married”.<sup>20</sup>

Education, in general, is the process through which the child is taught how to be successful in his community. Actually, for many Gypsies, formal education is the first and most direct encounter with the outside world of gadje (the non-Gypsy world). Many Gypsies may be protective and reluctant to send their children to school – out of their family and community – and fear assimilation. Gypsy parents’ attitudes to non-Gypsy education are further complicated by the requirement of their children to learn skills (such as reading and writing), which are of little importance to their own community. For example, the Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Education on the Provision of Education for Gypsy and Traveller Children<sup>21</sup> estimated that only 40% of European Gypsy children attend school at some point of their lives, the other 60% have never been to school, and that 50%, but in most places 80%, of Gypsy adults are illiterate. Also, because of low ages of marriage and early childbirth among Gypsies in general, girls face additional challenges of staying in school. Among Gypsies, informal, non-registered marriages are found to be prevalent, and early childbirth makes it difficult for young mothers to stay in school. For example, a Gypsy from Romania argued:

I have seen that most people who are involved with Roma children are not Roma themselves. They are gadjo, or non-Roma, or white. When you tell a Roma child how to act in school, you hold for him the same expectations as for gadjo children. And, there are some Roma children that will obey. But, of real value to a Roma child? The answer is no. Roma children cannot incorporate the values learned, and less and less so. They cannot use society’s values in their everyday life. If a Roma child is educated in the standard way and goes back to live inside the Roma community, he would starve. The skills a Roma child needs are very different

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<sup>20</sup> Psychologist Slobodanka Mutić, Belgrade Elementary School “Siniša Nikolajević”, April 2004.

<sup>21</sup> *The Roma Education Resource Book, op.cit.*

from the skills of a gadjo child. The European education system wants to create gadjo out of Roma children.<sup>22</sup>

No doubt, Gypsy poverty, isolation and prejudice against them contribute to their present day situation: short life expectancy, both infant mortality, poverty and low education levels. However, the Gypsy culture in itself can sometimes increase the risk for certain illnesses and add to the present-day plight. For example, there is a widespread resistance to infant and childhood vaccinations/immunizations.<sup>23</sup> Group and social segregation can be carried to extremes such as refusal to register births and deaths, that important trends in morbidity and mortality may be hidden. Their segregation also results in lower participation in health screening in general.

## Fieldwork

To indicate what is common among Gypsies in general regarding their socialization, we discuss two settlements. The fieldwork was performed in spring 2003 and spring 2004, in two Gypsy settlements: the first settlement is located at the outskirts of Belgrade, and represents a poor, city Gypsy settlement; the second settlement is in Macva, a rural area in Western Serbia.

First, the *city* settlement, called Hunter's story, stands for a "typical" poor, city Gypsy settlement. It has around 420 Gypsies, living in 57 houses. All inhabitants declare themselves to be Roma or Cigani. Three groups are self-identified: *Ashkali* (with approximately 2/3 of the population), *Egyptians*, and *White Gypsies*. The Ashkali and Egyptians are Muslims whose ancestors came from Kosovo some 60 years ago; a certain proportion (around 15%) of these Gypsies have relocated from Kosovo after the 1999 bombing and settled with their relatives in the settlement. The White Gypsies are ex-Muslims, who came from Bosnia and converted to Orthodoxy in the past decades; however, all claim they are "natives" of Belgrade. All adult members are fluent in Romani, Albanian and Serbian. There are 7.4 members per household and 5.1 children per family. Their education level is low; most went to school for only a short period, averaging 4 grades, which is illiterate by Serbian standards. In the past, their traditional occupations were, for the Egyptians, blacksmithing; for the White Gypsies, horseshoeing; and for the Ashkali, charcoal-burning. Today, all live by humanitarian help and illegal trade – mainly cutting and selling wood from a nearby forest. Some houses have electricity, but most pull electric power from street-lights; there is no sewage system. Some 30 children attend a "special school" for mentally retarded children: parents say, in this way the kids get free meals. Most drop out after the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and the girls get married. Bride-price and a girl's virginity are obligatory for first marriage. Marriage is common between Egyptians and Ashkali; however, when one marries an Orthodox White Gypsy from the same settlement, they call it a "mixed marriage", and the children

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Save the Children, *op.cit.*

from such a marriage are called “mutts”. No marriage with Serbs exists at all. One female informant explains:

I’m very proud to be Roma. I’m proud because I’m beautiful, and because I behave like Roma should. Mixed marriage with Serbs? No, that’s impossible: first, they don’t want us, second, that’s not allowed. They [the Serbs] have premarital sex, we don’t have that, it’s forbidden for Roma girls.

The Serbs are called *gadje*: the Gypsies in this settlement have little contact with Serbs or the outside world, except when they sell wood, or receive humanitarian help; they keep to themselves and marry within the settlement. One Gypsy got angry:

The non-Roma took over our traditional jobs: before, when Tito was alive, and in the past, it was the Roma who did the trade, crafts, black-market, fortune-telling and music. Now, we are like expelled: nobody wants us, the non-Roma are doing our jobs, and that’s why we are so poor.

A 46-year-old male, argued: “Gypsies here acquired a lot of bad things from you, non-Roma: now we steal, lie, and fight. We weren't like that before. It is you [the Serbs] who did this to us”.

In this settlement, Gypsy children acquire hardly any skills and knowledge based on written texts. The set of objects that surrounds these Gypsy children includes neither children’s books (nor any books) nor usually any toys. Children are expected to help around the house, fetch water and look after their young siblings.

The *second* settlement is located in the village of Mačvanski Pričinovići, in Mačva in the country side, 85 kilometers to the west of Belgrade. The Gypsies in this village identify themselves as Gurbeti. Their traditional occupation was iron-smithing. During Tito’s regime, many Gypsy villagers left for Austria, only to return to the village for holidays and special occasions. Most Gypsy houses are empty today – out of 110, only around 25 houses are lived in. In this sense, the village is a typical *gastarbeiter* village: many Gypsies with stable jobs in Austria managed to obtain loans from Austrian institutions, returned home to build two and three story houses, with excessive decorations and modern architecture, in which nobody lives. These houses serve as a status symbol: many compete to see who will build the biggest or best-equipped house and highest fence; some fences go up to 10m in height. Most Gypsies in Austria work in low-paid/low-status jobs, such as grave-diggers, street cleaners, or in a factory or flower-shop. The estimated number actually living more or less permanently in the village, occupied also by Serbs, is approximately 120 adults, and 50-70 children aged 1-10. Before the break-up of Yugoslavia, most of those still living in Mačva had been traders: they used to travel to Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia and sell cattle. Legal and illegal trade in smuggling pigs, cows and chickens was a successful occupation at the time. Today, most of them are not employed: during the summer season some work occasionally as fieldworkers, or in black-market trade. During the wintertime, they do no work at all: they play cards and gamble for small sums of money. All Gypsies in the village today are Orthodox Christians; they converted from Islam some 80 years ago. Today, they speak Ro-



mani, mixed with Serbian, as their mother tongue, and also fluent Serbian, while many younger ones born in Austria also speak German. In the past, the Gurbeti from this village maintained endogamy by marrying only Gurbeti Gypsies from their own or nearby villages.

According to their estimates, around 30-40 Gypsy children are enrolled in a local school, which they attend irregularly. Most girls drop out of school at age 11-12 and get married. There are 5 or 6 children who never enrolled in school at all: most of them were assigned to “special schools” in Šabac, a nearby town, but they never attended. Very little attention is paid to children’s education; most kids play on the street unsupervised when young. Older children, teenagers, help around the house, or just hang out at the village main square.

## Discussion

Gypsies in our two settlements received their “socialization” into their own little Roma community from their ancestors. Close kin, particularly parents, are the primary socializing agents of Gypsy children. Gypsy children have little or no contact with children from other ethnic groups. A crucial aspect of Gypsy socialization is an emphasis on the distinction between non-Gypsies and Gypsies; that is, between gadje and Roma. They kept non-Roma influence out by:

1. not going to school and being socialized into the non-Roma world, and
2. by marrying only Gypsies.

Except through their occupations, little time is spent with non-Roma. If they went to school, or if they sent their kids to school all the way through, they would be strongly influenced by a non-Roma environment, and they couldn’t marry so early. Parental attitudes powerfully influence their ethnic identity and eventual occupations. In our two settlements, the majority of parents report efforts to foster children’s ethnic pride and to teach them about their “group”, their so-called “tribe”, which is the history and practices of their ancestors. Most informants say that they receive their “learning” through events of everyday life, by watching and copying their parents or older members of their extended family, and most importantly, through an emphasis on kinship. The non-Gypsy school, i.e., formal education, is seen as a threat to this influence, taking away the children from parental guidance and their economic activities. The persistence of “Gypsy socialization” is a sign of the strength of Gypsy traditions and of the parents’ capacity to influence and “educate” their children through the generations.<sup>24</sup>

There are several mutually consistent evolutionary perspectives on ethnicity, ethnocentrism, ethnic identity, and relations between ethnic groups,<sup>25</sup> which

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<sup>24</sup> For similar examples throughout Europe, see *The Roma Education Resource Book*.

<sup>25</sup> J. P. Rushton, *Genetic similarity theory and the nature of ethnocentrism*, in K. Thienpont & R. Cliquet (Eds.) *In-group/Out-group Behavior in Modern Societies: An Evolutionary Perspective*, Vlaamse Gemeenschap/CBGS, The Netherlands 1999, 75 -107; K. B. Mac Donald, *A People that*

could explain Gypsy behavior at the group level. Together, these perspectives illustrate the interplay of evolved cognitive and motivational systems with mechanisms of rational choice able to choose adaptive strategies in novel environments.<sup>26</sup> One of the theories is Genetic Similarity Theory<sup>27</sup> (GST) that extends beyond kin recognition by proposing mechanisms that assess phenotypic similarity as a marker for genetic similarity. These mechanisms support positive attitudes, greater cooperation and a lower threshold for altruism for similar others. GST is perhaps the only way to account for the finding that there is a correlation between the heritability of traits and the degree of positive assortment for those traits by spouses and best friends. The data indicate that people not only assort positively for a wide variety of traits, but they do so most on traits that are more heritable. This theory has important implications for theories of ethnocentrism: the continuum from phenotypic and genetic similarity to phenotypic and genetic dissimilarity is also an affective continuum, with liking, marriage, friendship and coalition formation being facilitated by greater phenotypic and genetic similarity. GST in turn suggests a genetic basis for xenophobia: that the liking and disliking of others is facilitated by this system, independent of whether the other is a member of a socially designated, that is, culturally constructed in-group or out-group. Furthermore, among Gypsies, it is probable that their cultural manipulation of segregative mechanisms/segregative cultural practices have resulted in ethnic similarity being of disproportionate importance for Gypsies, regulating their associations with others. For example, because of cultural barriers between Gypsies and others, including endogamy, phenotypic differences between Gypsies and others have actually increased, resulting in clearer criterions of assortment.<sup>28</sup> This, in turn, have led to a tendency to conceptualize both in-group and out-group as more homogeneous than they really are. In general, the stereotypic behavior and attitudes of the in-group are positively valued, while out-group behavior and attitudes are negatively valued.<sup>29</sup> The outcome of these categorization is behavior that involves discrimination against the out-group and in favor of the in-group, beliefs in the superiority of the in-group, positive affective preferences for the in-group etc. Anthropological data indicate the universality of the tendency to view

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*Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy*, CT: Praeger, Westport 1994; van der Dennen, *Of badges, bonds, and boundaries: In-group/out-group differentiation and ethnocentrism revisited*, in K. Thienpont & R. Cliquet (Eds.) *In-group/Out-group Behavior in Modern Societies: An Evolutionary Perspective*, Vlaamse Gemeenschap/CBGS, The Netherlands 1999, 37-74.

<sup>26</sup> K. B. Mac Donald, *An Integrative Evolutionary Perspective on Ethnicity*, 2001. <http://www.csulb.edu/~kmacd/>.

<sup>27</sup> J. P. Rushton, *op.cit.*, 75 -107.

<sup>28</sup> For segregative cultural practices among Jews see: K. B. Mac Donald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy*, Westport 1994.

<sup>29</sup> D. Abrams & M. A. Hogg, *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, Springer-Verlag, New York 1990; M. A. Hogg & D. Abrams, *Social Identifications*, Routledge, New York 1987.

one's own group as superior,<sup>30</sup> and Gypsies are no exception.<sup>31</sup> As MacDonald<sup>32</sup> pointed out,

...the evidence suggests that perceptions of in-groups and out-groups are the result of adaptive design and that between group competition is a reality of the human environment of evolutionary adaptedness. ...The perceptions of in-groups and out-groups have been the focus of natural selection, that is, the mechanisms evolved because humans were recurrently exposed to situations in which perceptions of in-and out-groups rather than concatenations of individuals were adaptive.

While group selection theories can, indeed, increase our understandings on Gypsies as a group, the approach adopted in this paper diverges from group selection perspective – where it differs is in the emphasis of traditions. Namely, Gypsy ethnicity could be much better understood if it also incorporates traditions–behaviors copied from parents, commonly referred to as traditions. As pointed out before, the fact is that most Gypsies do not consider themselves members of a unified group, but identify instead with the subgroup to which they belong. Within these subgroups, language and religion, as well as emphasis on a particular ancestor, a founder of the tribe/group, which a group might hold on, remain diverse. Traditions imply the copying of behavior of others, especially when young.<sup>33</sup> In general, one's own particular ancestors, and their unique characteristics (influenced obviously by their genes), uniquely influence one's behavior. While genes are important, the behavior encouraged and exhibited by one's unique ancestors is also of great importance. And the uniqueness of behavior and hence traditions are powerful influences on what genes will be selected for. Traditions can create selection pressure – when scientists apply "natural selection", they mean selection by the environment working on genes.<sup>34</sup> But the environment does not cause genes, and a gene can come along and replace another gene in the same environment. Also, a new tradition can occur (e.g. a new prophet's new argument) that can replace other traditions without a change in the environment. With humans it is probable that traditions themselves have been the driving force behind the spread of those traditions. Thus, selection may be driven by the inheritable elements themselves – genes and traditions, not necessarily by the environment. Groups, including families and tribes, are consequences, not causes, of social behavior. The driving (evolutionary)

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<sup>30</sup> R. A. Levin & D. T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behavior*, Wiley, New York 1972.

<sup>31</sup> In addition, some animal species such as chimpanzees, like humans, divide the world into "us" versus "them" R. J. Russell, *The Lemur's Legacy: The Evolution of Power, Sex, and Love*, Tarcher/Putnam, New York 1993; van der Dennen, *Studies of conflict*, in: M. Maxwell (Ed.), *The Sociobiological Imagination*, Albany: The State University of New York Press 1991.

<sup>32</sup> K. B. Mac Donald, *An Integrative Evolutionary Perspective on Ethnicity*, 5-6. <http://www.csulb.edu/~kmacd/>

<sup>33</sup> L. B. Steadman, *Traditions are not explained by "r"*, Paper presented at meeting of Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Santa Barbara, CA 1995.

<sup>34</sup> L. B. Steadman, *Natural selection and the evolutionary status of culture*, Paper presented at meeting of *Human Behavior and Evolution Society*, Binghamton, NY 1992.

force behind social behavior is parental care, which, in humans especially, is strongly influenced by ancestral traditions.<sup>35</sup> “Lateral” social behavior is the result of parentally/ancestrally encouragement of offspring to favor co-descendants, the closer ones favored over more distant ones. Endogamy restricts the range of co-descendants and thus limits the lateral extension of such behavior. Endogamy also promotes the persistence of traditions.

Furthermore, parents everywhere are extremely interested in their children copying their behavior because they are the parents’ descendant-leaving stake – children represent their future success – and the parents’ behavior has been successful (they survived and reproduced). When behavior is copied from ancestors, including parents, by being inheritable, it is subject to selection, and therefore can influence its own frequency in succeeding generations. Like any inheritable, Darwinian trait, only when it helps to leave descendants does it tend to regularly increase in frequency.

So, given our genes and our experiences, especially with parents and close kin, we come to exhibit social behavior (altruism, cooperation) toward others, and thus perhaps to form enduring relationships with them – social groups. By our parents directing social behavior toward us – caring for us – we respond with social behavior, remember them, and thus have a “social group” with them. In general, our smaller such groups are more important but they are ephemeral – they tend to break apart as we grow older and marry – but the relationships, which really are social groups may endure. The larger categories such as our race, ethnicity, tribe etc, and even our religion and country, while much more enduring are far less important to our (daily) lives.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, many Gypsies enforce a social separation from non-Gypsies: they tend to stay apart from the mainstream of society by traditional, that is ancestrally encouraged, choice. Social traditions among Gypsies include marriages restrictions and occupations. A key socializing mechanism for Gypsies that promoted their survival and reproduction in the past was an emphasis on the particular occupations employed by various Gypsy tribes. As pointed out before, these subgroups may be distinguished by their occupation, language and religion. Individual ancestors encouraging endogamy and a particular occupation, was the *primary social* influence on Gypsies for centuries, probably millennia.

In regard to rural Gypsies in Serbia, their social stratification and limited marriage choices preserved their local, village traditions, including their occupations.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, a Gypsy responding to the interests of surrounding peasants

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<sup>35</sup> C. T. Palmer, & L. B. Steadman, *Human kinship as a descendant-leaving strategy: a solution to an evolutionary puzzle*, *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems*, 20(1), 1997, 39-51.

<sup>36</sup> As C. M. Arensberg, *The Irish countryman. An anthropological study*, Prospect height, Waveland Press, Illinois 1937/1988, 105, recognized for rural Ireland: “tradition works locally”. In-

could develop a new male occupation and then transmit it to his male descendants, which ultimately had the effect of creating a new local kin group. Gypsies were accepted and tolerated in places where their particular occupations were valued. They preserved their particular occupations by not mixing and not creating wider kinship and marriage ties with Gypsies in other villages. Most interviewed Gypsies simply stated that they follow no specific rules of behavior other than the ones they learned from their parents, at home. One male Gurbet Gypsy in Mačva, argued:

I don't know what is a "correct" behavior for a Roma. I don't know about other Roma in *this* village – how could I know, and I don't care – I only know for me. I learned what is correct behavior from my father: That's my old dad's principle. My sons are the same – they learned how to behave from me.

Gypsies' success in retaining their socialization has been based on their endogamy, which has helped their sons get wives – who else would marry them? – and thereby pass on their traditions. Especially in the eastern part of Europe, the Gypsy marriage pattern remained the same for centuries. Among the most ancient Gypsy traditions is their emphasis on the difference between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.

All this points to the following conclusion. Fundamentally, it is the behavior of individuals, not groups, that makes a difference.<sup>37</sup> When activities lead to success in leaving descendants, such activities may be transmitted to the descendants.<sup>38</sup> But new experiences of individuals may lead to new behaviors which, when they help to leave descendants, may become new traditions. The important point is that groups are consequences, not causes, of social behavior. The family group is a result of the hierarchical behavior between parent and child that leads to the lateral relationship between siblings. This hierarchical behavior and relationship includes the transmission of traditions, including social traditions. Larger kinship groups are based on the hierarchical relationship with more distant ancestors.<sup>39</sup>

Because children represent the descendant-leaving stake of their own ancestors, the most powerful social influence on individuals, other than their genes, is the behavior of their individual parents, whose behavior was influenced by their own unique parents, etc. It is this fact, we suggest, that can most illuminate our understanding of the traditional, or cultural behavior of individuals, including Gypsies.

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deed, his examples show that one's behavior is influenced significantly by the uniqueness of one's own particular parents.

<sup>37</sup> C. T. Palmer, E. Fredrickson, C. F. Tilley, *Categories and gatherings: Group selection and the mythology of cultural anthropology*, *Evolution and Human Behavior* 18, New York 1997, 291-308.

<sup>38</sup> C. T. Palmer, & L. B. Steadman, *Human kinship as a descendant-leaving strategy: a solution to an evolutionary puzzle*, *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems*, 20(1), 1997, 39-51.

<sup>39</sup> L. B. Steadman, *Kinship, religion and ethnicity*, paper presented at meeting of *Human Behavior and Evolution Society*, Albuquerque, NM 1992.