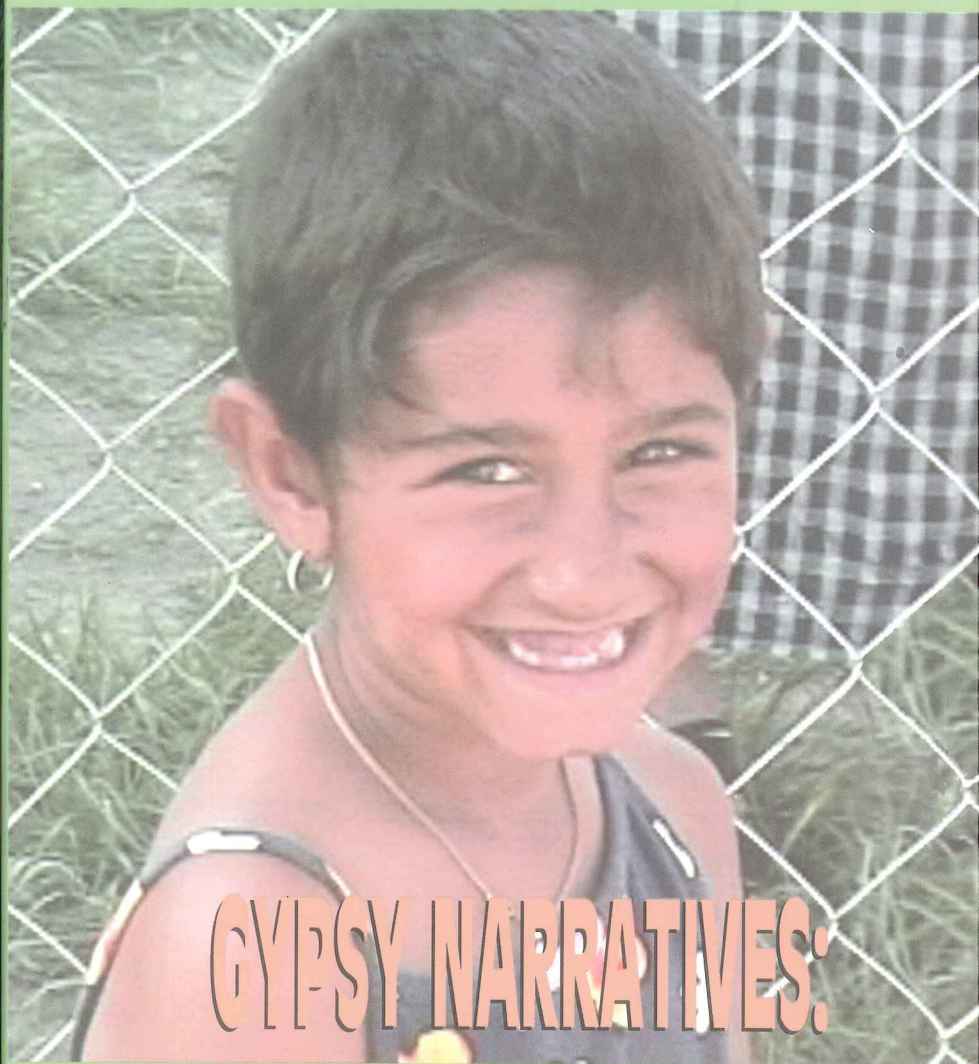


Jelena Čvorović



**GYPSY NARRATIVES:  
FROM POVERTY TO CULTURE**

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Jelena Čvorović

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Dragana Radojičić

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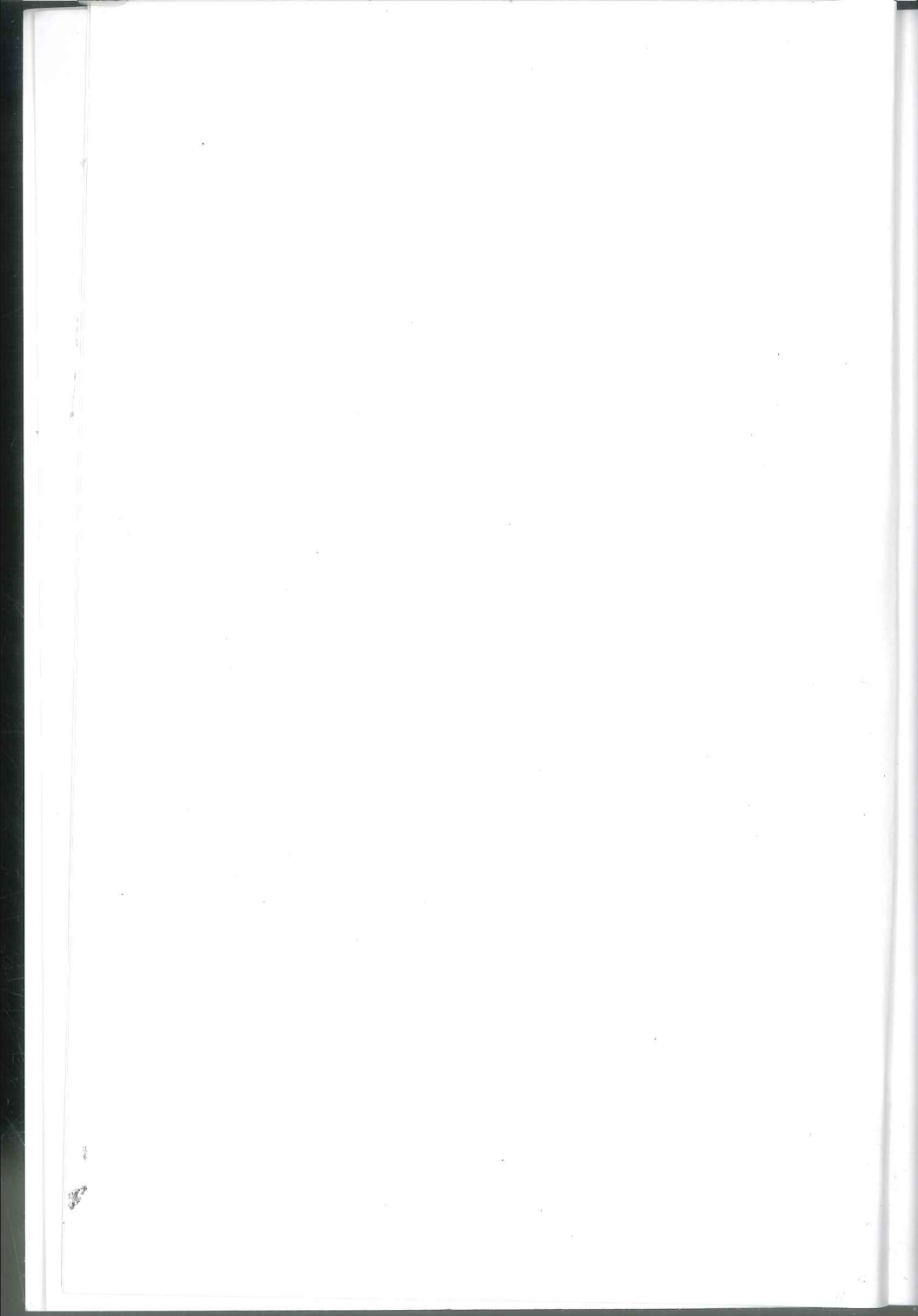
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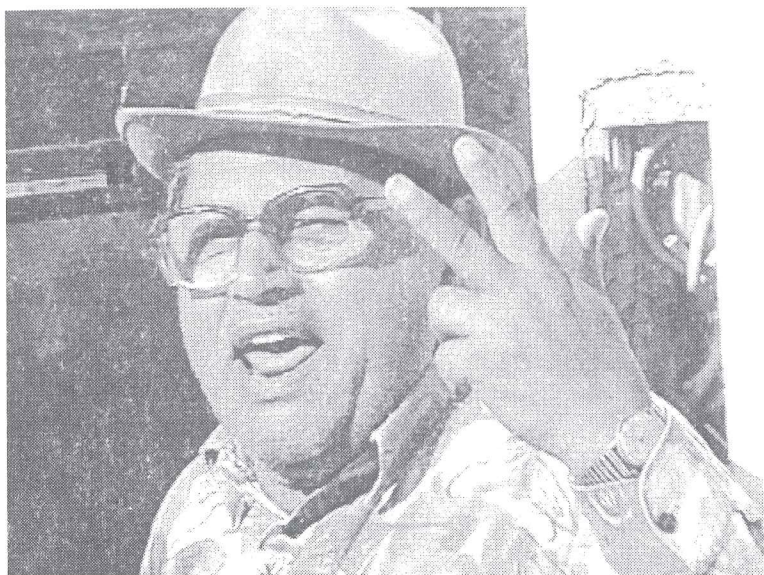
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*With gratitude I acknowledge the help  
of my dear friends  
who made my work possible.*

To Sofka, Dragan and Mika

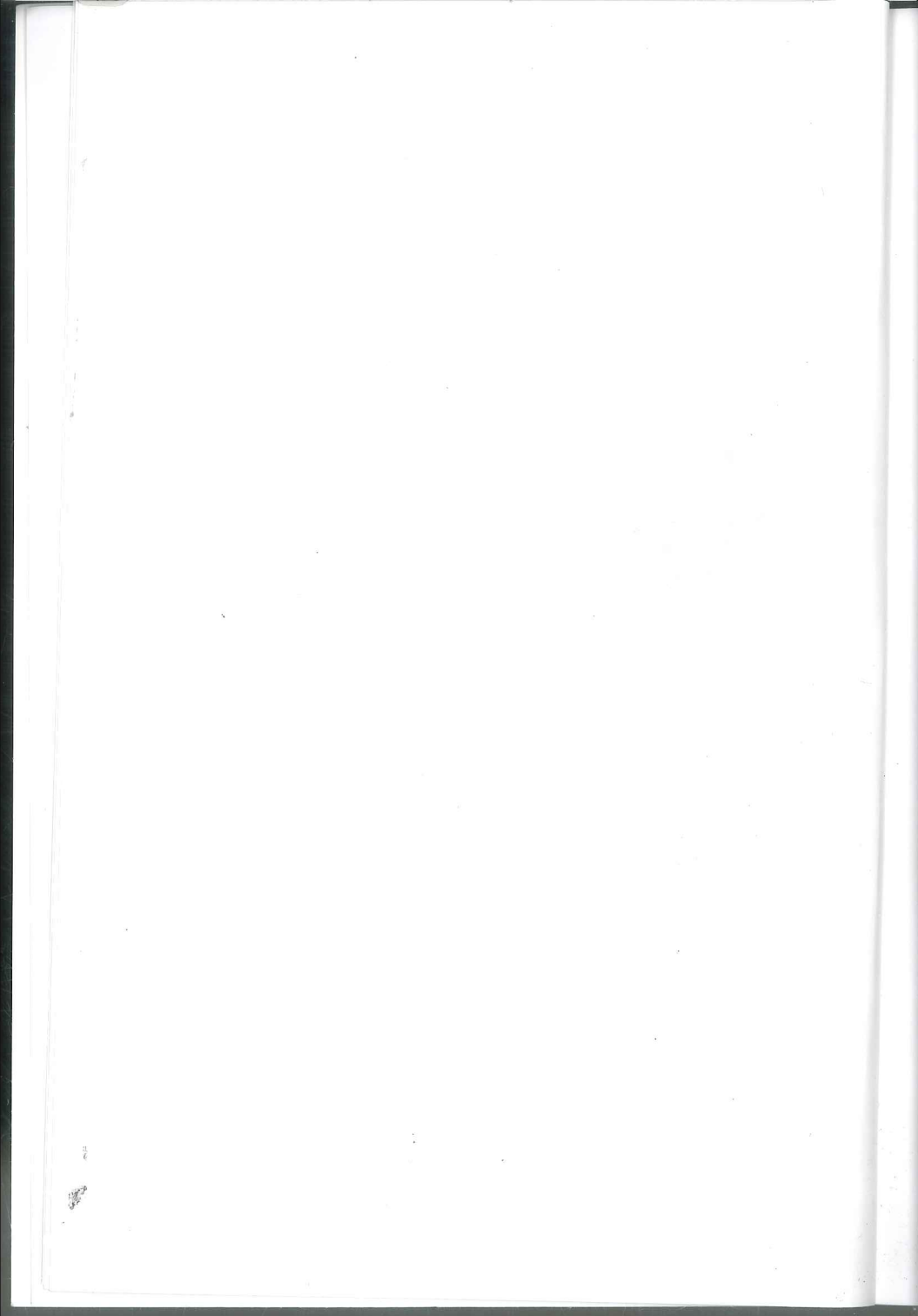






*When I first came to Cedar, I was the last of all Roma. Now, I'm the leader, of all 110 houses. It is not because I have everything, but because I have such good kids, and I'm respected for my age and of what I am. When I began, I had nothing to eat, I lived in a true poverty and misery. I came a long way, from poverty to culture, to what I have today: two houses, land and everything on "buttons".*

Dragoslav Jovanović, a Gypsy from Cedar



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## PART ONE

### Foreword

#### SAS TAJ SAS OR HOW TO BEGIN A STORY

"You will wonder all through the Earth forever, you will never sleep in the same place, nor you will drink water from the same spring twice". These are the alleged words of the great magician who cursed Ćen, the ancestor of all Roma. This is how Roma explain their curse (Živanović 1990).

Not all Roma people refer to themselves as Roma. Some prefer the European term *cigani* or *zigeuner*. Some European groups/tribes of Roma reject all together their connection with Roma people in general (Mirga & Mruz 1997). This is perhaps particularly true for Serbian Roma, where many Roma refer to themselves as to "smoked Serbs", or just Serbs. Therefore, throughout this manuscript the English term "Gypsy" is used, except when Roma refer to themselves by that same name.

The Gypsy and non-Gypsy populations have lived side by side in Europe for centuries and the experience has been less than satisfying for all concerned. Gypsies are found all over Europe with substantial populations in Central and Eastern Europe. In spite of their presence in Europe for centuries, their integration into European society is poor. They are one of the rare ethnic groups who never laid claim to a territory. And yet Gypsy history is one of exclusion and discrimination. There is the legend, still alive in rural Balkan countries, that the Gypsies made the nails that were used to crucify Christ and/or that they stole the fourth nail, thus making the crucifixion more painful (Djordjević 1932). Gypsy hunting and other such persecutions have occurred almost from the beginning of the Gypsy presence in Europe, with a peak in the World War II.



During the World War II approximately 300.000–600.000 Gypsies were murdered in the Holocaust. Gypsy discrimination continues to this day. Persecution and discrimination is now carried out by governments, communities, and individuals — especially in Eastern Europe and increasingly so since the fall of communism (Erlanger 2000).

Literature on the Roma/Gypsies is vast and diverse, characterized by the absence of an empirical basis to most theorizing. Such a literature, especially the one that emphasizes the exotic and isolated character of Gypsy culture, contributes even more to the present-day misapprehension of Gypsies and their behavior.

This manuscript deals with a full range of sexual and reproductive behaviors among different “tribes” of Gypsies in Serbia. The examined traits include rates of fertility, mortality, age distribution, education, crime rates, and parental care. Based on original fieldwork, this book also elucidates and contrasts the reproductive behavior of typically poor Gypsies with a group of much wealthier Gypsies living in a Serbian village. In addition, Gypsy traditions of culturally prescribed sexual behavior are also studied. Two hypotheses are being tested: 1) Gypsy reproductive behavior is a result of their ethnic, traditional strategy, and/or 2) Gypsy reproduction is a result of low status and being poor. Moreover, the relationship between socioeconomic status, reproductive behavior and ethnicity is also explored.

It is found that Gypsy tribes employ different reproductive strategies, ranging from a low-investment style of reproduction, (“I” reproductive strategy) to a more typical (“K”) parental strategy. The reasons bringing about these differences come from the Gypsies’ readiness to adjust their behavior and reproduction in order to create the most favorable strategy in a given environment. After all, “Each people makes its own adaptation. Today it is these adaptations rather than historical continuities which invite comparison” (Arensberg 1988:23).

This present analysis is based on data taken from available demographic assessments, research conducted by the author in the Belgrade Obstetric-Gynecology hospital, as well as fieldwork performed among Gypsies in Mačva, an agriculturally rich county in western Serbia. Data were collected on marital and reproductive

histories as well as culturally prescribed behaviors from villagers in the four selected villages of Mačva-Pocerina area, over two-years period, in 2002 and 2003. These data were compared with and complemented by official demographics. For the sake of informants protection and security reasons, the real names of the villages will not be identified. Almost all informants insisted that their villages and names remain anonymous. Therefore, pseudonyms are used to name the villages and the informants. The first village surveyed, Dogwood, is inhabited by Gypsies of Romanian origin — the Karavilax tribe. Additional information was collected from villagers of the Gurbeti tribe, in the Cedar, Bramble, and Cock villages and among the Čergari Gypsies in Šabac-town, also in Mačva.

In addition to discussion on Gypsy reproductive strategies, this book also presents three selected oral histories collected from the Gypsies in Mačva. The Mačva Gypsies have largely lost most of the distinctive “Gypsy” oral traditions: Gypsy stories, folklore and legends are remembered only by elders today. The existing wealth of Gypsy oral tradition runs the risk of disappearing or being distorted in the course of swift social change. No doubt, the pressing problems of the Gypsy ethnic group in Serbia today are poverty, low-educational levels and low standard of living. However, other problems that Gypsies in Serbia face are acculturation and loss of their specific tradition. The Gypsy ethnic group in Serbia owns a treasury of traditional stories that could still have a great cultural and educational value. The creation and continuance of oral tradition among Gypsies represent one of the most significant mechanisms in the preservation and constitution of generations of young people as a separate ethnic group.

The Gypsy oral histories presented here demonstrate that the Gypsy behavior can be better understood by bringing together the narration of the local peoples with the objective data produced by anthropology. When these Gypsies use traditional elements of their culture as a foundation to talk about the past, their life histories become visible as underlying explanations of cultural practice and behavior rather than as only complementing ethnographic account (Cruikshank 1992).

## A History of Gypsies

WE HAVE NOTHING LEFT  
FROM THE OLDEN TIMES:  
OUR ANCESTORS LEFT  
US NOTHING BUT PAIN,  
POVERTY AND SORROW.

A Mačva Gypsy (2003)

The Gypsies are probably of northern Indian origin, having moved out of that area some time between 800 AD and 950 AD, and migrated westwards into Europe, arriving there some time after 1100 AD (Hancock 1987). It is unclear why they left India, and there are no explanatory written documents. From linguistic influences preserved in all Romani dialects, it is most likely that Gypsy major migration route passed through Persia, Armenia, Greece and the Slavic-speaking parts of the Balkans (Fraser 1992). A number of early European historical sources refer to the Gypsies as Egyptians, and the term "Gypsy" is thought to mirror that assumption (Ibid.). Another common legend is drawn from an 11<sup>th</sup> century chronicle by a Persian historian, describing a group of 10,000–12,000 musicians and entertainers given as a gift to the ruler of Persia, Shah Bahram Gur, by an Indian Maharaja, during the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Vukanović 1983, Fraser 1992). Linguistic and historical data, supported by new genetic studies, suggest that the European Gypsies, embracing a large number of socially different endogamous groups, may be a complex conglomerate of founder populations (Kalaydjieva et al. 2001). Genetic results suggest a limited number of related founders, compatible with a small group of migrants splitting from a distinct caste or tribal group.

Individual Gypsy groups can be classified into major meta-groups: the Gypsies of East European origin; the Sinti in Germany and Manouches in France and Catalonia; the Kaló in Spain, Ciganos in Portugal and Gitans of southern France; and the Romanichals of

Britain (Frayser 1992). Out of these, the greatest variety is found in the Balkans, where numerous groups with well defined social boundaries exist (Marushnikova & Popov 1997)

In the Byzantine Empire, Gypsies constituted an oppressed caste; they have been regarded as Muslims (Tatars), intruders from the land occupied by the Muslims. Actually, the first record of Gypsies in Constantinople is from 1054; their first appearance in Europe came as military attachments to Ottoman armies. Later, they were confused with members of the heretic sect of *Antiganoi*, meaning "untouchables". Upon their arrival in Europe, Gypsies were free to move around and work unmolested for a century or more before social and economic factors pushed them into a situation of enslavement (Hancock 1987). They were forbidden to enter churches or to intermarry with whites, and were permitted to follow certain occupations only. Actually, the Roma were the first people of color to immigrate in large numbers to Europe, and Europeans tended to treat them as outsiders.

Although demographic and historical data are limited, census data and tax registers suggest that the overall number of Gypsies in the Balkans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was estimated at only at 17,000 (Marushnikova & Popov 1997).

Today, the current size of the European Gypsy population is around 8 million and rising, which is equivalent to that of an average European country (Save the Children 2001). In terms of their absolute and relative size, Gypsy population differs in both parts of Europe. Due to the subjective nature of Gypsy ethnic identity and their "ethnic mimicry", the population figures should be treated as estimates. Only 1.5 million Gypsies live in the five largest Western European states, that have populations between 30 and 80 million each, and the rest of Gypsy population reside in Central and Eastern Europe (Liegeois & Gheorghe 1995).

There are significant differences existing between Gypsies of Western Europe and those of Central and Eastern Europe. While Western European states generally tolerated Gypsy traditional practices, in Central and Eastern Europe the policy of socialist governments was to assimilate Gypsies and they were targeted for low-skilled employment within centrally planned economy (Crowe 1996). Efforts were made to help Gypsies to settle down and to



improve their economic and cultural position in the post-war years. This resulted in the banning of nomadism in most of the countries in the region, and destruction of Gypsy traditional occupations. And while protected to some extent by socialist regime, during the transition period Gypsies became the biggest losers. In the Central and Eastern European ex-socialist countries, the totalitarian regimes collapsed by the end of 1989, this is the starting year of the transition for the most (Philipov 2002). And although there are differences among the countries in timing, pace and intensity of the changes, some characteristics are common to all countries. The transition started at a time when economies of all countries were near or at the collapse, and as a result, impoverishment and unemployment significantly rose.

In all post-Communist countries, the danger of national and ethnic conflicts is becoming increasingly evident. The growth of xenophobic nationalism and the skinhead movement are current and significant forces in repression of the Gypsies. The state of affairs of the Gypsies in the former communist states is one of the key human rights issues. An intense effort is needed to solve social problems and ease tensions between the Gypsies and the European nations among which they reside. The problem is not only an internal one important to the former communist states alone but has become a global one due to the attempts of many Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe to seek asylum in the West, and the legal and illegal emigration of thousands of others to Western countries.

The position of Gypsies in all Central and Eastern European countries is more or less the same. Gypsies are perhaps the population group worst hit by unemployment in all countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus they have high levels of unemployment, sub-standard housing, lack of education and skills, and a deepening dependence on state benefits and services. At the same time, the Gypsy rate of criminality is high, although by no means ill-treatment of Gypsies in judicial systems is high also. For example, in Hungarian prisons 60% of male inmates are Gypsies, which makes 12 times the national average; in Spain, Gypsy females make up more than one quarter of the female inmates even if Gypsies account for 1.5% of the total population (Amat 2001).

At the same time, the Gypsies' demographic characteristics greatly differ in most countries from those of the population as a whole.



Thus they have high birth rates and death rates well above the average and high infant mortality. The very high birth rate combined with a relatively short life expectancy makes the Gypsies a very young population, made up of large families. Gypsies present a growing population in all parts of Europe: the propagation of an illiterate and unemployed population could create a "social time-bomb" (Farnam 2002). In the populations of the post-communist states, Gypsies number between 3 and 10% (table 1), and their birth-rate is more than twice the national averages. The demographics point out to an increase in the relative size of the Gypsy population in the years to come.

Table 1 Estimated Gypsy population in Central and Eastern Europe

COUNTRY	Total population	Gypsy population	Percentage of Gypsy population
Bulgaria	7.8m	800.000	10.3%
Czech Republic	10.3m	300.000	2.9%
Hungary	10.1m	600.000	5.9%
Romania	22.4m	2.000.000	8.9%
Slovakia	5.4m	520.000	9.6%
Serbia	7.4m	360.000	5.7%

(Adapted from Liegeois & Gheorghe 1995)

For example, the Slovak Republic has one of the largest Gypsy populations in Europe — current estimates by local authorities put the total number between 420.000 and 500.000, or close to 10% of the total population (World Bank 2001). Because of the higher birth rates among Gypsies than other population groups, their share is likely to rise in coming years: recent demographic projection suggested that, given current trends, Gypsies could become a majority in the Slovak Republic by 2060 (Anon 2001).

Early in this century, the Gypsies in Slovakia, as elsewhere in Europe, formed a separate community, living on the social periphery of the mainstream population. Gypsies were perceived by Slovaks as a particularly anti-social and criminal group (Farnam 2002). This attitude was reflected in the policy of collecting special police

evidence — such as collecting fingerprints from members of Gypsy groups, a law about wandering Gypsies, and so forth. During the Second World War, approximately 6 to 7 thousand Roma from Bohemia and Moravia died in a concentration camp at Auschwitz (*ibid*). It is estimated that 90 % of the Gypsies with a domicile in occupied Czechoslovakia perished. After World War II, the policy of the state was oriented toward one of assimilation of the Gypsies. The so-called “Gypsy question” involved financial motivation for Gypsy women to undergo sterilization. Today, most Slovak Gypsies live in filthy rural settlements and urban ghettos. More are being moved by the officials into segregated areas each month. Despite pressure from the European Union to reintegrate national minorities, several towns in eastern Slovakia have recently passed laws banning Gypsies from entering the city limits, let alone living inside them (*ibid*). Ninety-five percent of the Gypsy population in eastern Slovakia is unemployed, and almost all Gypsy children in Slovakia attend segregated schools with a remedial curriculum designed for the mentally retarded.

In Bulgaria, Gypsies inhabit almost all regions in the country. In some towns they exceed one-third of the population, like in Sliven, Lom, and Maglizh (Tomova 1995). There are Gypsy neighborhoods in almost all cities. Many of the homes there fall short of the sanitary standards. In Bulgaria, Gypsies constitute a heterogeneous community (Marushiakova & Popov 1997); they profess different religions and speak different languages. In addition, the economic stratification is quite marked. Some of the Gypsies qualify themselves as comfortably well off even though that portion accounts for no more than 5%. The great majority live in total poverty. As in other counties in Central and Eastern Europe, Gypsies have specific demographic behavior. Early marriages are a traditional custom: 40% of the Gypsies get married before they turn 16 and 80 % before they become 18. Generally, at that point they discontinue their education. Their fertility rate ranks highest in comparison with all other ethnic groups (Noncheva 2000). The big family model is traditional for the Gypsy in Bulgaria. About a quarter of all families have three or more children, while such families account for 1–3 percent of the other ethnic groups in Bulgaria. Also, the lowest income levels are typical of the Gypsies. On the other hand, almost half of the Gypsies are recipients of social assistance services, their only formal source of income. Poverty and poor living

conditions are factors contributing to Gypsy health status deterioration. As one survey indicates, many individuals of Gypsy origin have never visited a physician or had their children vaccinated (*ibid*). The Gypsy child mortality rate is much higher than that of the Bulgarians: 240 per 1,000 versus 40 per 1,000, and some diseases like tuberculosis is three times more frequent. The degree of unemployment is three times higher than the national average. The low level of education is a typical social risk for the young people of Gypsy origin. Dropping out and low school attendance are among the social problems of this ethnic group in Bulgaria.

In Hungary, the situation is similar. The population of Gypsies in Hungary, as arrived at by various estimates made over the past 100 years, has risen at a rate exceeding the increase of the population as a whole (Bereczkei 1993). In the 1990s their proportion of the population has been put at 4%. The rise in number and proportion arises from the high fertility rate — more than twice than of the country in total. Their age composition, again because of high fertility, is dominated by the young, with around one-third being children. They live in ethnically and linguistically closed household-family units, and have a low tendency to assimilate. As for regional distribution, more than 60% live in villages, a great number in very small villages. Their level of education falls well below of the non-Gypsy population.

And while socio-economic issues related to Gypsies are becoming the focus of political debates in Europe, their health status is rarely discussed. In regards to Gypsy health, there are three indicators drawing attention: a life expectancy significantly below national averages, high neonatal mortality and high infant mortality rates. Research carried out in France, Spain and Greece in 2001 by the *Médecins du Monde* reveals that high Gypsy infant and neonatal mortality and short life-span are very widespread. A similar situation is found in countries of the European Union. In Gypsy population, the neonatal mortality index is about 19 per 1000, as against 2.2 per 1000 in France in 1996, whereas infant mortality reaches about 23.5 per 1,000, as against 4.8 in France in 1996 (*Medecins du Monde* 2001:1). Gypsy life expectancy in most countries surveyed is about 50–60 years old, and as such is considerably below the national averages of the European Union countries (*ibid.*, Reyniers 2000).



No doubt, Gypsy poverty, isolation and prejudice against them contribute to their short life expectancy and infant mortality. However, the Gypsy culture in itself can sometimes increase risk for certain illnesses and add to the present-day situation they are faced with. For example, there is a widespread resistance to infant and childhood vaccinations/immunizations (Save the Children 2001). 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.

Recent medical genetic research on Gypsies has identified a number of previously known but today globally rare conditions, caused by private founder mutations in the Gypsy population. Epidemiological data on the reported gene frequencies for both private and imported mutations among Gypsies in Europe often exceed by an order of extent those of global populations (Kalaydjieva, Gresham & Calafell 2001). Carrier rates for a number of disorders that affect Gypsy population have been estimated to be 5 to 20% range. Further, galactokinase deficiency affects 1 in 5000 Gypsy children, while its worldwide frequency is 1:150.000, or 1:1.000.000 (*ibid.*). Also, autosomal dominant polycystic kidney disease has a global frequency of 1:1000 individuals, and 1:40 among the Gypsies in Hungary; primary congenital glaucoma ranges between 1:5000 and 1:22.000 worldwide, and about 1:400 among the Gypsy in Central Slovakia. Also, nine Mendelian disorders caused by "private" Gypsy mutations have been described, like some novel neurological disorders: hereditary motor and sensory neuropathies (type Lom and Russe), and the congenital cataracts facial dysmorphism neuropathy syndrome.

Geneticists conclude:

With the exception of phenylketonuria, Mendelian disorders have been described as genetically homogenous, with a single mutation accounting for all affected individuals and related polymorphic haplotypes unambiguously indicating a common origin and founder effect (Kalaydjieva, Gresham & Calafell 2001:6).

The importance on consanguinity in affected Gypsy population places the focus on patterns of their traditional behavior. Gypsy social segregation and centuries old traditional norm of endogamy lead to an increase in consanguineous marriages, and thus an increased risk for birth defects. Also, crowded living conditions lead to an increased incidence of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory infections and hepatitis. Gypsy infants are more likely to be born prematurely and low birth weight due to a lack of prenatal care (Bereckei 1993).

According to an evolutionary perspective, people are designed by natural selection to be fitness-maximizers (Daly and Wilson 1983). Gypsies are experiencing high reproductive rates and the increase in the relative size of their populations. On the other hand, at 1.3 children per woman, post-Communist states have the lowest fertility levels in the world — even lower than the 1.6 average of Western Europe (World Health Organization). United Nations (UN) research predicts that the population in the region will decrease by one-third in the first half of this century.

The sudden change in reproductive behavior and fertility rates is a topic of debate among scientists as well as in mass media. The low fertility rates in modern, industrialized countries is said to represent a major challenge for those who attempt to explain human behavior from an evolutionary approach. It is a fact that many people in societies worldwide voluntarily reproduce at lower levels than a century ago; this change in reproduction begun in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe and continues still today in Central and Eastern European countries. The so-called demographic transition is characterized by a decline in number of children that parents raise, in spite of general increases in the availability of resources.

In most Central and Eastern European countries fertility rates changed probably as the result of the pro-natal policies employed by the most governments in the region. During the 80s the fertility rates were above replacement in some countries (Romania, ex-Yugoslavia), and below in others (Bulgaria, Slovak Republic), while the mean age at birth of the 1<sup>st</sup> child was very low in all the countries (Philipov 2002). The prevalent pattern was a two-children family model. This period also brought about significant postponement of births. The prevailing explanation of the reduced fertility rates in Central and Eastern European region relates to the social and econo-



mic hardships experienced by population at large in the countries from the region: growth in the direct costs of having children as a consequence of the down of income. However, the Gypsies or Roma are amongst the population groups worst hit by the unemployment in all countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and yet, they are experiencing high birth rates and the relative increase in size. Especially intriguing for an evolutionary approach, according to Borgerhoff-Mulder (1998), is the fact that the poor outreproduce the wealthy ones.

On the other hand, statistics must be used with proper care. The care is based on determining correlations and "fitting them into wholes":

Statistics have a way of revealing real categories in life, but they also send one upon many false scents... For example, one learns little or nothing of various kinds of human beings if one counts only single characteristics. On the other hand, if one counts a wide variety of numerable features and finds one human group distinguishing itself again and again within this wide variety, one is justified in thinking one is dealing with a class of which the individuals are instances (Arensberg 1988:50).

As long as birth rates remain at their present levels, for the Gypsies and non-Gypsies populations in Central and Eastern Europe, the threatening their effects are on the size and age structure of both populations. The behavior of the society as a whole is defined by its demography (Wilson 2000). Demographic developments in Central and Eastern Europe could have a number of serious economic, social, political, psychological and other consequence that are a potential source of social conflict. Giving the size of the "Gypsy problem" and its tendency, the demographic factor could become among the most destabilizing ones.

### Modern Evolutionary Theory

This book attempts to explain Gypsy reproductive behavior by applying concepts drawn from evolutionary psychology.

Modern Darwinism is the grand unifying force that social sciences very much need for internal coherence. The application of evolutionary theory and sociobiology

offers the prospect of characterizing human nature with greater objectivity and precision... It is the ultimate underpinning of the social sciences and a beckoning mystery to the natural sciences. To grasp human nature objectively, to explore it to the depths scientifically, and to comprehend its ramifications by cause-and-effect explanations leading from biology into culture, would be to approach if not attain the grail of scholarship... (Wilson 2000:vii).

Evolution occurs as a result of natural selection, proposed Charles Darwin in 1858. Darwin was a naturalist who was attempting to explain how organisms came to have the various traits they exhibit, and he discovered that when certain traits that had some chance of being inherited helped individuals leave descendants, those traits in a similar environment tended to increase in frequency, along with the descendants. This discovery of natural selection identified the main cause of the persistence and change in frequencies of inheritable traits (Wilson 1978, Daly and Wilson 1983). At that time, Darwin was unaware of the fundamental mechanisms of inheritance — genes, which were yet to be discovered. In 1930s several biologists put together what has been termed the modern synthesis, bringing together Darwin's natural selection and biology, but applying it to the gene pools rather than traits.

However, intellectual roots of human sociobiology lie in developments within the evolutionary biology of the 1960s. The modern theory of evolution combines Darwinian selection and Mendel's discovery that inheritance is based on the transfer from parent to offspring of particulate units, or genes, which generally remain unchanged although they are shuffled and reshuffled in the course of succeeding generations (Symons 1979).

Sociobiology seeks to determine general principles and then test them against all social animals, including humans. Universal human social and behavioral traits (common to all people) can be explained in terms of the same biological principles that apply to other

animal species (Wilson 1975). Daly and Wilson summarized basic sociobiological theory, concentrating especially on *Homo sapiens*:

There are still many scientists who would exclude *H. sapiens* from sociobiological analysis. Some argue that other animals pursue evolved fitness interests, while people pursue acquired psychological goals; some argue that language or culture or volition or self-awareness exempts us from the evolutionary principles applying to all other creatures. We are unmoved by these arguments, which seem to us to be founded on bankrupt dichotomies of biology versus culture and nature versus nurture. All behavior requires ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic explanation, and all animals pursue proximate "psychological" satisfactions whose connection to fitness are indirect and disruptable. People are obviously very special animals, but we are convinced that the same body of evolutionary theory is applicable to all creatures (Daly and Wilson 1983: v).

Natural selection as the major unifying force in biology and Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection remains unchallenged by serious contenders after more than a century of debate (Dunbar 1982). One of the fundamental ideas underlying an evolutionary approach to behavior is that through the process of natural selection organisms become adapted to their environment (MacDonald 1988).

Natural selection proceeds on several different levels at the same time. Natural selection operates on phenotypes, the actual animals that live and die and breed more or less successfully. An organism's phenotype — its observable structure and behavior — is the product of the interaction of its genotype and environment in which it developed and exists.

Most sociobiologists/evolutionary psychologists agree that human activity is only an evolutionary adaptation if it resulted in greater reproductive success for the ancestral population. In evolutionary terms, successful reproduction means producing offspring that are themselves successful at reproducing. In the language of evolutionary biology, an organism's fitness is a measure of the extent to which it succeeds, compared with other members of the population, in passing on its genes to the next generation (Symons 1992: 144–148). An organism is reproductively successful or unsuccessful



only compared with other members of the population, and in this sense, reproductive competition is inevitable. Selection can favor organisms who promote not only their individual fitness but also the fitnesses of individuals with whom they share genes by common descent (*ibid.*) That is, selection is for maximization of inclusive fitness, which is the sum of individual's own fitness plus its influence on the fitnesses of organisms, other than his direct descendants, with whom it shares genes by common descent (Hamilton 1964).

On the other hand, much of human behavior is cultural, and evolutionary explanations of human behavior could not be considered complete if they cannot account for culture and traditions. The essence of Darwin's discovery is that when certain traits that had some chances of being inherited helped individuals to leave descendants, those traits in similar environment tended to increase in frequency along with the descendants. Natural selection, therefore, is to explain the persistence and change in frequencies of inheritable traits — inheritable phenotypes. The point is that natural selection operates directly on phenotypes, not genotypes: "It is not the genes that live or die, breed or help their relatives, but the realized animal. The result is that both phenotypes and gene pools evolve" (Daly and Wilson 1983:32). The core of Darwin's finding is that anything inheritable and replicable is likely to influence its own frequency in subsequent generation. Because Darwin knew nothing about genes, the discovery of Darwinian selection does not imply genes (Steadman 1992). What it does imply are inheritable, replicable traits. Because genes are inheritable and replicable, their frequency will be influenced by the effect they have on their "host's" success in leaving descendants. This should be also true of traditions, which are also both replicable and inheritable. Traditions are the key to understanding of much of the human behavior. Traditions are culture that has been transmitted from ancestor to descendant: culture acquired from ancestors is distinctive and distinguished by coming from individuals who have been successful in leaving descendants.

Some behaviors are so successful that they are persistently retained from generation to generation across all cultures. The human transmission of culture — learned, copied behavior — from ancestor to descendant is what is meant by tradition. 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 (Stedman 1995). Traditions can be seen as a system of information, support and guidance, which serve as "cultural supplements" (Steadman and Palmer 1994:173). Traditions 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 descendants-leaving success of their ancestors. This model is named "descendant-leaving-strategy", to distinguish from those models focused on reproductive success only (Palmer & Steadman 1997). What we are studying today, are actually traits that have had descendants-leaving success over a very large number of generations, whether or not they caused great reproductive success for any given generation.

Therefore, we can attempt to explain the persistence and spread of a particular behavior in the same way as any stable, inheritable phenotype, that is, by its contribution to an individual's success in leaving descendants. Consequently, the primary interest of sociobiology is in behavior, and how individuals behave.

Many areas of social sciences could gain from the explicit application of an evolutionary approach. For instance, within anthropology, the study of ethnicity has done little to increase the understanding of ethnic competition and violence that so troubles the people of many countries of the world (Steadman 1992). Ethnic favoritism may be both the main benefit of being a member of an ethnic group, and at the same time the main problem in the world today. For example, the clashes between different ethnic groups characterize much of the modern world. From an evolutionary perspective, a violent conflict is a special case of competition, that pays-off only under certain circumstances (Wilson 2000). In fact, competition can have strong effects without any behavior that is aggressive in the usual sense of the word: the major examples in the modern world are peaceful migration between states, high rates of reproduction of one ethnic group within multiethnic states and discrimination in economic affairs (Salter 2002).

Evolutionary psychologists have attempted to explain the reproductive behavior of different groups in terms of life history theory. In biology, life history theory organizes research into the evoluti-

onary forces shaping the timing of life events, with a particular focus on age-schedules of fertility and mortality (Kaplan, Hill, Hurtado & Lancaster 2001:293). According to life history theory, each species or subspecies has developed a characteristic life history adapted to the particular ecological problems met by its ancestors (Wilson 1975). A life-history is a "genetically organized suite of characters that evolved in coordinate manner as to allocate energy to survival, growth and reproduction" (Rushton 1996:38). Daly and Wilson (1983:221) define it as "a species-characteristic adaptive schedule for the expenditure of reproductive effort over the lifetime".

The most influential general scheme that has been proposed is that of *r*- versus *K*-strategists, where "*r*" and "*K*" are symbols that are used to define two ends of a hypothetical continuum that involves a tradeoff between offspring production and parental care (Rushton 2000). Both *r*- and *K*-strategists have the same goal: the increase of their genes in succeeding generations. In modern biology, the quantity *r* is a measure of the intrinsic rate of increase of the size of a population that has been freed from resource limitations, which is expressed, for instance, as the increment in total population size per thousand adults per year (Daly & Wilson 1983). In due course, a growing population must come up against a resource limitation and cease to expand. The maximum population that a species can maintain in a particular habitat is its carrying capacity for that habitat, symbolized by *K* (ibid.:199). An *r*-strategist, or an *r*-selected species, is a creature that has been shaped by natural selection to maximize *r* because circumstances in the evolutionary history of the species have repeatedly permitted rapid population growth. In an *r*-strategist, selection will pressure to maximize the capacity for rapid, prolific breeding because the quickest breeders will win the largest share of the expanding gene pool during each population explosion. A *K*-selected species, on the other hand, is the one whose adaptations are more concerned with survival and reproduction when the population is at or near *K*, the maximum that the habitat can support.

In terms of family characteristics, *r*- and *K*-strategists differ in total number of offspring, rates of infant mortality, and degree of parental care. Rushton (2000) has suggested that the characteristics shared by *r*-strategists include: higher levels of individuality (e.g., higher incidence of law breaking), more permissive sexual attitudes,



higher sexual intercourse frequencies, weaker pair bonds, low parental investment, shorter life expectancy, and lower intelligence. On the other hand, K-strategists share, among other characteristics, lower levels of sexuality, aggression, and impulsive behavior. They tend to develop greater family stability and longevity, and they put more time and care into their offspring. They work together in getting food, helping kin, and they have more complex social systems.

The primarily focus of sociobiologists is on the evolutionary origins of between-species differences. Species are only relatively *r* and *K*. Yet the theory of evolution also requires that there is a difference to within species. It follows that some humans are better *K*-strategists than others: humans are very *K* when compared to other species, though some people and groups are more *K* than others (Rushton 2000). Populations adopting the lesser *K*-strategy to egg production are predicted to allocate a larger percentage of physical resources to other aspects of reproductive effort.

In Serbia, Gypsies have been a part of the society since the middle ages, but their integration is poor. Although some intermarriage occurred in Serbia, Gypsies remained largely endogamous and therefore a separate ethnic group. In the former Yugoslavia, ethnic competition and violence characterized much of the past. In such multi-ethnic societies competition may include warfare between different ethnic groups over territory, the control of which traditionally facilitated reproduction and development of cultural and economic traditions. The benefit of ethnic control over a territory is obvious—it helps a particular group to carry on its genes and traditions into subsequent generations (Salter 2002). A recent example of successful genetic competition in multi-ethnic society using warfare is the conflict between the Serbs and Albanians. The latter is the largest national minority group in Serbia. The Serb-dominated Yugoslav state attempted to suppress Albanian separatists in Kosovo, an effort frustrated by NATO. Subsequently, organized violence by Albanian forces resulted in the almost total displacement of Serbs from their ancient territory. Today, the Gypsies, or Roma, form the second largest ethnic group in the multi-ethnic state of Serbia. Their migration to Balkans and Serbian territories has been called a “peaceful migration” (Vukadinović 1983). However, a competition between diffe-

rent ethnic groups does not have to be violent, and competitors may unwittingly outbreed each other (Wilson 2000). In sociobiology, the measure of a trait's success is successful reproduction.

A pioneering Hungarian study by Bereczkei (1993) reported that Gypsies were relatively "r-selected" (more offspring, less parental care for each) when compared to non-Gypsy Hungarians. Bereczkei (1993) claimed the Gypsy r-strategy was a result of a mix of both genetic and cultural predispositions. Some studies have proposed that people with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to have a K-strategy profile than those of lower status, as seen in variables such as sexuality, mortality, reproduction and health (Jensen, 1985; Weinrich, 1977; but see Rushton & Bogaert, 1988). The argument is that differences in reproductive and sexual behavior are the result of differences in the stability of the social environment and resource predictability that are expected by people of different social status, and where education, income and profession play a major role. It is precisely this behavior of Gypsies in Serbia that is examined here along an r-and K scale.

In Europe, the Gypsy population tends to suffer disproportionately from higher rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, crime and disease. At the same time, Gypsies present a growing population in all parts of Europe: in the populations of the post-communist states Gypsies number between 3 and 10%, and their birth-rate is more than twice the national averages. So, the question is why a demographic transition path is not taken by the Gypsies?

There are two hypotheses that could explain Gypsy reproductive and sexual behavior.

### *The first:*

Gypsies' sexual and reproductive behaviors are a result of their ethnic traditional strategy that encourages endogamy and high fertility. Gypsy ethnicity became a complex issue due to the historical and political circumstances they have encountered in Europe: most Gypsies do not consider themselves members of a unified group, but identify with the subgroup to which they belong, whose language and religion depend on its location and circumstances (Čvorović 2003a). In Central and Eastern Europe today, the only common distinctive feature these various Gypsy "tribes" share is their pronata-

list, endogamous tradition, which obviously has helped Gypsies so far to survive and leave descendants, retaining their group uniqueness at the same time. Therefore their situation, characterized by segregation and a low socio-economic position, could be in part, self-imposed. This results from their traditional refusal to accept, and become a part of the larger hierarchy of their host populations, where kinship remains an important basis of cooperation, especially in the Balkans, and where a lot of what passes for ethnicity at the local level is actually kinship.

If this hypothesis is true, then wealth, socioeconomic status and environmental predictability will not have an affect on Gypsy reproductive strategy.

*The second hypothesis:*

The Gypsy pattern of reproduction is a result not of their traditions but of their poverty, characterized by high levels of fertility, illegitimacy, crime, illiteracy and welfare. The poor with high fertility have the assurance that the state welfare, or "transfer payments" will keep their babies alive above the level of starvation (van den Berghe 1979). Gypsies' chances of upward mobility into the middle class are few and remote—they have almost no middle class to aspire to. Alternatively, to have an additional child is a source of income, for many Gypsies, maybe the only certain one. So, why not have more children? If this is true, then relatively better-off Gypsies, who do not need social assistance to live, will have fewer children than the general Gypsy population, and will invest more in each. One way of this investment would be to send Gypsy children to schools, so they could become integrated into society, find better jobs, etc.

These hypotheses were tested on Serbian Gypsies in Mačva. The state of Serbia recently underwent the demographic transition, has relatively large populations of Gypsies, and during the communist regime, its government pursued a pronatalist/welfare policy, which might be relevant to Gypsy birth rates today. Several levels of data collecting and analysis were employed to test the predictions listed above which include: fieldwork among several Gypsy groups, comparison of all data on demographic assessment, specific economic, cultural and social forces encouraging or discouraging high fertility, and marriage patterns among Gypsies.



## Gypsies in Serbia

*[former] Yugoslavia is the one and only country of gourmands...  
In other countries, if you don't work, you don't have anything to eat,  
but in Yugoslavia, you can eat and drink and don't have to work at all!*

Dragoslav Jovanović, a Gypsy from Mačva

The first written document referring to Gypsies in Serbia dates from 1348, when Stefan Dušan, the Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks presented some Gypsy slaves to the monastery of Prizren, in Kosovo (Djordjević 1924). 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 (Vukadinović 1983). In the Balkans, through centuries of Turkish rule, Gypsies were strictly endogamous: even the godfathers or best men at their weddings were Gypsies.

In the past, the extended family was their social unit, and the occupational niches they filled contributed to the Serbian economy. In Serbia, their traditional occupations made them a part of the economy, which benefited both Gypsies and non-Gypsies. The traditional Gypsy occupations include crafts like trough-making, basket-making, spoon-making, blacksmithing, ironsmithing and entertaining (music). Although they made a contribution to the agriculturally based Serbian economy, they were despised by the Serbian peasantry; craftsmen in general were held to be in a low social position, always occupying an isolated and the lowest status in the society (Djordjević 1932). In time, Gypsy artisan products became indispensable, especially in Serbian low land areas, where they could make a living by selling their crafts. By 1884, by an order of Serbian law, all Gypsies had to settle down, and their nomadic life mostly ceased.

Gypsies live in all parts of Serbia. The largest number are in the South Morava Region (4.2 per cent of the total population) and the Nis Region (1.4 per cent of the total). In some municipalities in these two regions they account for as much as one third of the population: Surdulica, Bujanovac, Bojnik and Vladičin Han. These regions and municipalities are among the least developed in Serbia (Save the Children 2001). In the past, some intermarriage occurred between the Gypsies and Serbs, especially in places where Gypsies became fully assimilated with the local culture (Djordjević 1932). The incidence of intermarriage, however, was low, and to this day, Gypsies have remained a separate ethnic group.

### Ethnicity

Inventing traditions, including nations and ethnicity, is a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past (Hobsbawm 1983). The actual process of creating such ritual and symbolic complexes has not been adequately studied — much of it is still rather obscure. The invention of tradition occurs more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which “old” traditions had been designed. Within anthropology, and among critics outside the discipline, there is a suspicion that the invention of culture and tradition are politically revisionist and anti-native queries (Linnekin 1991). The apprehension is, that writing about the contemporary construction or invention of tradition undercuts the cultural authority of the studied peoples by calling into question their authenticity. In this sense, authenticity is equated with the transmission through time of a tradition (Handler 1986). The main problem is that the way the issue of invented tradition is represented and understood outside the anthropological discipline. Even when such invented traditions are revealed to be an intellectual ploy, the issue remains emotional and political for the peoples studied, particularly for those who are engaged in a struggle for political recognition.

As pointed out before, the Roma/Gypsies are probably of northern Indian origin. Still today, it is unclear why they left India, and there are no explanatory written documents. From linguistic influences preserved it is most likely that Gypsy major migration route

passed through Persia, Armenia, Greece and the Slavic-speaking parts of the Balkans. Many early European historical sources refer to the Gypsies as Egyptians (Fraser 1992). According to historical sources, the Gypsies themselves spread out the legend about their Egyptian origin; they represented themselves as dukes, kings and princes from Egypt. The inventive process of Gypsy traditions in Europe had begun: "In the entire chronicle of Gypsy history, the greatest trick of all was the one played on western Europe in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century" (ibid.:62). Gypsies/Roma had begun their sojourn in Europe by taking advantage of the Christian piety of the age. Since it was a Christian obligation to help pilgrims, especially the ones with documents of recommendation from rulers, the Gypsies created letters of passage from high government officials such as King Sigismund of Hungary, representing themselves as penitents for the sins of their ancestors who had rejected Christian teachings in Egypt. As a result of the sins of their ancestors, they were required to wander the earth as pilgrims seeking charity from others (Fraser 1992, Djordjević 1932).

Many anthropologists have argued in recent decades that "culture" and "tradition" are anything but stable realities handed down intact from generation to generation. Tradition, for instance, is now understood to be an invention designed to serve contemporary purposes: "to read the present in terms of the past by writing the past in terms of the present" (Lindstrom 1982:317, cited in Hanson 1989:890). When a particular group invents its own traditions is it usually to legitimate or sanctify some current reality or aspiration. When, on the other hand, people invent traditions for others, and treat them as their inventions were the actual state of affairs, the invention of tradition for subordinate peoples becomes a part of the asymmetrical relationship of power (Hanson 1989).

The Roma/Gypsy ethnic traditions form an excellent context in which to situate these issues. In time, due to the assimilation processes and manipulation with their own ethnicity, many Roma today deny their Roma ancestry. Firstly, not all Roma people refer to themselves as Roma. Some prefer the European term *cigani* or *zigeuner*. Secondly, some European groups/tribes of Roma reject the connection with Roma people in general, like the Sinti and Manouches



(Mirga & Mruz 1997). This holds to be exceptionally true for the Roma/Gypsy ethnic/minority group in Serbia.

Today, Gypsies are perhaps the most segregated ethnic group in Europe. The same is probably true for Serbia. In Serbia, Gypsies form a complex mixture of groups. In fact, there are a quite few subgroups of Gypsies in Serbia. Some of them lost the Romani language and their mother tongue is now Serbian. There are different forms of Romani depending on which group the Gypsy belongs to. Interaction between different groups is limited, and the form of Romani spoken is an important means of distinguishing between groups (Čvorović 2003a). Furthermore, Gypsies have always come under several appellations and names. Each group represents a historical and originally to a certain extent, localized entity. Gypsies always depended on the needs and contacts with their host countries, as a source of their livelihood; many times Gypsies adopted their hosts' culture in response to the different requirements of their social and environmental surroundings. The result is the great diversity of Gypsy tribes and the lack of identity as of an integrated ethnic group. Therefore, Gypsy culture in general is extremely diverse and difficult to pinpoint. Their ethnicity is also disputed and 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 (*ibid*). Within these subgroups, language and religion also remain diverse; the religion which a Gypsy tribe or ethnicity might hold on is to depend on location and circumstances. A significant characteristic of Gypsies as a group is their adaptability to religious and political changes. Their religious and political standings depended always on the current political climate. For example, some contemporary Christian Gypsies are ex-Muslims.

Until very recently, the characteristic of all groups was that they did not mix with each other — there appeared to be a strongly emphasized antagonism among the groups. A system that divides these groups, much like a caste system, still exists in some parts of Serbia today. In the past, with respect to other Gypsies, allowable marriage choices were largely restricted. Females in particular, were expected to marry someone within their particular tribe and most obeyed the rule by marrying within their group (*ibid*).

In Serbia, the characteristic of the Gypsy as an ethnic group is the so called "ethnic mimicry" or "favored identity", by which Gypsies declare themselves members of the majority community. According to 1991 census, there were 140,237 Roma/Gypsy in Serbia, which is 1.4%. Today, official estimates of Serbia's true Gypsies range between 360–500,000, compared to 7,478,820. Serbs (Save the Children 2001). On the other hand, many Roma consider themselves to be Serbs, belonging to a specific Roma/Gypsy subgroup. For example, the president of one local Roma association in the village of Cedar, in Mačva, comments:

We just got a status of national minority from the officials. Some asked for it, and got it. I haven't. We were cigani before, now we are Roma. I don't care. I'm a Serbian cigan and Serbian cigan I will stay. But now we have the title: Roma.

Another informant from the same village, who declare himself as Roma, argues:

The word Rom means a man, but for me, it actually means that you should not be ashamed to say that you are a Rom/cigani. On the other hand, we say that we are Roma, but we live together with our peasants [Serbs], we have the same customs and the same religion, and the only thing that differs us, is our face color!

The "favored identity" matter is evident from the following statement of a Karavlox Gypsy, from the village of Dogwood, also in Mačva:

We were all born in Serbia: my grand-grand father and his father, my father, and myself. My ancestors came from Romania, but I feel I belong here. We always behave like Serbs. I have never felt like a Gypsy, ever. We all declared as Serbs, on all censuses. In this village, we don't speak Gypsy language. We speak Serbian, and we know some Romanian, but just a few phrases. We are not Roma, the others [people from other villages] are.

Yet another variant of the Gypsy "favored identity" is the construction of the new ethnic identities and new traditions. Among

Gypsies, these new identities and traditions assume to restore an ancient origin, in spite of the complexity to attest its legality and even obvious contradictions to historical records. A notorious example of the invented tradition and change in the identity of the ethnic group usually called Gypsies is the emergence of the Egyptian community in Serbia and Kosovo. The invention of Roma/Egyptian/Ashkali ethnicity had been going on for a few decades, taking various forms in that time, and anthropological interpretations and misinterpretations have joined the contributions of other scholars, government officials and Roma themselves in the inventive process. The important question is: does anthropology, as one of the inventing instruments in the latest invention of the Roma — namely, the Egyptians and Ashkali cases — raise doubt that anthropological accounts do not represent cultural reality?

In fact, the Egyptians in various regions in the Balkans were known under various names: Jedjupci, Gjupci, Egjup, Adjupci, or Jevg, for example (Djordjević 1932, Vukanović 1983). These various appellations were used for Muslim Roma ethnic groups in Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. In Montenegro, for example, their terms are connected with their traditional occupations: they are also known as Kovaci (Blacksmiths) or Ashkali (charcoal-burners) in Kosovo, the occupations traditionally reserved for the Roma in Balkans. In time, most of these local groups have lost their Romani language and heritage, and accepted the language and customs of the surrounding majority.

The term “invented tradition” here includes traditions actually invented, constructed and formally instituted, emerging in a less traceable manner within a brief and datable period (Hobsbawm 1983). The whole process of publicly establishing a new identity of the Egyptians came to the surface in the 1970s; in the 1991 census for the former Yugoslavia, the Egyptians are mentioned and noted for the first time. The census data reveals there are around 6.355 Egyptians. However, according to the 1995 Egyptian internal census there were around 85.000 of Egyptians in Kosovo (Zemon 2001). In 1999, at the onset of NATO bombing, during the peace-talk in Rambouillet an Egyptian named Abazi, a member of the Serbian delegation argued:



There are around 150.000 Egyptians in the Kosovo area today. We don't know the Romani language, but use only Albanian. Our children attend Albanian schools. We don't mix with other nations or with Roma. We don't celebrate Djurdjev-dan [Gypsy slava-saint patron's day]. Many centuries ago, the Turks have moved us from Egypt to Kosovo (V. Nedeljković 2002).

Soon, the Egyptians established themselves as a separate, though "imagined" community (Anderson 1996). Actually, the key element in their identity is the question of their ethno- genesis. Several scholars have joined their efforts with those of Egyptians leaders to make up a distinctive interpretation of historical documentations that serve as the foundation of the creation and development of this particular community (see S. Nedeljković 2003, Marashuikova et al. 2001, Zemon 2001, Courthiades 1999). Their connection with Egypt is allegedly justified by historical data. As mentioned before, the first Roma/Gypsies to arrive in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe claimed to be counts, dukes or even kings from "Little Egypt", and therefore, their names of Gypsies, Gitanos of the Greek Guftoi, all derived from the Egyptian name (Djordjević 1932, Fraser 1992). The particular "Egyptian" myth is traced down to Moldon, where a hill near the Western Greek town was called Gyppe, from Egypt, and was allegedly settled by Gypsies/Roma. However, the region was always known for its Roma settlements but never for "true" Egyptians who could have settled there under Ottoman domination. Moreover, the Arabic language was never spoken in the Balkans (Laederich 2000). Nevertheless, folk stories about ancient Egypt origin still live in oral traditions even among some Roma groups today, who are well aware of their India origin. For instance, the Gurbeti Gypsy group from the Bramble village in Mačva declares themselves to be Roma: they acknowledge the fact that their ancestors came from India. However, these Gypsies/Roma trace back the origin of their Djurdjevdan celebration to ancient Egypt. According to their oral tradition, St. George was an Egyptian soldier, who killed a dragon and saved one Roma community in ancient Egypt.

Meanwhile, the struggle to establish and maintain the Egyptians as a separate community took various forms. Various associations, parties and foundations are established for this purpose. Many

of their recently established cultural associations and clubs bear the names like "Pyramid", "Little Egypt", "Nefertiti" and so on (Zemon 2001). At the same time, various media have developed for the same purpose: magazine and journal publications, scientific and pseudo-scientific books attempted to establish and cement the Egyptians folklore and "ancient" history. Also, many symbols related to ancient Egypt, like the photographs of Pharaohs, Cleopatra or pyramids are being displayed during gatherings as a confirmation of their true identity (S. Nedeljković 2003). In the meantime, the Egyptian leaders and scholars still struggle to influence and convince the wider community, as well as the Egyptians themselves that "...among this [Egyptians] ethnic community, there is an ethno-psychological self-confidence of belonging to a collective ethnic entity, different than other surrounding ethnicities... This [Egyptian] ethno-psychological self-confidence is taken to be... the most important ethnical category which speaks about the distinctiveness of one community" (Zemon 2001: 66-67, my translation).

And while the Egyptian elite tries to distance and repel from the Roma ethnic group, many of "the Egyptians" perceive themselves as Roma: they consider themselves to be Roma, they speak Romani language, and some even participate actively in various Roma associations (S. Nedeljković 2003, P. Polansky 2003, personal communication). Some, on the other hand, declare themselves to be Albanians, Macedonians or Turks, depending on the circumstances and current political climate. In fact, the Egyptians speak the languages of the surrounding populations. In Kosovo, for instance, their native language is Albanian, but they use Romani and Turkish almost equally; in Macedonia and Serbia, they speak Albanian and Serbian. Furthermore, in spite of the allegedly encouraged endogamy, the Egyptians all freely intermarry other "ethnic" groups: in Kosovo, they intermarry with Roma and Ashkali (Laederich 2000, P. Polansky, p.c., May 2003).

Nonetheless, in spite of the efforts of the Egyptian elite, the ethnic identity of the Egyptians is still rather depleted and uncertain of its memberships values and obligations. However, in time and with enough of repetition of the invented traditional elements, political and media pressures and encouraged endogamy, these elements may become "real" ethnical symbols for the Egyptians.



Following the Kosovo war, after the former Yugoslavia was defeated and the territory was handed over to ethnic Albanians, yet a new minority emerged: the Ashkali. Many scholars identify the Ashkali group as Albanian speaking Roma (P. Polansky, p.c., 2003, V. Nedeljković 2002, Vukanović 1983). In the past, the name "Ashkali" was used to assign the Roma ethnic group in southern Serbia and Kosovo; they were Muslim Gypsies, who gradually lost their Romani language and adopted the language and customs of the Albanian minority (Vukanović 1983:138). Their traditional occupations included blacksmithing and coppersmithing. Today, most Roma from Kosovo consider the Ashkali as well as the Egyptians to be Albanian speaking Roma (P. Polansky, personal communication); according to the Egyptians, the Ashkali are pure Egyptians who deliberately hid their identity, and the word "ashkali" comes from an Albanian word for charcoal (see also Marushiakova et. al 2001). Yet, following the Egyptian example, the Ashkali managed to found a political organization, by which they declared their separate ethnic identity. They claim that there are around 200.000 of Ashkali in Serbia, of whom majority is displaced from Kosovo after the war. The Ashkali in Serbia explicitly stated that they are not Roma/Gypsies, nor Albanians, but a native people from Kosovo, with its own language that only resembles Albanian (V. Nedeljković 2001). The Kosovo Ashkali, on the other hand, state that they came from Egypt; some of them call themselves Hashkali. Thus, they claim that this name was given to them by the Kosovo Roma. Today, they live mostly in Albanian villages, in their own mahallas and follow mainly Albanian customs. In fact, most know their ancestors were Roma, but in their scramble to survive and avoid retaliation and discrimination against the Roma, the Ashkali now deny their Roma roots (P. Polansky, p.c.). In Kosovo, like the Roma themselves, they try to live without working, surviving on pensions and social assistance. The Ashkali community produced several versions of their ethno-genesis and history, based allegedly on their oral traditions and folklore. The basic purpose of creating and inventing this new tradition was probably to distinguish themselves from other Roma and Egyptians. According to one legend, they came originally from Iran, arriving in the Balkans around the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Ashkali adopted the Illyrian language, while the Illyrians adopted the religion of the Ashkali themselves

— Islam (Marushiakova et. al 2001). Another legend holds the Ashkali to be the colonists from ancient Rome, who came from Italy to Albania, and this is why they speak the Albanian language. There is a third legend, too: the Ashkali originated in Askalon, in Biblical Palestine; therefore, the Ashkali originated at most ancient times and relate their name, civilization and culture to another Biblical nation.

The appearance of new communities among Roma is still an on-going process, and one cannot predict how many more will originate in the future. The emergence and existence of the present communities is unique inasmuch as external play has been involved in the "creation" of those new identities. In the former Yugoslavia the beginning of the transition period brought about ethnic competition and conflict that resulted in a decade of wars; during the war and post-war years, in a situation of general ethnic factionism, the Egyptians and Ashkali came out. Before the Kosovo war, the Egyptians and Ashkali declared themselves mostly as Albanians. With the escalation of conflict between on one side Serbia and Macedonia, and on the other, ethnic Albanians, the Albanian speaking Roma emerged as two separate groups. The Serbian and Macedonian officials supported the creation and separation of these groups out of the Albanian national minority: the emergence corresponded with their own political and national interests (S. Nedeljković 2003).

Many of the Roma leaders, on the other hand, resist the emergence of the Egyptians and Ashkali, and actually see this phenomenon as a separatism that weakens the already loose unity of their national minority. One of the Roma leaders in Serbia, Dragan Vasiljkovic, the president of the Roma Union of Western Serbia, argues:

I take them [the Egyptians and Ashkali] to be Roma people. There is no proof that they originated in Egypt, or that they represent a different ethnic entity. What their leaders claim — is just a theory, without any historical evidence and connection. In fact, this is a calculated manipulation in order to avoid and deny their Roma roots, combined with the personal interests of their leaders. Just a decade ago, those same leaders were actively involved in our Roma movement, and today, they declare themselves to be a separate ethnic group — whether the Egyptians or Ashkali (personal communication, May 10, 2003).

The emergence of the Egyptians in Serbian territories is a striking example of the so-called "invented tradition". In the case of the Egyptians, it emerged within a few decades and established itself with great rapidity. The Egyptian newly emerged "ethnic" tradition seeks to infuse certain values and norms of behavior by recurrence, which repeatedly implies continuity with the past. Here, the ethnic group attempts to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. Their invented tradition serves to establish a social cohesion or the membership of a real or artificial group or a community. The producers of such inventions are outsiders as well as insiders: anthropologists often participate in the creative process. On the other hand, the existence of such invented traditions damage the hierarchy and unity among Roma. Hierarchy, which promotes cooperation and reduces competition, is not only the basis of a group/society wealth; it is also the basis of success in competition with outsiders (Steadman 1997).

The current invention of Roma/Egyptians/Ashkali traditions is becoming more and more built-in into those cultures by reason of people talking about them and practicing them. In Serbia, Gypsy culture is an issue in the struggle: "Inventions are common components in the ongoing development of authentic culture...invention is an ordinary event in the development of all discourse" (Hanson 1988:899).

Therefore, the question of "genuine" vs. "invented" tradition among Roma raises some important questions. The logic of cultural invention implies that anthropological knowledge is available to various contending parties, to use in pursuit of their own ends (Linnekin 1991). However, political reading of the issue arises when cultural/tradition invention is explored in contemporary nationalist contexts, for in such situation cultural authenticity is seen as the legitimating merit of group identity: continuity with the past is taken as a test of validity and genuineness about cultural identity (Clifford 1988). What anthropology could see as an advance in cultural theory, could be interpreted, on the other hand, as damaging to native claims to cultural distinctiveness. Conversely, the question remains open: "should we avoid writing about cultural invention as a process, about nationalism, or only about cultural invention in nationalist contexts?" (Linnekin 1991:448). If we take Clifford's (1988) stand



that culture is an ongoing human creation, than, in the case of Serbian Roma, the invention of traditions could be seen as the symbolic construction of social life.

### Ethnicity and Endogamy

In cross-cultural research, an "ethnic unit" or a *cultunit* is usually defined by language, political organization, and territorial contiguity (Abruzzi 1982:15). However, in Serbia various Gypsy groups are divided today on the basis of the language used, they have no common territory and their community organization varies from region to region. In Europe, most Gypsy/Roma tribes still rely heavily on a distinction between the non-Roma and Roma, that is, *gadje* and non-*gadje* (Mirga & Mruz 1997). Central to this is the system of acceptable behavior for Gypsies is the notion of *marime*: a distinction between behavior that is pure, *vujo*, and polluted, or *marime* (Hancock 1997). 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 (Vukadinović 1983).

Within an ecological approach, an ethnic population/group is defined as an assemblage of individuals with a significant number of behavioral characteristics shared, a shared historical identity and a higher occurrence of marriage with members of the same population than with members of other populations (Abruzzi 1982:16). Among these, marriage is of central importance in the definition of ethnic populations: ethnic endogamy preserves the distinctive ethnic characteristics within a community. The extent of ethnic endogamy functions as an isolating mechanism by enhancing ethnic identity and reproductive isolation of the population (van den Berghe 1979). Furthermore, ethnic endogamy also preserves and maintains the adaptive traits like reproductive and subsistence strategies, access to resources, or child-rearing practice. In contrast, intermarriage among different ethnic groups has the weakening effect upon differentiation within human communities and threatens to destroy traditions. Endogamy is often applied on a society-wide level and assists in setting of group boundaries (*ibid.*). Endogamy practices help to

underline group identity and uniqueness in opposition to neighboring groups with whom marriages are discouraged.

In most of the European countries, including Serbia, the Gypsies remain a separate and distinctive ethnic group. Gypsies' success in retaining their group identity has been due to not cooperating in one very important way, that is, marriage. The fact is that throughout the Europe, and especially in the Eastern Europe, Gypsy marriage pattern has remained the same for centuries (Mirga & Mruz 1997). This pattern is characterized by endogamous, early unions/marriages, an emphasis on girls' virginity, and encouragement of reproduction for all females. In Gypsy culture, females are of a special importance: they are the reproductively scarce resource; should they "marry out", the females' reproductive capacity is lost to the group. This pattern of behavior was encouraged and acknowledged equally by males and females in Gypsy culture for centuries. And although females play "the subordinate" role to "dominant" males among Gypsies, there is always a demand and competition for women among Gypsies. The transmission of particular, learned behavior from ancestor to descendant influences the ancestor's success in leaving descendants, and thereby the frequency of the behavior being transmitted (Steadman 1995). The transmission of culture and behavior from ancestor to descendant among Gypsies is what is meant here by tradition. A tradition, like any other inheritable phenotype, can by its effect on the behavior of descendants influence its own frequency in later generations. Darwinian selection applies to any inheritable phenotype. Because traditions can be inherited at 100% frequency, in contrast to genes, all descendants can inherit a tradition (Steadman 1993). This is the reason why traditions can have a much more immediate and powerful effect on their subsequent frequency than genes. In spite of the genetic diversity among Gypsy groups that reside in Europe (Kaladjieva et. al. 2001), their traditions of sexual and reproductive behaviors — learned behavior copied from their ancestors — appears to be the same: their distinction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies, the concept of *marime* or pollution, especially their endogamous and childbearing practices, including high fertility, have helped Gypsies in the past to leave descendants. This particular tradition of sexual and reproductive behavior was, for Gypsies, an inheritable and replicable trait, which tended to increase in frequency along with the descendants.



The formation of different Gypsy tribes/groups and their dispersal throughout Europe in the middle ages is explainable by the selection theory. When energetic demands for the efficient exploitation of different resources favor distinct adaptive strategies within the same environment, selection should produce socially diverse populations to the exclusion of one uniform (Wilson 2000, Abruzzi 1982). In certain environments, it may be energetically cheaper for distinct populations to exploit limited and nonoverlapping sets of resources, than for one undifferentiated population to exploit the total range of available resources. The most common examples come from the anthropological literature: nomadic and sedentary populations (Barth 1969). Most significant here is the differential demand for mobility. Overt competition has been reduced through the development of more or less symbiotic relations, imposed in part by the greater power of the dominant population. Nomadic pastorals and sedentary cultivators exhibit important symbiotic exchanges, yet they present a significant degree of competition with each other, as land, or a territory, is a finite resource required by both.

Since different strategies of resource exploitation select for different patterns of labor organization, selection within humans would favor any mechanism that maintained the adaptive organization of the community (Abruzzi 1982). Inasmuch as ethnic endogamy maintains local ethnic distinction, selection would specifically favor those mechanisms that reduced the incidence of intermarriage among different ethnic groups in communities where ethnic specialization occurs.

Under stable ecological conditions the number of independent isolating mechanisms separating two or more local ethnic groups should increase in time. Reproductive isolation underlies the recurring pattern of ethnic relations associated with expanding pioneer populations (Barth 1969). Initial flexible interactions evolve into more rigid, stereotypes exchanges as the number of immigrants increases and the competition over resources intensifies.

Premating mechanisms that foster "ethnic visibility" are quite common means used to enforce isolation between ethnic groups (Barth 1969, Abruzzi 1982). Such mechanisms limit the interaction of local populations and highlight the recognition of ethnic identity reducing the likelihood of interethnic marriage. These premating

mechanisms include residential concentration, occupation, distinct form of dress and speech, prescribed patterns of social interaction, courtship and marriage rules and other factors that exhibit local ethnic distinctions.

Since selection for ethnic differentiation operates upon learned behavioral patterns, the more such isolating mechanisms become institutionalized, as part of the explicit rules of a community, the greater is the likelihood that they will be maintained in that community in the following generations. The stereotypes of behavior are likely to lead to socially adaptive, appropriate behaviors a large portion of time (Wilson 2000, Daly and Wilson 1983).

Among Gypsies, it is possible that the division into small groups/tribes of the founder population has occurred due to the pressure for higher mobility in the face of competition for resources and territory; has been consolidated further by oppressive legislation and maltreatment, geographic dispersal and cultural and linguistic divergences.

The tribe/group, with its own endogamous professional-group organization was the primary social unit of the Gypsies for centuries. Their ethnicity was maintained by the rules based on tradition and endogamy, and their survival was made possible by the sexual and reproductive strategies they employed. Only the recent political and economic changes have led Gypsies ceasing to practice their original professions, accompanied by the weakening of traditional rules and endogamy.

Today, however, the practice of these behavioral rules varies from country to country, and tribe to tribe. Where in practice, the particular sexual and reproductive tradition among Gypsies is not always favorable to change: even today, their maintenance of ethnic boundaries by endogamy fits into centuries-old traditional norms. Consequently Gypsy endogamy practice preserved traditions, but at the cost of cooperation with outsiders.

For instance, in Mačva there is an apparent distinction among Gypsies themselves, based on how strictly families or individuals maintain the old norm and distinctions. Even when this practice is not clearly visible, like in places where Gypsies largely adopted behavior norms of the majority, many Gypsies managed to enforce a social separation from non-Gypsies. Many Gypsies tend to stay apart

from the mainstream of society by choice. Among the general Gypsy population in Europe, for example, education and technology are not significant factors within the culture and are not traditionally considered important (Noncheva 2000). A noted example is their illiteracy: even when provided with a schooling system in their own language, many Gypsies fail to complete even a basic education (McDonald et al. 2001, Save the Children 2001).

### 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. For example, just 20% of the Gypsy labor force has regular jobs: those who have some kind of work held the least desirable and most poorly paid jobs, like laborers and herdsmen in rural areas, street cleaners, garbage collectors etc (Save the Children 2001). Actually, they are at the bottom of every social and economic indicator: the least educated, the poorest, the most unemployed, the most imprisoned, and the most welfare dependent (Simić 1993).



Typical Gypsy settlement in Belgrade





The general situation in Serbia has contributed to the present Gypsy condition. Serbia's economy and institutions were corroded by a decade of wars, isolation and sanctions; much of its infrastructure was destroyed in the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. In fact, 18.2% of Serbs live in acute poverty, making only \$20 per month, while 36% live on the edge of acute poverty, with \$34 per month; of the 7,000,000. Serbs, 800,000. are unemployed (UNDP — United Nation Development Program).

This present-day, almost total impoverishment of the Serbian population in general, and the fact that in Serbia, due to the Communist regime and the idea of "classless" society in the past 60 years, where classes in sociological sense of the word did not exist, make it impossible to explore class differentiation that might occur along r/K lines in the case of Serbian Gypsies. Nevertheless, according to some studies that deal with the similarities and differences of low income Gypsy and low income Serbian family, the Gypsies occupy the lowest position on all socio-economic pointers: they are the most unemployed, the least educated, the poorest, the most welfare-dependent and the most segregated (Mitrović 1990, Simić



1993). At the same time, they have the most children and the most divorces. At the time of the study, all informants were the recipients of welfare, and since Gypsies are known to have additional children in order to receive social help, these findings should be taken with some reserve.

As pointed out before, Gypsies have been part of the Serbian economy since the middle ages. In the past, for a success, Gypsies have worked out ways to cooperate with people around them, especially in trade. Such collaboration has benefited both sides of the transaction, or it wouldn't endure. Gypsies could best be described as "non-peasants", that is to say, not tied/owning the land. Their different ethnic origins are no doubt historically relevant for the purposes of determining the role that the Gypsies actually play within the larger society in which they live and interact. However, during the communist era, the policy of the socialist government was to assimilate Gypsies: efforts were made up to help them settle down and improve their economic, social and cultural lot. The result of this policy in Serbia, with its ups and downs, was a creation of total welfare dependence for most Gypsies. They were forced to settle down, and abandon their traditional occupations, that once had a well-defined social and economic functions.

Available statistics for the Gypsies in Serbia are not without its flaws; many Gypsies do not declare themselves as such, therefore, their actual number, fertility, mortality and other demographic parameters remain obscure or unknown. However, from the existing data, Gypsy demographic characteristics greatly differ from those of the population as a whole: they have high birth rates and death rates well above the average and high infant mortality.

### Demographic Assessment Data

#### *Increase of Gypsy Population*

For those that declared themselves to be Roma/Gypsy or cigani, census data over the years revealed very high birth rates (Table 2.). The Gypsy birth rate is consistently higher when compared with the total birth rate for the Serbs. For example, between 1961 and 1971 the Gypsy birth rate was more than four

times higher than for the rest. At the same time, the mortality among Gypsies is also consistently higher when compared with the rest of the population. It is interesting to note that, in the period between 1961 and 1971, when the Gypsy birth rate was the highest, that is, 83.4, their mortality was also the highest: 21.2. The natural increase of Gypsy population is evidently higher than for the rest; on average, it is at least double. Also, the natural increase for the Gypsy group in 1991 was 22.4%, while for the Serbs it was -0.2% (Statistics for Serbia 1991).

Table 2. Natural Increase of Gypsy Population from 1953-1981

Period	Birth Rate %		
	1953-61	1961-71	1971-81
Total for Serbia	23.4	19.2	17.5
Gypsy	39.6	83.4	25.0
Period	Mortality %		
	1953-61	1961-71	1971-81
Total for Serbia	10.0	9.0	9.1
Gypsy	10.5	21.9	15.4
Period	Increase of population %		
	1953-61	1961-71	1971-81
Total for Serbia	13.4	1.2	8.4
Gypsy	29.1	62.6	19.6

### *Increase of Gypsy Population in Serbia*

The available official census data indicate that during the last one hundred and fifty seven years, Gypsies increased their number fourteen times. However, the data censuses are not accurate; this comes from the fact that the Gypsies did not declare themselves on censuses truthfully.

It is estimated that their real number is around three times higher than it appears from the last census, or around 360,000 (Sa-

Table 3. Increase of Gypsy Population in Serbia

YEAR	Gypsy Population	Increase in %
1834	10. 000	
1921	34. 919	349 %
1948	52. 181	49 %
1953	58. 800	13 %
1981	110. 959	89 %
1991	140. 237	26 %

ve the Children 2001). If this number is correct, than it appears that the Gypsies may have increased their number since 1834 around thirty-five times. On the other hand, the percentage of total Gypsy population in Serbia was estimated at 2.1% in 1866 (Djordjević1923). Today, that percentage has increased to the level of 5.7%.

### *Age and Gender Structure*

The Gypsy group gender structure is 50.37% males to 49.62% females (Statistics for Serbia 1981). The Gypsies are a young population: 41.7% belong to the age group below 14 years of age, 54.4% belong to the age group from 15–59, and 3.9% belong to the age group of 60 and above. The average age is 17.2 years. For the Serbs, in contrast, only 11.70% belong to the age group 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.

### *Fertility*

Table 4 shows that for Gypsy females after their childbearing age, the group of 55–59, the average number of births is 5.8; for those aged 65 and up, the number is 6.2. Among the generation of females born after WW II, the expected average number of births is four (Petković 1992). The characteristic of the birthrate among female Gypsies is that almost all fertile females participate: the percentage of those who have not given birth decreases from 72.2% in the group of 15–19 years of age, to only 7.2% among females aged 36–39.

Table 4. Average number of births for Gypsy population in 1981

AGE	% females who have given birth	Average number of births (females who have given birth)	Average number of births (all females)
Total	74.6	3.58	2.67
15-19	27.8	1.78	0.49
20-24	73.2	1.88	1.37
25-29	91.2	3.17	2.76
30-34	91.4	3.87	3.54
35-39	92.8	4.64	4.30
40-44	91.8	5.36	4.95
45-49	91.3	5.29	4.83
50-54	90.3	5.54	5.00
55-59	83.6	5.86	5.26
60-64	89.7	6.06	5.43
65 and more	86.1	6.21	5.34
15-34 (1947-1966)*	64.2	2.71	1.74
35-44 (1937-1946)	92.8	3.42	3.17
45-59 (1922-1936)	90.5	5.50	5.00
60 and more (1921. and before)	87.3	6.23	5.42

\* date of birth (adapted from Petrović 1992)

Fertility rates are much lower for Serbian females. For example, in 1961, the average number of live born for a Gypsy female in Serbia was 6.25, while for a Serb it was 3.32 (Statistics for Serbia 1961-1991). In 1981, the average number of live born for a Gypsy female was 4.70, in contrast with 2.09 for a Serbian female. In 1991, the average number of live born for a Gypsy was 4.34, and for a Serb, 1.80.

Another feature of the Gypsy group is a very high number of children born out-of-wedlock. For example, for the former Yugoslavia as a whole, in 1981, the percentage of children born out-of-wedlock was 9.1%, while for the Gypsy group was 47.8% (Petrović, 1992). However, many Gypsies live in unregistered marriage



unions, which have all marriage characteristics while they last. However, those unregistered unions are short-lived; Gypsies enter marriage, whether registered or not, at an early age, and divorce many times.

Actually, Gypsies hold females to be very valuable. Many Gypsy groups still practice today an ancient custom of bride price — “buying” a marriageable woman for a great price (Djordjević 1932, Savić 2001). In the US, a group of Kalderas Roma still buy a bride; the girl has to be a virgin, and knowledgeable in spells and fortune telling. Some groups pay up to \$10.000. in gold or in gold coins (Djurić 1987:259).

According to informants from the suburb of Sabac, where this custom is still in practice today, a price can sometimes go up to 20,000 Euros, if a girl is a virgin. For Gypsies, a woman's highest value is her reproductive capacity. If a woman bears many children, she is respected and rated well; if, on the other hand, she does not produce babies, she is chased off and returned to her parents.

### *Crime Rates*

That Gypsies obey the law and social rules less than the rest of ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia is evident from the Crime rate statistics (Crime rate for Yugoslavia, Statistics, 1973–1987, Stanković 1992). A characteristic of the Gypsy ethnic group is that their crimes against “state and private property” (stealing) are 2.17 times higher than for the rest of the nations/ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia. Also, in 1987, among recidivists, 47.2% are Gypsies, which put them at the top of the crime rates at the Yugoslav level. In the category “crimes against marriage and family”, which includes kidnapping, buying and selling children and women, sexual and physical molestation and abandonment of children, bigamy and sexual relations with blood relatives, Gypsies on average committed 44% more of these crimes than the rest of the nations. In these crimes, the participation of Gypsy females is on average 60% more than the rest of the females of all other nations/ethnic groups.

*Education*

Literacy, that is, illiteracy, represents a special problem for the Gypsy ethnic group. According to the 1981 census data of former Yugoslavia, the Gypsy group shows elementary illiteracy. For example, the number of Gypsies without elementary school was 80%; only 16.8% finished obligatory elementary schooling; only 4.1% finished high school, and only 0.2% college or university. The percentage of illiterate male Gypsies was 20.8%, and for females, the percentage is extremely high — 48%.

The most recent extensive study on Gypsy education is from 2001, by a United Kingdom non-government organization Save the Children. According to this survey, the situation did not change much for the past twenty years: 62% of Gypsies had not completed primary education, and over a third had no schooling (Save the Children 2001). 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 (Save the Children 2001:164).

The poor education of Gypsy parents is probably one of the main reasons behind the children's high illiteracy and drop-out rates. For parents, a formal education is not seen as 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 (Mitrović & Zajić 1993). 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. It should be noted that the schooling in Serbia, from elementary school to university, is free. Another problem that Gypsies enrolled in school face is their scoring on IQ tests. The school psychologists who administer the tests (WISC-R) prior to the first grade, call the results of intelligence tests given to Gypsy children, "Gypsy IQ", meaning that they show up retarded (Save the Children 2001:164). The Gypsy children, on average, are unable to score more than 70 points on the test, which places them in the slightly retarded category (ibid). Then, they are sent to special schools, since they are not able to master the curriculum. According to the available data, the Gypsy population has a high percentage of pseudo-retarded children. 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 similar pattern (Bakalar 2002, Save the Children 2001). In Serbia, Gypsy parents contribute to this situation: 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.

No cross-cultural study on Gypsies exists to this day. Preliminary analysis on Czech and Slovak Gypsy population implies that some genetic factors might influence Gypsies' performance in school (Bakalar 2002). However, further research is needed which would establish and differentiate the role of environmental and genetic factors.

It is a fact that Gypsy children in Serbia grow up in culturally disadvantaged conditions, living in overcrowded homes, nutritioned poorly, and often with no electricity or running water. Gypsy children are not exposed to any intellectual stimulation, which could help them to perform better on IQ tests and in school. Their poor performance might arise from these external factors. On the other hand, Gypsy population as a whole do not have a literary tradition; since their first appearance in the Balkans centuries ago, their main con-



cern was how to survive, and outwit obstacles in life, which included persecution, enslavement and harassment. The reproductive strategy that Gypsies employed might be the answer to life conditions they met and lived in. Given their high rates of reproduction, infant mortality and short life span, perhaps there was less selection for schooling ability.

### *Mortality*

Gypsy neonatal and infant mortality in Serbia/Yugoslavia is no different than for the rest of European countries.

Table 5. Mortality for Yugoslavia 1971–1986

AGE	0 Y.	1–4	5–9	10–19	20–34	35–49	50–54	55–59	60–64	65
YU	6.8	1.0	0.4	1.0	3.0	7.4	4.8	5.7	7.4	62.4
Gypsy	26.1	3.3	1.2	1.7	4.0	10.9	6.5	7.8	8.0	30.4

In 1981 the mortality percentage of infants for the whole of Yugoslavia was 30.8, while for the Gypsy infants it was 51.5 (Stanković 1992). The mortality data for the 15-year period, from 1971–1986, show that Gypsy infants and children die at a high rate: they have almost a four times higher rate than the rest of the infants and children — 26.1% to 6.8%. Actually, the percentage of those who died in their first year of life, and those who died after 65 years of age is very close: 26.1 to 30.4. Also, twice as many Yugoslavs live above the age of 65 than in the Gypsy group. The Gypsy group suffers from high demographic loss of its infants and rather unbridled reproduction at the same time.

A more recent study found that in some parts of Serbia, the average Gypsy life expectancy is 29–33 years; Gypsy population suffers from malnutrition, lung diseases, avitaminosis, intestinal, skin and skeletal diseases and alcoholism (Simić 1993).

The low living standard of the Gypsy families is reflected also in their diet, which falls below normal human requirements, in terms of the quantity and in terms of the quality alike (Simić 1993). Their diet is typically poor, irregular, of poor quality and hygienic standards. The daily menu of a family often consists of one meal, obtai-



ned by begging, peddling or rummaging around dump yards. Their daily diet usually consists of bread, potatoes, corn flour, seasonal vegetables and fruit. Meat is seldom on the menu, generally in families with a full-time employed member. A large number of Gypsies, especially their children, are undernourished.

### Study Sites and Ethnography

In addition to demographic assessment data, I conducted research in one of the nation's largest Obstetric-Gynecology hospitals, "Narodni Front", where I interviewed 187 Gypsy females who had just given birth. They were all unemployed and married, their husbands were employed, and none were recipients of welfare. A control group was used which consisted of 312 Serbian females, who also gave birth at the same hospital. Those particular 312 females were chosen based on their employment status: only the married, unemployed ones were interviewed, whose husbands had a steady job, so that they could be fairly compared with the female Gypsy sample. Females from both samples represent the urban population, having households in Belgrade or its suburban area. In addition to the interviews, which included questions about their status, marriages, and sexual behavior, the data from their medical charts was also consulted.

Table 6. Hospital Table

	Gypsy Sample	Serbian Sample
Total: 499	187	312
Average age	22.78	28.32
Average number of children	2.42	1.83
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> pregnancy	19.12	28.92
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> intercourse	17.23	18.08
Intercourse frequency per week	5.43	2.50
Physical parameters for the infants		
Length at birth in cm	48.56	53.00
Weight at birth in gr.	2815	3402

The Gypsy females were on average 5.54 years younger than the control group, and had on average, 32% more children than the control group. At the age of first pregnancy, the difference between the Gypsy sample and the control group is 9.8 years, meaning that the Gypsy females gave birth at an earlier age, with an average of 2.42 children. Based on interviews, the average age of first intercourse shows that Gypsy females had started their sexual life a little less than a year earlier than the Serbian females. The Gypsy females have on average 2.17 times more intercourse/sexual activity per week than the control sample group. For infants, the data show that Serbian infants weigh 21% more than the Gypsy ones.

These differences may be due to the fact that on average, Gypsy females are much smaller in size than Serbian females. Actually, based on morphological measures, Gypsy ethnic groups in Serbia are characterized as having medium height, gracile skeletons, underdeveloped musculature and low values in morphological properties (Ivanović 1990). On the other hand, the Serbian population as a whole shows high values of physical development indicators and basic anthropological parameters, including tall stature for both males and females and strong physical constitution. A low birth weight and better survival of premature infants might be considered as an innate characteristic of the r-strategy (Bereckei 1993). During pregnancy, the lower fetal weight needs less physiological investment of the mother, who loses less of her reproductive and parental resources and can invest more in potential future offspring (ibid). However, given the high mortality of Gypsy infants and morphological differences with Serbs, more research and adjustment measures are needed to establish if this is the case.

On the other hand, a striking fact is that 6.2% of the Gypsy female hospital sample is classified as mentally retarded, or "slow"; 3.2% were disabled (deaf and mute), and 1.6%, mentally ill. Despite these obvious imperfections, females are nevertheless in demand and valued as such in Gypsy culture.

In addition to the demographic data and hospital research, I have conducted fieldwork among the Gypsies in a Serbian village, Dogwood, in Mačva-Pocerina area, and among Gypsies in Cedar, Bramble and Cock villages, also in Mačva. The particular group from Dogwood hold themselves to be "true Serbs". For purposes of

comparison with these groups, I have used data from a different, "urban-based" Gypsy settlement provided by the Society for the Improvement of Local Roma Communities (1999). The Gypsies in this latter settlement declare themselves to be "true" cigani, or Gypsies.

### *Little London*

The group of "true cigani" lives in a suburb of Pančevo, a transit city just outside Belgrade, in a *mahala*, or *cigan-mala*, the name reserved for shanty settlements on town or village peripheries. Their settlement, called "Little London", lacks electric power, running water, and a sewage system. There are 62 households: 41 Gypsy households and 21 non-Gypsy, the latter consisting of non-Gypsy refugees and other welfare recipients. A majority declared themselves to be Orthodox Christians, having moved to Little London from various Serbian villages, smaller towns and different places from former Yugoslavia. Most have lived in this settlement for over ten years. Being newcomers, they do not form an endogamous or uniform group. Also, they are multilingual: Serbian is widely spoken, as well as Romani, Romanian and Albanian. 78% say they are Roma, one ciganin, and the rest say they are Romanians or Vlax.

*The age and gender structure in Little London.* The gender structure in this settlement is almost equal: 51% are males, or 91 individuals, and 89 are females. The age structure resembles the general Gypsy age structure in Serbia: 60% of individuals are younger than twenty years of age. That is, in Little London, most individuals belong to the group of 5–19 years of age, which is 42%, 15% are individuals of 25–34 years. 34% make individuals aged between 34–55 years of age. Individuals above 55 years of age make up around 9% of the population of Little London.

*Fertility, marriage and family.* The average number of children for the female population of Little London is 3.76. In 55% of the cases, females gave birth to their first child between 15 and 20 years of age. The practice of early and multiple marriages among the Gypsies is evident from the marriage pattern data: in Little London, most females were married, most of them "sold" into marriage at the age of 13–15. The divorce and second or third marriage followed usually by the age of 20, while 15% of females got divorced at 15 years of



age. Early marriages contribute to high fertility rates, and conversely, such a high fertility rate is a result of multiple marriages. 44% of females have at least 1 child from a previous marriage, 19% of females have 2 children, 5% have 3, 12% have 4 children, and 2% have 5 children from previous marriages. In 29% of Gypsy households, females are the "head" of the family, because of divorce.

The average number of individuals per household is 4.20. Around 10% of households consist of elderly people, living alone. The status and position of elderly people in this settlement is bad: according to the informants, "nobody takes care of them." Also, the solidarity of the Gypsy group in this settlement is weak — lack of trust and cooperation is evident from the fact that most do not expect, give, or receive any help from their kin or neighbors.

The weak pair-bonds, relatively high proportion of single-mother households, high fertility, sexual freedom and frequent change of partners, and very young age structure are compatible with the general Gypsy behavioral picture, obtained from the demographic data.

### *The Village of Dogwood*

The Gypsies of the village of Dogwood belong to the Karavlast Roma, or Romanian Gypsies, who came to Serbia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fieldwork was conducted in the village of Dogwood, second largest village in Mačva, a county in western Serbia. The Gypsies here claim to be "natives" of Serbia, since, as they repeated constantly, their ancestors were born and raised in the same village, Dogwood. They claim to belong to the Lejaši group, from the Romanian word *laiesi*. In the middle ages, the majority of Gypsies in Romania were slaves (Djordjević 1924, Hancock 1987). The Gypsy slaves in Romania were divided into groups, serving either the Crown, noblemen or households. The *laiesi* represented the slave-group allowed to move about the estates doing a variety of jobs, including those of musicians. During their slavery, many of them escaped to Serbia, and after the abolition of slavery in 1864, they migrated to Serbia in large numbers. They appear to have a somewhat darker skin color than the rest of the Gypsies.

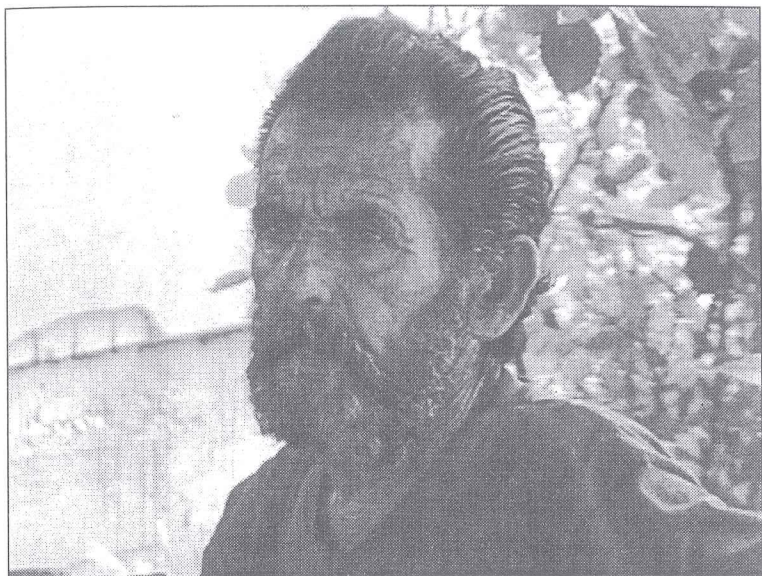


The village of Dogwood is made up of 900 households, of which 90, or 10% are inhabited by the Gypsies. The village has electric power and running water. All 90 Gypsy houses are made of solid material, with modest but all necessary equipment like refrigerators, carpets, TVs etc. They speak Serbian as their mother tongue, and Romanian as a second language. Romani, or Gypsy language is not spoken at all. They are all Orthodox Christians and celebrate *slava*, the ancient Serbian family holiday. Their traditional occupation is music: most of them, like their ancestors from Romania, are musicians. They were never employed, like other Gypsy groups, as craftsmen. In the past, the males, as musicians, traveled throughout the former Yugoslavia to play their music. Since the 1990's, however, the majority of males have worked in a village factory, owned by a native Serb. The majority of females are housewives.

These Gypsies hold themselves to be more sophisticated and restrained than other Gypsy groups and they do not marry or form social relationships with individuals from them. Instead, according to their own words, they do create lasting social relationships with Serbs of their village; almost all have Serbian godparents. Kinship is



A village brick factory



A native from Dogwood

very much emphasized, as is the form of polite or "proper" talk and behavior among kinsmen and with older people. They all have Serbian traditional names. The custom of buying and selling marriageable females does not exist among them. They consider themselves to be "true Serbs". The available census data from 1948 until 1991 show that none of the Gypsies in Dogwood ever declared that he/she was a Roma/Gypsy.

*The age and gender structure.* There are 2,446 inhabitants of Dogwood. Gypsies make up around 11% or 270 individuals. 19% are children up to 15 years of age; 62% are "work-capable", that is, individuals between 15–59 years of age, and 18% are individuals older than 60 years of age.

#### *Marriage Pattern of Gypsies in Dogwood.*

The marriage pattern shows that Gypsies in Dogwood village have stable marriages (see Table 7): 70% had only 1 marriage, with the average length of 27 years; 20% had 2 marriages, with the second





marriage average length of 16 years, and only 7% had three marriages, with the last marriage lasting an average of 12 years. The majority of marriages are registered unions, with the average length of 24 years; unregistered marriages comprise 16%, and they are short-lived, averaging 2.5 years. In only one case was a father not involved in childcare — this father went abroad for work and never returned; this is one of two single-mother households among the Gypsies in the village. The other single Gypsy mother was married to a Muslim and lived in Bosnia until the breakout of war; she then divorced her husband and returned to her native village with her two children. One Gypsy woman got divorced but never married again. She does not have children.

Table 8. Parental Marriages and family environment of Gypsies in Dogwood

Stable Marriage	67%
Divorced	19%
Grow up with relatives	8%
Orphans	5%



Also, the informants' parents' marriages appear to be stable unions: 67% of parents' marriages never ended in divorce while 19% were divorced. Only 5 informants were not raised by their parents: 1 was raised by his grandmother, 2 by their aunt, and 2 grow up in shelters because of their parents' death.

*Sexual and reproductive behavior of Gypsies in Dogwood.*

Table 9. Sexual and reproductive behavior of Gypsies in Dogwood

Members per house	3.0
Children per house	2.2
Number of sexual partners before marriage — females	0.15
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> Intercourse	18.09
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> Pregnancy	22.25
Frequency of intercourse per week	2.61

The average number of individuals in Dogwood village per Gypsy household is 3. The average number of children per family is



2.2. The number of sexual partners before marriage for females was 0.15. The age of first intercourse for females is 18.09. The age of birth for the first child, for both males and females is 22.25. The frequency for intercourse per week is 2.61.

*Natural Increase of Population in Dogwood.*

Table 10. Decrease of Population in Dogwood

YEAR	Gypsy Sample	Dogwood	Serb Sample
1961	339 (11%)	3083	2744 (89%)
1967	317 (11%)	2768	2451 (89%)
1991	270 (11%)	2446	2176 (89%)

This table shows that the ratio between the Serb and Gypsy groups stayed the same for a period of 24 years, meaning that this Gypsy group had the same natural increase as the majority — the Serbs in the village.

On the other hand, table 11. shows that during the period of 27 years, more people died in the village than were born, for both groups. Actually, the total population decreased around 20% in the period of 1961–1991.

Table 11. Absolute Natural Increase of Population in Dogwood

	Live — Born	Died	Absolute Natural Increase
1963–1970	338	243	95
1971–1980	300	310	–10
1981–1990	322	363	–41
1991–2000	266	346	–80
Total	1226	1262	–36
Total/year	33.14	34.11	–0.97



Dogwood 1943: best friends tied with godparenting



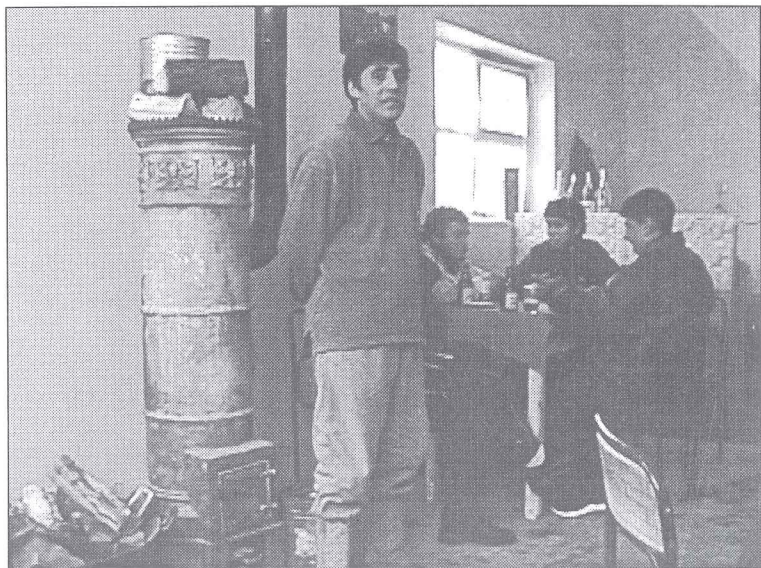
The comparisons between this Gypsy group, and the Hospital samples show that these Gypsies are far more similar to the Serb sample: their average ages at first intercourse, frequency of intercourse per week, average number of children and at age of first pregnancy correlate closely. The hospital Gypsy sample, and the information gathered from the Gypsy settlement Little London, on the other hand, correlate with the demographic results for Gypsies in general.

### *The Village of Cedar*

The village of Cedar is a mid-size, relatively rich and typical for Mačva's peasant settlements. The majority of villagers are Serbs, whose main occupation is agriculture. The village has approximately 2000 inhabitants. The village has 750 houses, of which 110 belong to Gurbeti Gypsy population. *Gurbet* is a Turkish word, and means "a beggar". Before the fall of Yugoslavia, most Gypsies were traders: they used to travel to Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia and sell cattle. Legal and illegal trade and smuggling of pigs, cows and chicken was a successful occupation at the time.



In the 1970's and 1980's, many Gypsy villagers left for Austria, Vienna, only to return to the village for holidays and special occasions. Most Gypsy houses are empty today — out of 110, only around 20–30 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 official 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 competed with each other who will build the bigger or better equipped house and fence. Some fences go up to 10m in height. Most Gypsies in Austria work in low-paid/low status jobs, such as grave-diggers, factory or workers in flower-shops, and street cleaners. According to several Gypsy informants, Gypsies' salaries do not exceed 9–10.000 schillings per month; of that, around 8.500 schillings are necessary just to buy food and pay for appliances. In Austria, it appears that Gypsies live in a very modest fashion. However, due to the bitter economic fate and political unrest in Serbia their foreign salaries and loans made them looking very suc-



Gypsy Club



cessful in their homecountry. The estimated number of Gypsy inhabitants, who live more or less permanently in the village, is approximately 120 adults, and 50–70 children aged 1–10.

Recently, the remaining Gypsies managed to obtain several donations from foreign non-government/humanitarian organizations. The Gypsies founded a "Gypsy club" in one garage, where males gather on a daily basis to talk, have drinks and play cards. Most of them are not employed: during the summer season some work occasionally as fieldworkers, or do a black-market trade. During the wintertime, most of them do not work at all: they play cards — gamble for little sums of money.

According to the listing of school age Gypsy children made by one of the non-government organizations, donators of humanitarian help for Gypsies, very few children attend school. It was impossible to determine the real number of Gypsy children enrolled in local elementary school, since some Serbian refugees from Bosnia living in the village are found also on the list: it appears that some displaced Serbs declared themselves to be Gypsy/Roma, in order to become recipients of humanitarian aid. One Gypsy informant commented on





The Club member

this issue: "Even the Serbs realized now how nice it is to be a Gypsy". According to the available estimates, around 30 Gypsy children are enrolled in a local school, which they attend more or less regularly. However, as said by some Gypsy informants, most girls drop-out school at age 11-12, and get married. There are 5 or 6 children who never enrolled school at all: most of them were assigned to special schools in Šabac, but they never attended.

The Gurbeti Gypsies in this village call themselves "Serbian Gypsies" and they are bilingual. All Gypsies in the village use the Romani language as their mother tongue. Also, all of them speak fluent Serbian, which little kids learn along with the Romani in the early childhood. Their Romani language is a mixture of Romani and Serbian words; it belongs to the Old Vlax dialect. The younger generations, whose parents have left for work in Austria, also use the German language, and for young that were born abroad, the German is now the first language.

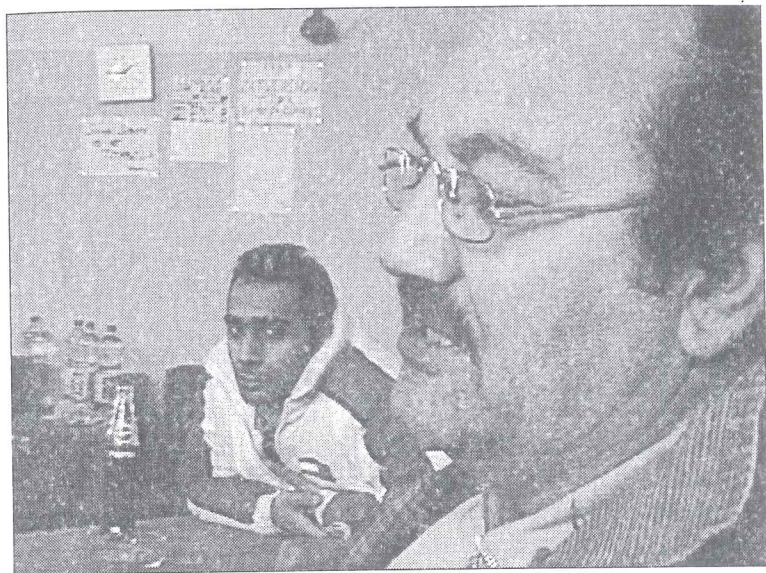
In the past, the Gurbeti from Cedar maintained endogamy by marrying only Gurbeti Gypsies from their own or from nearby villages. One informant argued:

I can always recognize my own. Other Gurbeti, like the ones from Pocerina, are the same as we are: we speak the same dialect, we dress the same and we cooperate together. But Čergari Gypsies, they are very different from us; when I meet a Čergari, I don't always get what he says, even though we speak the same language. I have to think twice about what he said; that's because they have such a weird accent. Also, I can recognize one [Čergari Gypsy] by his clothes — they dress differently than us. And also by his face, and by his behavior. That's because they have very different mode of behavior and life than us. They used to go around in čergas [wagons]; I know we never did that, my father told me: we were never into čergas, begging and bears. We never marry them. I know of only one girl from the village that married into Čergari tribe, but her mother died, and her father was not doing good, he was ill and couldn't watch over her, so she left. There wasn't anybody to intervene, so she did what she pleased and married into Čergari tribe. We also never marry them because they are from a different environment, a different village — if you go there, you can get beaten, there, you don't have anybody of your own. Čergari still do fortune-telling, and many of them steal. Since I'm from a different background, I can't follow their footsteps, even if they are very rich today.

Today, the villagers say that traditional endogamy is not so strictly obeyed anymore, even though it appears that most marriages fit the old norms. Interestingly, in their Gypsy language, there is no word "*marime*" which means "being polluted". The so-called Gypsy "ritual cleanness", connected with the notion of *marime*, appeared never to play such a big role among the villagers. According to informants, even the ones from an older generation, contact and marriage with non-Gypsy was not sanctioned, nor was there ever an expulsion from the group due to the "breaking of Gypsy tradition". Most of them simply stated that they never followed any specific rules of behavior, other than the ones they learned from their parents, at home.



One informant, Mika (the photo bellow), a 40 year old male who is one of the founders of the Gypsy club, argues:



The word Rom means a man, but for me, it actually means that you should not be ashamed to say that you are a Rom. On the other hand, we say that we are Roma, but we live together with our peasants [Serbs], and the only thing that differs us, is our face color! We only preserved that we marry just Gurbeti, but that's fading now too. We married within the village to avoid misunderstandings and fights; you can't marry someone who has different mentality than your own. 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, how to be a good host from me. I only know that it was a big deal to catch [marry] a peasant [a Serb] girl. Only, they never wanted us. Before, to get married was a very difficult undertaking; today, it's no biggy. You just go, like on a fresh market place, and buy a cow, or a girl, it's the same.





Mika, his daughter and little Daniela, his grandchild

In recent times, the only "expulsion" from their village happened a few years ago, when a young Gypsy male, known for his problematic behavior, got into trouble with some Serbs in the village. This man engaged in a trading business with some Serbs, and according to the informants, he appeared to behave deceitfully, which alienated the participating Serbs. In order to soothe the tension, his Gypsy relatives "bought" him off: they bought his house and gave him the money, to go and live somewhere else.

The Gypsies in the village celebrate *slava Djurdjevdan*, widespread among Gypsies in general. And although most informants said they do get along well most of the time with the Serbs in the village, godparenting ties between Gypsies and Serbs are extremely rare. Gypsy villagers state that Serbs from Mačva are very difficult people to get along with; when Gypsies were poor, they were despised by peasants because of their poverty and low position. After many Gypsies left abroad, made money and built nice houses, they say that peasants envy them: "whatever you do, it's no good for them", as one informant concluded.

According to some male unmarried informants, they would like to get a good girl for a wife; the ideal wife is "from a good fa-

mily, blonde, who cooks good". On the other hand, when asked about their chances of marrying a Serb female, they say "a thing like that [a marriage with a peasant] is not likely to happen to me". Gypsies stated that it was always humiliating for Serbs to intermarry with them. In a case when a Serb male was not capable of marrying a female from his own group, Gypsies have a saying: "The time has come for him to marry a black Gypsy girl". Nevertheless, mixed marriages exist today, and are usually formed between male Gypsies and female Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. On the other hand, local peasant girls are still not an easy catch. For a Gypsy male who managed to marry a "white" girl, Gypsies say that he is *magerdo*, or "painted with all colors", so cunning and dextero-us that he was able to catch a peasant girl. One 52 years old female informant argued:

It was always a great embarrassment for a Serb to marry a Gypsy girl. In a case like this, his family never accepted the poor girl. A Serb would never marry a Gypsy girl — only if he is the lowest one, without anything on his own, so he couldn't find anything better. But, we have some marriages between our males and peasants: we always accepted peasant girls very well. It was like an honor to us, to have a peasant in the family. It was always a plus, a gain for a man to have a Serbian wife. Then again, many of these [refugee] girls would marry just anybody today, just to get a roof over their heads.

Most Gypsies that work abroad come and go from Austria to Serbia during the year: because of their fluctuating number, the sample of interviewed Gypsies included 50 villagers.

Table 12. Sexual and Reproductive behavior of Gypsies in Cedar

Members per house	5.1
Children per house	3.0
Age of first intercourse	14.5
Age of first pregnancy	17.0
Frequency of intercourse per week	2.6

Table 13. Marriage Pattern of Gypsies in Cedar

Number of marriages	Length/years	
	registered	nonregistered
one	37.5%	12,7
two	37.5%	8,1
three	12.5%	0,7
four	12.5%	0,3
	registered	nonregistered
Percentage of marriages	30%	70%
Length/years	27	6

The tables 12 and 13 show that the Gurbeti Gypsies in the village of Cedar have, on the average, more family members, more children, more marriages, divorces and non-registered unions than the Gypsies from the village of Dogwood. On the other hand, they started to engage in sexual and reproductive activities at an earlier age, than the Dogwood Gypsies. The difference of the age of the first pregnancy is 5.25 years. And although the sample appears to be rather small, the information gathered in this village approaches the general Gypsy demography.

In conclusion, when compared to Serbs, Gypsies in general have higher fertility, longer reproductive period, earlier onset of sexual behavior and reproduction, more unstable pair-bonds, higher rates of single-parenting, shorter intervals of birth spacing, higher infant mortality rate and higher criminality. However, these differences in reproductive and sexual behavior might be the result of differences in the stability of the social environment and resource predictability that are expected by people of different social status, and where education, income and profession play a major role (Weinrich 1977).



In order to determine the relationship between socioeconomic status, reproductive behavior and ethnicity the reproductive behavior of typically poor Gypsies with a group of much wealthier Gypsies living in a Serbian village are described and contrasted. This was the first research to study the reproductive behavior of the rich Gypsy group.

The fieldwork was conducted in two Mačva villages in Western Serbia: Bramble and Cock. The first village surveyed, Bramble, is unique in many ways: it is ethnically pure, that is, inhabited only by Gypsies; also, the majority of Gypsies in this village are much wealthier than the rest of the Gypsy population in Serbia. The second village, Cock, on the other hand, is a typical poor Gypsy settlement. Gypsies in both villages belong to the Gurbeti Gypsy group. These Gypsies are also called Turkish Gypsies or Horaxane. They were Muslims until some 80 years ago. The two villages are approximately 30 miles apart.

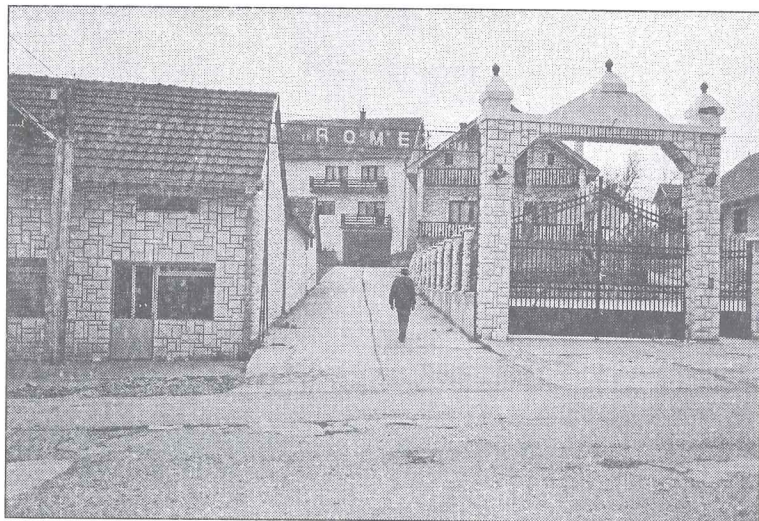


Gate decoration

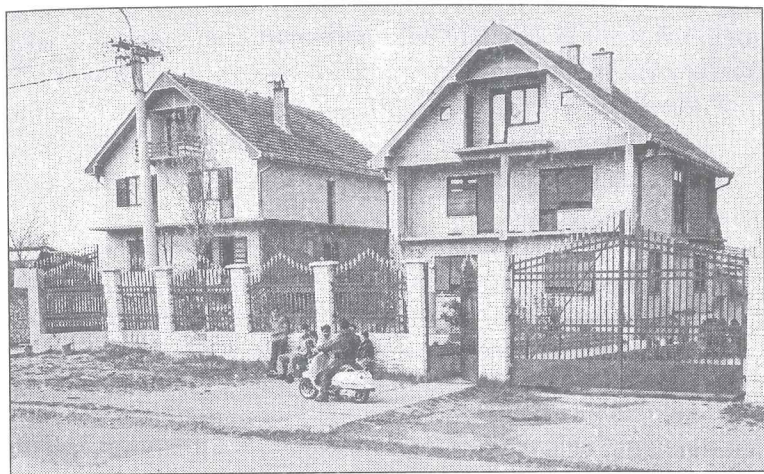
*The village of Bramble: Rich Gypsy*

This particular Gurbeti group came from Bosnia to Serbia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Gypsies in this village trace back their origin to ancient Egypt. They argue that their ancestors were expelled from the Egypt, and were forced to settle in the Balkans around 1400 AD. They acknowledge, though, that they are Roma. They were nomadic and mostly blacksmiths. In 1948, there were exactly Gypsy 30 houses in the village of Bramble (Radovanović 1994). Today, the village has approximately 350 houses inhabited by around 1600 Roma. The informants tell, half jokingly, that they “chased off” the Serbs, and became a majority after WWII.

In many ways, this is an atypical village for Serbia: most streets are paved with asphalt, there is a radio station “Bramble”, and most houses are big, with excessive decoration, ornaments and sculptures. Some houses even have a swimming pool or a fountain, in spite of the shortages of running water in the area. Young teenage males riding their vespas are often seen. The wealth of these Gypsies comes from trade: during Tito’s time, and especially in the 1990’s, at the time of the Milošević regime and sanctions against Serbia, this







village was a meeting point of traders and blackmarket-dealers from Serbia and Bosnia. Many Gypsies from this village participated in legal and illegal trade of cattle, gasoline and tobacco. Among local Serbs from a nearby village Brdarice, this place is known as "the city of tobacco": Gypsies here used to own and operate an illegal tobacco factory, producing Marlboro cigarettes which they sold around the region of the former Yugoslavia. Today, however, most of them live from cattle breeding and agriculture; unlike most Gypsies in Serbia, they are landowners. An interesting fact is that, in spite of their wealth, almost all families applied for a welfare allowance for a third child, but only around 20 families got some social assistance. Out of these 20, 3 families got financial support from the state because they have mentally retarded children

In spite of their wealth, the reproductive pattern of these Gypsies seems to fit the general Gypsy population. They start sexual life early and enter endogamous marriages at an early age: females have to be virgins in order to get married, and a bride price goes up to several thousand euros. The educational level of most informants is low: most of them have only a few grades of elementary school, despite the school existing in their village. The average lifespan is around 65 years of age, which is below the Serbian national average. However, unlike the general Gypsy population in Serbia (Čvorović



2003b), divorce is very rare; informants justify this fact by saying that they don't have time to "fool around" since most males work full time. For males, marriage with Serbs is often discussed: most of the informants say that they will happily trade with Serbs, marry their daughters, but would never "give away" a Gypsy girl to a Serb. One male informant argued:

We usually don't marry outside our village. When we do, we bring females here; we don't give away our daughters. It's better that she marries someone poor in this village than a man I don't know. When we take women from other villages, even Serbs, we teach them how to behave, what to do. But we don't give our daughters to marry Serbs.



Bramble natives

Actually, these Gypsies stay isolated from the Serbs and other Gypsy groups; they explain this fact by saying that they are unique, because they are capable of making money which in turn places them in a higher social position towards other Gypsy groups.

*The village of Cock: Poor Gypsy*

This village is also inhabited by a Gurbeti Gypsy group. The Gypsies in this village are poor. These Gypsies used to be basket-makers. There are around 56 Gypsy houses out of 300. The approximate number of Gypsies in this village is 450. The average number of individuals per household is 8. Until the war in 1991, they used to travel all over the former Yugoslavia and sell their products. Today, most of them scramble to survive: they do a little trading, work for Serbs on the land during the season, or wait for help from their relatives who went to Austria to work. Their reproductive cycle is typical for Gypsies: early, endogamous marriages, quick and easy divorce, and many children who grow up in acute poverty. When asked why they have so many children when they cannot feed them,



Cock village: children playing



one male informant argued: "Poor people always have time for sex and making babies — we don't have anything else [a job] to do". For example, one 40 year old female Gypsy gave birth to her 8<sup>th</sup> child this spring; she and her husband are both unemployed and live from begging in the village, helped by the husband's occasional work. The average life expectancy is around 55 years, which is the average for the general Gypsy population in Europe (Rayniers 1995).

As far as schooling, only 5 males had started secondary education; most of the villagers have never finished elementary school, and some are illiterate. None receive welfare because they are unemployed and many are not even registered with the officials, so they could not even qualify for social assistance.

Table 14. The comparison of the rich and poor Gypsy groups

	General Gypsy	RICH Gypsy group	POOR Gypsy group
Members per house	4.20	8.38	8.01
Av. Number of children	3.76	4.01	4.70
Age of first pregnancy	17.5	16.09	16.02
Age of first intercourse	na	15.50	15.05
Intercourse per week	na	2.62	4.02
Divorce	Frequent	Rare	Frequent
Education level	Low	Low	Low
never completed elementary school	80%	68%	76%

The general Gypsy sample, and the information gathered from the rich and poor Gypsy settlements in Mačva support the generalization that Gypsies have adopted a relatively r-style reproductive strategy. The comparison of the data show that wealth, socioeconomic status and environment predictability have no effect on the



Gypsy reproductive strategy. The data from these three samples correlate closely: there are almost no differences in the number of individuals per house, average age of first pregnancy and intercourse, number of children per family and educational level, in spite of the differences in wealth between the Gypsy groups.

### Discussion

In Europe, Gypsy traditions of sexual and reproductive behaviors — learned behavior copied from their ancestors — appears to be the same: their distinction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies, the concept of *marime* or pollution, especially their endogamous and childbearing practices, including high fertility, have helped Gypsies in the past to leave descendants. This particular tradition of sexual and reproductive behavior was, for Gypsies, an inheritable and replicable trait, which tended to increase in frequency along with the descendants.

Therefore, Gypsies' sexual and reproductive behaviors are a result of their ethnic traditional strategy that encourages endogamy and high fertility. Maintaining ethnic distinctiveness, including patterns of sexual and reproductive behavior, function to regulate competing population's access to resources, and the recognition that in one case the proximate causes of behavior may be largely inherited while in the other they may be primarily learned should not rule out the possibility that the selective pressures in both cases may be the same (Abruzzi 1982).

The comparisons between the Gypsy group in Dogwood, the Hospital samples, and samples from the villages of Cedar, Bramble and Cock show that the Gypsies from Dogwood are far more similar to the Serb sample. The hospital Gypsy sample, the information gathered from the Gypsy settlement Little London, and villages of Cedar, Bramble and Cock, on the other hand, correlate with the demographic results for Gypsies in general. These results support the generalization that Gypsies have adopted a relatively r-style reproductive strategy. The differences among these Gypsy groups are explainable by the different sexual and reproductive behaviors they employ. In the light of the available evidence, it is probable that the Gypsies were selected for their capacity to produce large number of

offspring in the short period of time; theory teaches that evolution probably proceeded to reduce the maturation time, increase the reproductive effort and offspring size at the expense of the life span (Wilson 2000:15).

During their exodus and history, Gypsies have been persecuted. In Europe, Gypsies acquired a reputation as thieves and people of dubious honesty (MacDonald 2002). They have been enslaved, molested, murdered and discriminated against (Hancock 1987). Their harassment continues still today (Erlanger 2000). This instability of their social milieu probably helped shape their cultural and behavioral traditions.

Everywhere, Gypsies always depended on the needs and interaction with their host populations, as a source of their living; many times Gypsies adapted to the different requirements of their social and environmental surroundings. The result is the great diversity of Gypsy tribes and the lack of identity as of an integrated ethnic group. The common distinctive feature of these various Gypsy groups is their pronatalist, endogamous tradition, which obviously has helped Gypsies so far to survive and leave descendants. Gypsies' sexual and reproductive behavior might be a result of their ethnic traditional strategy that encourages endogamy and high fertility. In spite of the group, territorial, language and religion differences, Gypsy fertility is high throughout the Europe and in the U.S. (MacDonald 2002).

The Gypsy tradition of early and endogamous marriages, the high value they place on a woman, her sexuality and reproduction, relaxed mores and views on divorce and frequent change of partners for women, and their high fertility rates made them successful breeders. Their general low parental investment is a side effect of a successful strategy.

On the other hand, the Gypsies of Dogwood, immigrants from Romania, sacrificed their presumably high rate of reproduction, exhibited by the majority of the Gypsies in Serbia, and adopted the cultural and reproductive strategy of the majority in the village. At the time of their appearance, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Serbia was finally being released from five centuries of Turkish rule. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Serbia was a battlefield for many wars between the Turkish and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Due to frequent wars, famine and plague, Serbian territories were almost deserted.

For example, in 1721, the village Dogwood had only 6 inhabitants, and was treated as a "medium populated settlement" (Djordjević 1924). In 1827, by order of the Serbian government, a few villages fused into present day Dogwood. By 1831, Dogwood had 369 tax payers, that is, males who had to pay regular head tax. However, not all inhabitants were "natives of Mačva." After the first Serbian rebellion against the Turks, in 1804, many Serbs from Herzegovina immigrated to freed Serbia. In 1822, 138 people immigrated from Herzegovina and settled down in Dogwood and nearby villages. A majority of the inhabitants of present day Dogwood are descendants of those immigrants. The immigrants were given land for agriculture, food and all necessary support by the government, and they were encouraged to stay in Serbia, where they still live today. And although Mačva was largely uninhabited, there are reports that the natives, at least in the beginning, did not receive the immigrants well: there were constant quarrels around the right to use the land, and sometimes even feuds. However, the Serbian government, by many orders, managed to adjust relationships between the natives and the newcomers. What also helped to mitigate the conflict is that the newcomers from Herzegovina represented the same ethnic entity: they were Orthodox Serbs, who lived in the same geographical, political, economic and cultural milieu.

Karavlox Gypsies from Romania represented the second wave of immigrants to Serbia. There are documents noting their presence in Mačva in 1718 and 1834, but the majority came after 1864, the date of the abolition of slavery in Romania. The general government politics at that time was to support anyone interested in moving into Serbia; one document from 1830 notes that Knez Miloš, the ruler of Serbia, asked that some Romanian Gypsies be brought to Serbia to live, since "there is a need for skilled horse dealers" (Djordjević 1924: 114).

However, the Dogwood Gypsies were musicians, never craftsmen like other Gypsies. Gypsy craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, basket-makers, spoon-makers, horse dealers etc., were in demand in some places in impoverished 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbia. And the need for the products they made was what made them accepted in the villages. Musicians, however, were never needed in the agriculturally-based Serbian economy. And although their music was very



much appreciated, and they were the only ones to perform professionally, they could practice and make a living from their music only irregularly: at weddings, village fairs and special occasions. And even then, they were paid in the form of a tip, making them dependant on the good will and mood of the payers. Gypsy success has always depended on a favorable social climate around them. On the other hand, an influx of genetically distant immigrants, as were the Gypsies in this case, may have had the potential to threaten and reduce the inclusive fitness of the native population, including the newcomers who were also Serbs. Unlike the Serbs from Herzegovina, Gypsies had highly visible different phenotypes, like skin color and hair texture, dress style and a way of life, which surely made them perceived as outsiders and intruders by the natives. The main danger posed to the inclusive fitness of an ethnic group is the loss of tribal or ethnic control over land (Wilson 2000, Salter 2002). Therefore, there was probably a potential danger of an ethnic conflict in the form of defending a territory. The crucial question is how do different ethnic groups come to get along?

In this case, to minimize potential conflict and encourage social relationships, the Dogwood Gypsies worked out ways to cooperate with the people in Dogwood. They made their own behavior acceptable to Serbs in the village in order to be accepted and in turn, survive and reproduce. They adopted the more stable, Serbian family-oriented strategy. In this situation, their potential for leaving descendants became dependent on cooperation with a larger number of people in the village. To establish cooperation beyond their ethnic/kinship category a decision must have been made by individuals on each side, since the majority of the Serbs in the village were also newcomers. For the Dogwood Gypsies, it was apparently a calculated decision to become Serbs that required losing virtually all of their own traditions, and their wider kinship ties to other Gypsies. Furthermore, such cooperation was supported by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian government, whose interest was in forming a larger village that would have more stability. The fact that some Gypsies were in the village in the early 1700's suggests the possibility that one or a few worked out a way to get along with the Serbs, and the others who followed may have been kinsmen and needed to accept the existing rapprochement — at the cost of their own Gypsy traditions.

How is enduring cooperation beyond one's own ethnic/kinship category achieved? Often it is facilitated by the acceptance of a religion. Communicating acceptance of a people's religious claims, communicates commitment to them and their religious hierarchy. For example, the general Gypsy population in Serbia is known to choose and change their religious affiliation depending on the political climate: since the middle ages, Gypsies went back and forth from Islam to Christianity. In the past, most of the Gypsies celebrated so-called Gypsy holiday "Djurdjevdan", linked with an old Turkish folk holiday Erdeleze or Hidrellez, dedicated to the coming of the new season, or new year (Djordjević 1932:77). Today, however, the holiday is celebrated on the day of one of the Serbians' *slava* dates. Gypsies' Djurdjevdan, in its original form, was not connected with the *slava* ceremonies among the Serbs (ibid.). Formerly, for the general Gypsy population in Serbia, it was really rare to celebrate other holiday than Djurdjevdan.

However, in the case of the Dogwood Gypsies, since they were Orthodox Christians already, Serbian nationalism probably served here as their religion. Their identification with the Serbs, godparent ties, and the worship of Serbian ancestors in the *slava* ceremonies show this. *Slava* is a Serbian pre-Christian annual religious holiday with a specific form. The etymology of the word *slava* shows that it is a religious celebration in honor, *laus*, of the dead ancestors. Thus, it is a kinship activity, a religious holiday dedicated to Serbs' first mythical ancestor/national God, *initia gentis*, who at the same time was the major deity of the Underworld (Čajkanović 1923). Although pre-Christian, *slava* became incorporated into the Orthodox Church canon and it has been celebrated almost in the same form and with the same significance for centuries. The function of ancestor worship among Serbs is to promote cooperation among descendants of the same ancestors and respect for their traditions. Most lateral cooperation is the result of accepting a common hierarchy, and in simpler societies the hierarchy consists of ancestors, or senior kinsmen who represent the dead ancestors (Steadman and Palmer 1994).

Godparenting among the Serbs, also an ancient, pre-Christian custom, is connected with the ancestral cult as well. Godparenting ties used to be formed between two families through generations. A godfather is thought to represent a mediator between living and dead

kinsmen (Čajkanović 1973). In real life, the role of the godfather is of the utmost importance and he is a highly respected figure: he names the newborn and does the baby's first hair-cutting; he also gives away the bride during a wedding ceremony and in the past mediated conflicts in the case of blood-revenge between families. Godparenting in the Dogwood village underlies the fact that the Gypsies here all bear Serbian names, both first and last. For example, most of the males bear the first name of Dragan, Nikola, and Stanko, and last of Stanković, Nikolić and Vasiljković, the same names that the Serbs in the village have. In this case, ancestral names indicate ethnic identity. To name a child, following Serbian custom, is to introduce him or her into a kinship group, and hair-cutting represents a sacrifice to dead ancestors. Both events are highly ceremonial, and still in practice in Dogwood village today. In fact, according to Serbian custom law, godparents are treated like blood relatives; the Serbian Orthodox Church, too, accepted and sanctioned this tie as a blood relationship (Milaš 1902:653, cited in Čajkanović 1973:275). Families tied with godparent relationships are exogamous, said to be true kinsmen. Through godparenting ties, the Gypsies and Serbs in the village encouraged the behavior that normally occurs between close relatives, to be directed toward non-kin. Thus, the most important effect of these kin-like ties among villagers of the Dogwood is that it encouraged family-like cooperation between individuals of two very different ethnic groups.

### Conclusion

When the Dogwood Gypsies accepted Serbian traditions, they anticipated new social relationships. Ancient Serbian traditional rituals, and their repetition connected with the celebration of *slava* and godparents ties, helped to create enduring social relationships between villagers in the Dogwood community. In this case, given that *slava* ritual and godparents ties are traditional, all the participants, the Gypsies and Serbs in the village, communicated their willingness to accept the influence of Serbian ancestors, and those who have encouraged the ritual (Steadman 1992). Such cooperation would reduce competition among the villagers and increase their ability to compete successfully with outsiders, when competition occurs for any scar-



ce resource. After all, extended kinship cooperation has been evolutionarily successful (van den Berghe 1979).

Later on, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the development of cities and country towns, the Dogwood Gypsies were able to travel and play their music. They particularly benefited from their profession during the 60's and 70's, in the prime time of the former Yugoslavia, when they traveled all over the country. Since the 1990's and the beginning of civil wars, most of them were unable to travel and play; today, the majority of males work in a village brick-factory, as brick-makers. Even in these changed circumstances, they retained the cultural and reproductive pattern that their ancestors adopted when they came to Serbia.

This argument is further supported when the Dogwood Gypsy group data are compared with the data obtained from another group of Karavlox Gypsies, who also arrived from Romania around 1883 (Barjaktarević 1965). This group lives in Apatin, in Vojvodina, a county in northern Serbia. They lived in a mixed village environment consisting of Hungarians, Germans, Croats and Serbs. They were under very different cultural and religious influences and never formed a solid social group. On censuses, the majority declared themselves to be Romanians. Unlike the Dogwood group, these Gypsies in Vojvodina were craftsmen, trough-makers and spoon-makers. In the past, they were mostly sedentary but are known to make seasonal migrations looking for places to sell their products (Djordjević 1932). In Vojvodina, the Karavlox Gypsy females have 3.35 children on average (Statistical yearbook for Serbia 1981). Their marriages are characterized as unstable, with frequent divorces: one man had 24 marriages in his lifetime. Also, a majority formed "unregistered" unions that end after a few years.

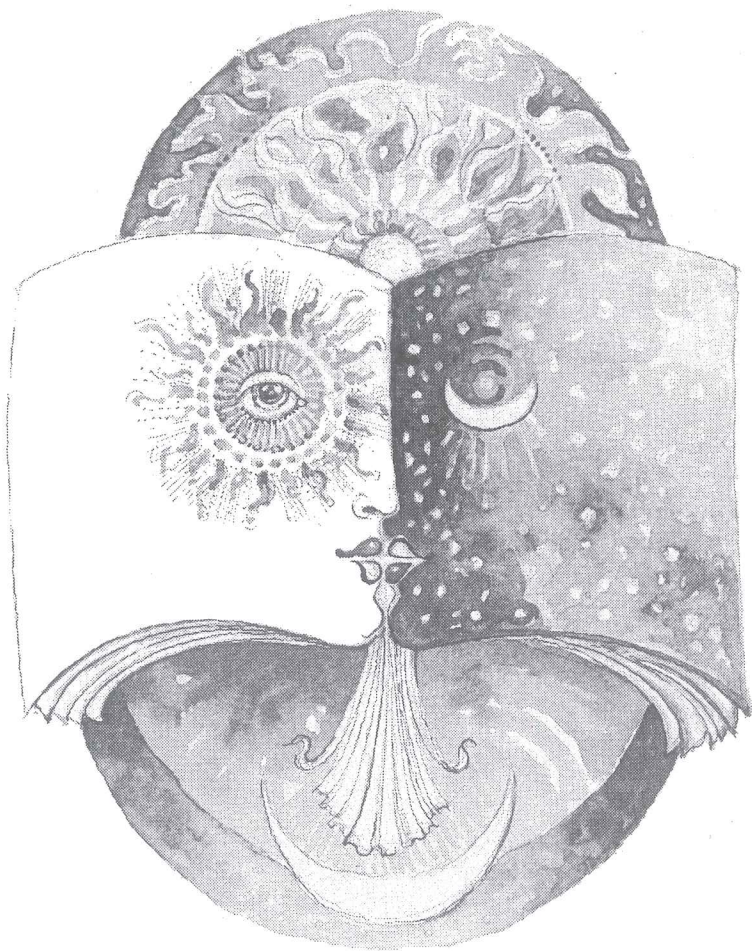
The fact that the Dogwood Gypsies changed their ethnic identity is an important theoretical issue: this apparently rational, calculated decision by individuals to accept new social relationships and abandon their own traditions and wider kinship ties has the same effect as when people join a modern religion. In the latter, the family-like social relationships are not limited to genealogical, that is, tribal identification. The prophet-created, so called "modern" religions, influence their followers to behave as if they were kin, therefore

creating new ways of behaving toward one another, including the acceptance of subordination to a hierarchy (Steadman 1992).

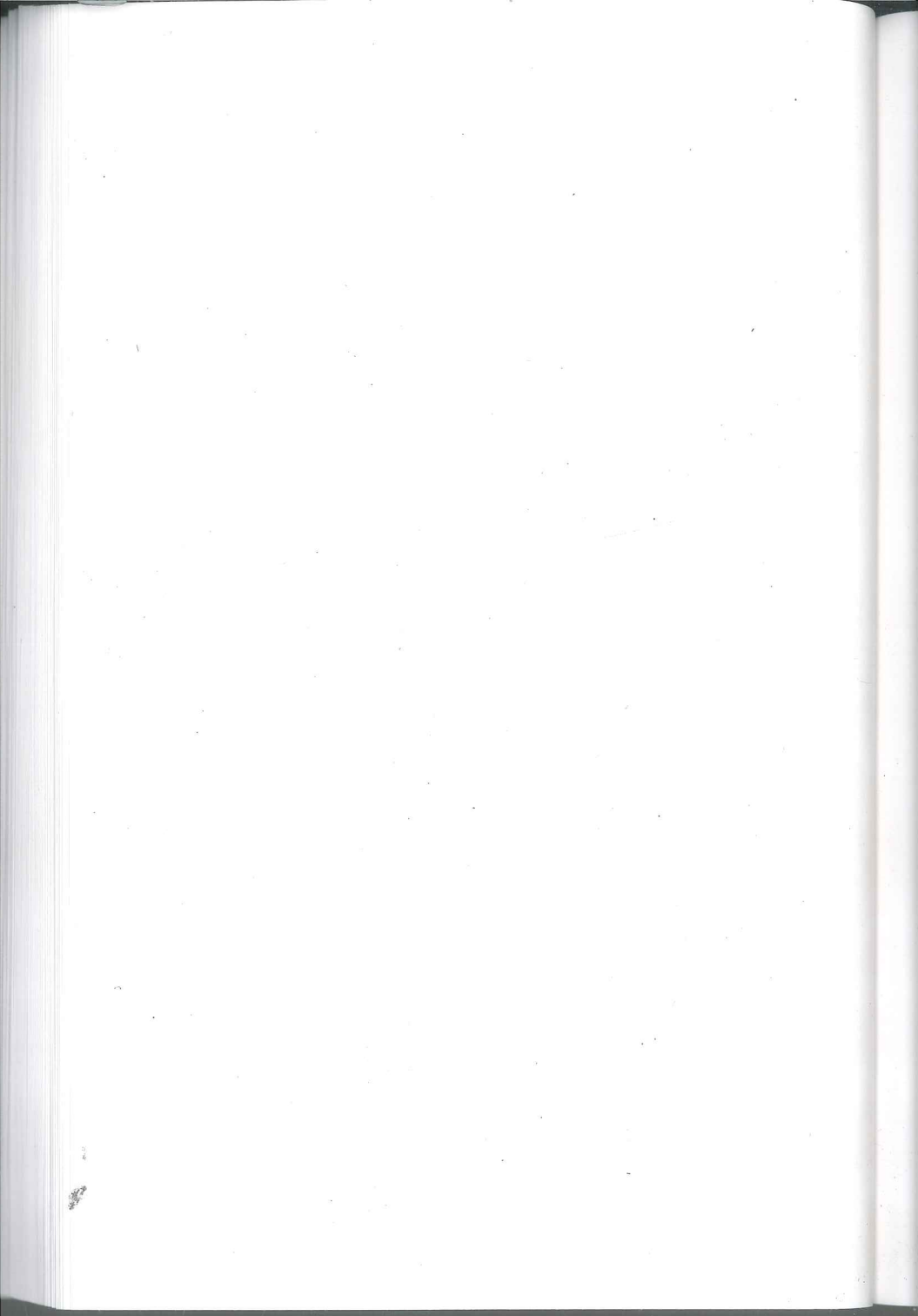
In Serbia, an ethnic group — Gypsies — exhibits a range of descendants-leaving strategies, ranging from, for humans, extreme *r*, to a typical Serbian *K* strategy. The reasons bringing about these differences come from the Gypsies' readiness to adjust their behavior and reproduction, in order to create the most favorable strategy in a given environment. As van den Berghe put it, perhaps a bit extremely, "Humans, being the intelligent and flexible animals they are, will adopt anything that works" (1979: 214). In the case of the Dogwood Gypsies, successful "*K* strategy" traits, including all forms of parental care, have been at the expense of "*r*" reproduction (Palmer & Steadman, 1997: 48). By adopting the more stable, Serbian-oriented strategy and traditions, the Dogwood Gypsies not only reduced their reproduction to teach their offspring traditions, they urged their offspring to do the same and to pass on this behavior to their descendants. The teaching and learning of traditions were at the expense of reproduction. While an *r*-strategy is *potentially* always more successful than a *K*-strategy, because of more offspring, when it comes into competition with *K*-oriented individuals — fewer offspring who receive more parental resources — the *r*-strategists may lose. The competitive edge gained by the *K*-strategists vis-à-vis the *r*-strategist may be one of the main benefits of the *K*-strategy (Palmer & Steadman, 1997). Simply counting the offspring of a Gypsy does not necessarily indicate his/her chances of successfully leaving descendants: If we measure the number of born children and reproductive rates, we overlook infant and juvenile mortality, and low parental care, which are, according to the data presented, widespread among Gypsies. After all, what is being studied here are adaptations, widespread traits that presumably were successful in the past. For the Dogwood Gypsies, we actually study traits that have had descendant-leaving success over a large number of generations, whether or not they caused great reproductive success for any given generation. The goal is to discover the function, the effect that can account for the increased frequency of such traits. And perhaps the most important traits here are the creation and maintained cooperation in a group of people that includes two different ethnic groups.

## PART TWO

### Gypsy narratives







## ROMA HISTORY BEGINS WITH STORIES

A Gypsy from Bramble

Conrad M. Arensberg (1988:30) argued:

*If the anthropologist avoids all explanations except those which arise out of his observations of what men do, and if he accepts them only when he can test them against observed behavior, he will be, if only imperfectly, in the main line of scientific development.*

The main thesis of this book, that Gypsy behaviors were largely determined by their past experience and success in leaving descendants, i.e., their traditions of sexual and reproductive behaviors, is very accurately reflected in the stories about their contemporary lives. To illustrate this argument, three Gypsy life histories are chosen as model examples.

The life stories appearing in this book come from communities relying on oral tradition. In international anthropology, documenting oral histories and life stories has always been an approved fieldwork method (Cruikshank 1992). And while such accounts were usually treated as supplementary materials, this current account is based on an idea that life-history study could provide a model for research (see Wright 1994, Cruikshank 1992): original historical accounts can speak of various events spread over many generations.

The three protagonists of the following stories are selected because they represent "the better-off" part of Gypsy population. All three: Dragoslav, Lepa and Dragan are well respected and known within their communities. The first two are selected also because they belong to the older generation, who still remembers the "old days" of Gypsy traditions. The three of them come from three different Gypsy tribes in Mačva: the Gurbeti, or Serbian Gypsies, the Čergari (nomadic), and the Karavlox tribe. All agreed that their real names should appear in this book.

The oral histories presented here allow, "to hear people tell their stories and observe their lives instead of being told what they think and the meaning of their behavior..." (Ruby 1991:54). Gypsies life stories presented here tell as much about Gypsies present as about their past. Their stories also talk about personal experience — and it is here that we come to grasp "a native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski 1961:25).

This part of the manuscript should be read like sequences of short chronicles, following the biographies and change of fortune of the protagonists. I did not bring in my own questions in the body of text, mostly because these oral histories should be read as continuous narratives.

All stories and conversations are recorded in Serbian, and later translated by the author to English language.



## STORY I

### FROM POVERTY TO CULTURE

Dragoslav Jovanović, the main protagonist of this story, is a good-looking elderly man in his 60's from Gurbeti Gypsy tribe; he used to be a musician and a trader. Today he lives in Cedar, a village in Mačva, agricultural rich area in western Serbia. The interview took place during the spring and summer months of 2002.

Dragoslav's oral history appears in eight sections, enclosing particulars connected with life history: family history, childhood, marriage, migrations, women, hierarchy, occupation, ethnic relations, and one section occurs as a folk song which has been carried through his family for generations. The song reflects the hardship and fatalism of the life that Gypsy women live in, but it also testifies of the characteristic Gypsy wittiness, a sense of black humor with which they face life with. This is the first time that this song has been documented, although it has existed among the Gypsies for decades.



Dragoslav

Dragoslav's account is colored with his reminiscence of the past days. In spite the poverty and hardship of Gypsy life, he sees the old days as better among other things, because the deference of young for old was greater. He dislikes the present because the old people no longer restrain the young, and the young no longer corroborate the old, as they used to.

On the other hand, his account is especially valuable because it represents the voice of a Gypsy who not only managed to survive but to succeed in life in spite of many obstacles such as poverty and his Gypsy background. Dragoslav managed to create a good life for himself and his family. Unlike many other Gypsies, he is proud of his Gypsy heritage and traditions.

### *Family*

Sas Taj Sas: and there were and there were...this is how we, the Serbian Gypsies-Gurbeti begin a story in our language. Romani language is not homogenous, we have so many dialects that we don't understand each other. That's





why a school in Romani would not yield any results. Anyway, people call me Dragan, but my real name is Dragoslav. I was born in Bukor, near Cer. Bukor is the village somewhere near Vlasic and Suvi Bunaric — that place is on every map. That is where I was born. And there it is a real jungle, really harsh environment and climate. My whole family lived in the same poor village. I don't know exactly where my ancestors came from. My father told me a story of how our grandfathers inhabited Bukor. I don't know if it's true or not. Maybe it's true. Supposedly, our ancestors came from Russia, but I wonder if my dad got this one right. Anyway, the story goes like this. Three brothers, Marko, Jovanja and Joksim were blacksmiths; they were traveling and moving around the earth and looking for a place to build a home. They carried their tools with them, and stayed in places where people needed blacksmithing. However, they didn't like any place they saw — it was too sunny, too cold or too poor. Finally, they reached Bukor, above the Cer mountain, and liked immediately its great woods and rivers. Gypsies like woods very much. Because of fire, that's why. Give me some wood, and there's the fire, and we are all warm, that's the only thing we need. There were around 300 Serbian houses, and the brothers liked that very much. So, they decided to stay. And so they stayed in Bukor, and built a little house made of wood. They developed the blacksmithing over there, and started our lineage. From one brother Marko, Marković family began; from Jovanja — Jovanović family, and from Joksim, Joksimović family. We are all Marković, Jovanović or Joksimović in this village. That's how we know who is from Bukor; we are all kin, descended from one of the brothers. By the last name, we know who is native here, and who came later. The others, those who came after us to this village, they are different, they are newcomers. We used to be blacksmiths, but not anymore. It doesn't pay off, so we switched to trade.

My grandfather brought his bride, my grandmother from Valjevo, she was also a Gurbeti Gypsy, and she bore him one son. They have been living together for some 15-16 years, when the I World War came. They took my grandfat-



her as a prisoner of war, to Germany. For a long time, she [grandmother] didn't have any news, until one day the telegram came, saying that her man died in a prisoner's camp. My family gave him a *daca* [funeral ceremony], and that's how it ended. Six years passed. And after six years, my grandfather, that one that supposedly died, appeared in our house alive and well! Well, at that time, my grandmother was married to a different man. She remarried after two years of the *daca*. My true grandfather's name was Dušan. He came home from the war and found his wife to be married to another man — as it turned out, his best friend. My grandfather came to this man, and they kissed, and talked peacefully for a long time. Then my grandfather, Dušan, asked: "My buddy, we were best friends. Why did you married my wife"? The other says: "Comrad, we got a telegram that said you died, we gave you the *daca*, and after two years, after everything was over, I married your woman. I took her and now I have a child with her". Then grandpa said: "Well, I have a child with her, too". You see, one child was from my true grandpa, born before he went to war, and another child was from that other man, named Milan. Then my grandfather said: "OK, my friend, since you also have a child with my wife, give me back my wife and I will take care of your child as well. I will take care of him as he is my own, if you give me back my woman". That's what he suggested, and that's what they did. That younger child was my father, people used to call him "Mihailo The Bastard". They called him bastard because he had two fathers.

My father impregnated a girl, and they [both families] married him to the pregnant girl; that female was my mother. Then, both of his fathers, his true one, and the other one, decided to help the married couple, and gave them some land and a blacksmithing business. They gave my father 30 acres of land, and made a little house. In that house both my brother and I were born. When I was around 2 or 3 years of age, my mother died. Tuberculosis. At that time, tuberculosis was a deadly disease. I hardly remember her. I remember her lying down on a huge pillow, with her hair

around — and she had a very nice hair, she was actually a very beautiful woman. She was crying a lot, she wanted me beside her bed, but I wasn't allowed to come near her, since she had an infectious disease. I still remember the pain I felt: some old women holding me down, and preventing me to crawl into my mother's bed.

When she died, my brother and I were alone — because my father was a bum and a low-life. He was really a very bad person. At the same time, people respected him greatly — he had "a name", as we say here. That is because he was a very good trader, very honest and a man "of word". Wherever he would go, into any house, he was met with respect for he was a good trader. Even today in many places, when you mention his name/refer to kinship with him, you get to eat and drink for free.

After a while, our father left us, and went after his affairs — drinking and chasing women. My brother and I were both dirty and neglected, there wasn't anybody to look after us. We were alone and scared. We didn't even have a bed to sleep on, just some dirty cloth on the floor. Then my aunt, my mother's sister came from Valjevo, saw the conditions and neglect we were in, and decided to take care of two small children. We were her sister's children, after all; she left, divorced her husband, and came to live with us. Her name was Rosa, we used to call her grandmother, for she was old. But she was really good to us. The first thing she did, was to make a bed for us: she went to a nearby wood, and cut some branches, and form a little frame which we filled with straw. We got the straw from one peasant [Serb]. We all slept on that straw bed. We had a brick stove, and she made us cornbread. That's what we ate most of the time; when there was no cornflower, we ate plums, and that's how we survived. That was a real poverty.

Later, my father returned with a new, young wife, so we got a stepmother, to look after us. She couldn't have any children, so my father made her to take care of us — and she was good woman. Our little family lasted until 1953. That year, my brother got married — he was 17 years old at

that time, and my father got deadly ill. I took good care of him, although he didn't deserve that. He was in his bed, dying for the next three years. Our Rosa died in the meantime. We had to sell everything from our house, to buy medications for my father, only walls had stayed, but he was beyond help — it was his destiny to die. After he passed away, my stepmother, still a young woman, went to search for men, and both my brother and I couldn't put up with her behavior. We told her that she cannot behave like that in our house, and that now, when her husband is dead, she is free to go wherever she pleases. And she did — she got married to some fellow, and went away. I never saw her again. Soon, my brother and his wife left to search for a better life. For life in Bukor was really harsh. There was nothing there, just plain woods and snow, and poverty.

### *Marriage and children*

I became a musician when I was 12 years old. Females love musicians — I have had four marriages so far! I married a singer, the first time, when I was 16 years old. Oh, how lovely she was! I married her so we could be [sleep] together. However, she was a road-house singer, and you know how these women have to act. I couldn't stand other men touching her, when she was performing, so I chased her out. That marriage lasted for about a year. Then, I brought another wife; we lived together for four years but she couldn't have children. So I chased out that one too. My third wife had very fragile health, and we didn't have children, so we parted after some time. Finally, I married for the fourth time, she was seven years younger than I was — she was 13 at the time, and I was around 20 years old. We've been together for only 3 months, and I had to go to serve in the Army. After several months I heard that she is pregnant. This fourth marriage was a "real" one — registered with the authorities and everything. We are married now for some 40 years. We have two sons together, my first one was born in 1963, and the other one in 1965. I am



very proud of my children — they are grown up men today, my oldest son already has grandchildren! So, from him, I have two great-granddaughters, wonderful little girls. They are my grandson's daughters; my grandson got married when he was 14 years old; in the beginning, his wife, a nice and mellow girl, couldn't have children, so we went to seek help from various medical doctors and medicine women. They helped us, so now they [the grandson and his wife] have my great-granddaughters. My younger son has two sons, the older one will get married any day, and the younger is 12 years old.

### *Migrations*

My children were born in Bukor, in our little, poor house. They lived in poverty there for almost ten years. One day, an official call came for my eldest son to start elementary school. He didn't start school on time, for the nearest school was approximately 6 km away, and he would have to cross woods and rivers to get there, and that was impossible especially during the winter months. So, after that letter came, I set down, and I started to think. I couldn't sleep that night. I thought — if we, me and my brother had to stay illiterate because of the neglect of our parents, my children will not have the same destiny! I've stayed "blind before the eyes" because of my parents, but my children will go to school. I was determined to change something about that, and I decided to move my family to Cedar, where my brother was already. I knew that Mačva was a rich county, and I heard that my brother is doing good over there. So I sold our little house, and came to this village. That was 32 years ago.

When I first came here, I came with "my hands in my pockets", that is, I had nothing. Yes, I've sold that unfortunate little house of mine, but that money was enough only to make some winter stores — like jam and cucumbers. Fortunately, my brother helped me, he gave me his house to live in. The same day I moved into his house, that same day

he went to work in Austria. I lived for three years in my brother's house. I played a little, and tried to make my kids to go to school. I managed to built a really small house, but it was ours: 11x5m. I didn't succeed with my kids' schooling though, they were just not made for school, I guess. Soon, they left school for good. I didn't know what to do — we needed money. So, I "made" us driving licenses, categories A, B, and C, and bought one truck. And we started to work: to trade pigs, smuggle any goods that bring profit, and we succeeded: we finally had the money to built a new, bigger house. It was a two-story house, this one where I live today. That's how we lived until 1989 — some playing, trading, smuggling with more or less success. I also started a business of selling coffee, and that worked out well. Then my kids went to work in Austria, and left me, my old woman and one grandson here. Little by little, with the money they earned, we bought some land, and I made a three-story house for my son. I managed to decorate my own house too, now I have everything working "on buttons". The house is 46x14,5m. and has everything, you name it, several TVs, kitchen appliances, radio, video recorder, heating, carpets, wood floors and tiles. I thank God for this. I'm very satisfied with my life. I have grandchildren, great-grandchildren, two sons and two daughters-in-law. They are all healthy. I think I had a good life. I don't drink, and my kids respect me. They are not afraid of me, they ask for my advice all the time, for I have seen the world. I help everybody in need. Although...I have to say...I miss my children. They are all abroad now, and only come once in awhile. I've never seen my grand-grandaughters. I long for my grandchildren too. My kids are very good kids — they send me money all the time, I have everything I need, thanks to their help. I will baptize my great-granddaughter in the summer, if they come, and we'll have around 500-600 guests. Sometimes I miss that little house when we were still together, poor, but a family. I can't work now, I've had a heart attack, but my kids help me. When I first came to Cedar, I was the last of all Roma. Now I'm the leader, of all

110 houses. It is not because I have everything, but because I have such good kids, and I'm respected for my age and of what I am. When I began, I had nothing to eat, I lived in a true poverty and misery. I came a long way, from poverty to culture, to what I have today: two houses, land and everything on "buttons". That's a long way from my Bukor and plums.

### *Females*

When I was a young musician, I went from woman to woman. I went everywhere, I come a long way. I had Hungarian, Croatian and Muslim women, and Gypsy ones. There is a story that Gypsies have hot blood — but that's not really true. Blood is blood, they are all the same. We are all the same, just we act differently. Before, we used to marry only our Gypsies [Gurbeti]. I know why we did that: a girl who is taught to make baskets is no good for a man who makes spoons, or if she is from a Cergari group, she doesn't know anything, and can't marry a blacksmith, she would be no good to him. The same is true for peasants [Serbs]: their girls know how to attend the cattle and they know agriculture, what would they be doing married to a Gypsy who doesn't have anything? Besides, they [Serbian females] never wanted a Gypsy husband anyway. Only if she was the last one [ugly], otherwise it is a shame for them.

Gypsies do marry young, too young. My father's brother married when he was 12 years of age. My wife was 13 when I married her. Girls used to be married at 13 years of age. 14 years of age was considered too old — for it was assumed that she sinned [engage in sexual intercourse] by that age. If she is a female, she must have sinned by that age. When I married my wife, she was a virgin; for if she wasn't, she would be sent home, back to her parents. That was really a disgrace for the whole family. It was a great law among Gypsies, and that's why we get married so young. So that the girls don't fall along the road.



That's why we can't register our marriages, and our children with the officials. We have to wait until both the husband and wife are 18 years of age, and by that time, many things can happen. Among us, if we don't marry the girl and get the proper marriage registration, she is not considered like a true wife. We have a lot of these unions — a young couple would get together, even bear kids, but if they are not officially married, no one considers the girl as a "true wife". That's why many males behave the way that pleases them: they cheat on their women, beat them, or chase them off. If, however, they are properly married, that's a different story.

If a woman cannot have children she is chased off. We don't buy females like Šiptari/Albanians and Čergari Gypsies; they pay up to 20.000 euros for a virgin, sometimes. We do make a dowry — like furniture, sheets, or something, but never money like they do. Also, we don't intermarry with them — with the ones who buy women; we marry only from our own tribe. That's how we know if a girl is from a good family. In the past, all non-Gypsies were gadje, like strangers to us, and we didn't marry them either. There was a sharp division in everything with non-Gypsies, clothes, life, marriage, food, cleaning, washing... Today, most of it is lost. I know some men that married peasant [Serb] women. There are around 10 mixed marriages in the village today, even one fellow married a Muslim woman. The thing that we marry within our own kind is still practiced today, but less. Only good head of the households [good families] still maintain that custom. All in all, we don't buy women but women can't marry if they are not virgins.

In the past, if a woman couldn't have children she was divorced from. Actually, women were like martyrs before. Their status was really terrible. First they had to obey their father, later on when they married — they had to obey in laws and the husband. And husbands...they are males, and males as males...Marriages were arranged in the past, it were the parents who decided where and to whom a girl will marry, even if she didn't like or know the man. I ne-

ver liked that custom. If she is good enough for my son, she is good enough for me. But the custom where parents interfere with kids' lives — that still exists with us.

When my grandfather was alive, all girls used to be married, not one stayed alone. Even the ones who were, let's say a little blind, or with a shorter leg, they got married too. Women were watched over in the past. If it happened that a woman had a bastard she stayed unmarried, for who would want a woman with a bastard? Then she had to obey her parents for the rest of her life, or a brother, or a daughter-in-law. She never had her own life; she raised her child as a bastard, and nobody wanted to marry her. It was very different from today. Today, if it happens that a girl has a child out of wedlock, she drags that bastard with her, into marriage. Before, she simply couldn't do it. When I was a child, a woman depended totally on her man; a man behaved like a guest in his own house — he didn't do very much, but it was expected that he would be respected, no matter what. He was a master. Our people didn't value women at all, except for bearing children and their houseworking. A woman was just a woman, that's how we used to say. I think that has changed today, for the worse.

For example, before, it was unthinkable for a wife to be unfaithful to her husband. If something like that would happen, she would be expelled from the tribe [group]. We don't have any special law concerning this matter, she is just sent out, and that's goodbye for good.

When I was young, we used to have these "dancing" parties in the village, folk dance, of course. But, boys on one side, and girls on the other. No touching or fondling at all. Our parents were present too, watching over our behavior. These dances were held outside, in the open sky, at night. We used to have these big fires burning, and dance all night long. When you have Gypsies, you have music also. All girls were accompanied by their parents, at least one of them, or a brother. When the dance starts, they watch over her very carefully: she is to behave in a proper manner, no other way. If, for example, a boy squeezes a girl too

tight, or tries to hold her, a gossip would spread around the village for the next seven days: how he is rude and misbehaved, and a girl is even worse for letting him do things to her. And that was considered a disgrace for a girl. You couldn't mess with girls just like that in the past, no chance. It was actually up to a girl to keep her morality high. If a man takes a girl, he's not going to get pregnant, but she is, and then what? Everybody can see that she is pregnant. That's why girls had to take care much more than men. And every father used to watch over female children so much. Women used to make sweaters, and sell them in nearby villages, but had to return home before the nightfall. Not one stayed to spend the night, or she would be seriously beaten. It's not like it is today, everything has changed today. They [girls] come home from nightlife at 3 or 4am, and that's too early even. Nobody asks them where they were, or what they did. It doesn't matter now if she is good or honest. No more.

Things started to change here in the village some years ago, maybe 20 or so, when people started to immigrate to Austria and Italy. Before that, we were here very compact, homogenous community, after all we are all immigrants from Bukor. We had the most honorable village, the best interrelations among Gypsies. All relatives, one-way or the other. Then some people came to live here from Pocerina, our Bukorani started to immigrate abroad, and things started to change gradually.

We have women here in the village whose husbands work in Austria; and some men stay home, while their wives are abroad, working. They don't have good marriages at all. There are a lot of opportunities today [for sexual intercourse], if you desire so. Women don't respect their men anymore; and children, they do and go whenever and wherever they please, no one watches over them any more. This liberty is considered normal these days.

Also, many Gypsies don't look after their kids the proper way — I say, if you don't have enough money, you don't



let you kids to suffer. But many Gypsies today are negligent about this matter.

### *Hierarchy*

When I was a young child, I couldn't walk by any elderly man without hand-kissing, or calling a "good day". In those days, everyone knew where he stood. For example, families were very big, up to 18 or 24 members, all living together under one roof. In such a family, a head of a household was the oldest man. When the family would gather around the table for meals, no one was allowed to take any food until a host would allow so. Actually, younger members, kids and daughters-in-law, were not allowed even to sit at the same table — they would eat standing on their feet. In those days, a great respect was shown and felt toward old and wise people who have seen the world. Everybody was subordinate, but no force was used at all. It was because we felt great respect, we were taught to do so. I have the same in my family today; 13 members I have, and they all ask for my advice and approval, and I never laid my hand on any of them, or raised my voice. They respect me, and that's why they listen to me.

It's not like that with everybody. For example, the other day I was riding in a public bus. It was, as usual crowded, no place to sit down. I'm 62 years old, an old man. Nobody got up for me. Finally, I saw a little girl from my village, a Serb, she was sitting down peacefully. I asked her to get up and give me her seat, my legs are killing me, and she replied: "Gran'pa, did you get up for older people, when you were young"? And I replied, that of course I did, always. And she told me: "That's why your legs hurt today". She didn't get up; I knew exactly from which house she is, her father is a good host. Kids today are unmanageable.

### *Ethnic relations*

I have lived in this same village for the past 32 years. I never had a conflict with any man, Gypsy or Serb. The Serbs here are the same as we are — equally uneducated, in

the same position. Many Serbs left for Austria too, they go wherever they want. The Serbs gossip a lot though. And they are peasants, they own and work on their land. We don't do that. That's the only difference between us. And the fact that we marry young, and we have more children. We do have more children than the Serbs here, but not so many as we used to. Before, we used to have like 6 or 7 per family, now it's less. Women watch now not to stay pregnant if they don't want to. There are no real differences between the Serbs and us; the way they celebrate slava, the same way we do it, it's just the different one. We celebrate Djurdjevdan, which is Gypsy slava, and Serbs have their own, like Saint Nicolas, or Luka, or whatever. We bury our dead the same way they do it. That is why we are Serbian Gypsies. We speak Romani, but that's half Romani, half Serbian.

A few years ago, there was a good-for-nothing Gypsy; he did some evil things to Serbs here, harmed them in many ways. He talked too much, said evil things to the peasants. Then a conflict arose. We were afraid to go to a store for cigarettes, afraid to go out. Then I called a few serious Gypsy men, and we decided to do something about it, so we chased this bad man out of the village. We bought off his house, and he was expelled from our village. I don't know where he went. Well, he wasn't from Bukor anyway; he was a newcomer, belonging to another Gypsy tribe. We call them Njamci, not a very good people. I think that the peasants call them Germans, don't know. After that, everything settled down with the Serbs. We are good neighbors now. There are only a few complete Gypsy families today; most of us are in Vienna. Only the poorest ones stayed here.

We have 110 Gypsy houses here; and we have two Roma political parties. I'm the president of one of them, "The Association of Roma from Mačva". One village and two parties — we don't get along well these days anymore. It's our people from Bukor that came here and built this village, gave it its present honor and respect. We made pavements,

and streetlights, and brought running water. Not to all houses, but for the most. The next thing to do is a sewage system. After we are done with it, we are through — we don't need anything else. We just got a status of national minority from the officials. Some asked for it, and got it. I haven't. We were Gypsies before, now we are Roma. I don't care. I'm a Serbian Gypsy and Serbian Gypsy all the time. But now we have the title. These Roma units now create various parties, but they are not united. Everybody loves to be a president, to have some function, to be somebody. We have two presidents in this village, because people can't get along with each other.

Since I became a president, I feel a lot better about myself. This function gives me something to do. It's no good when you are lonely, your kids away from you. It's difficult now to get along with your neighbor; if I come outside to sit on the bench, he surely won't come to keep me company. In my society, now we have meetings all the time, and that's why I can bear life.

### *Music*

I started to play violin when I was around 12 years of age; nobody taught me, I just learned it myself. I was really talented, I could pick up a melody just like that, no trouble. That is interesting, since Gurbeti are not known as musicians. It is very rare that a Gurbet Gypsy plays. We do other things. Like trade. The others, the Karavlast, Romanian Gypsies are born musicians, not us. Anyway, one day it was so-called "white Sunday", when we, Gypsies, go to Lazarice [religious holiday]. My two aunts asked me if I want to join them, and play my violin. I accepted, since this was a common way to make some money. They took their bags, my violin, and me and we started to walk to the village Ribara, which was around 10-12 kilometers away. We walked. There was no transportation in those days, only the lucky ones had animal drawn vehicle, mostly cows, rarely horses. I was really tired when we got there, but I



played, and people gave us money, and some food, like bacon, eggs, flower, which my aunt put in her "gypsy" bag. When the night started to fall, I wondered where we gonna spend the night. One of my aunts said that I should not worry, since we Roma have very good friends everywhere. It turned out they were not Gypsies, but Serbs, but I didn't complain. It was already dark when we approached this huge fenced house. When we got in, a host, one big Serb with mustaches, greeted us. He must have been 70 years old or so, but was well preserved. He asked immediately who I was, from which family. He kissed me when he found out who my father was — he knew my father well, and respected him for his good work in trade. Then he offered us some wine and rakija [brandy], which were considered a real honor. In those days, there was no coffee to serve for guests, but brandy and wine. And that was something. That was the first time I had some brandy: it was mixed with sugar and water, and cooked over for some time. Delicious, I can still feel its taste. Actually, I think I got a little drunk — it was really sweet, and I never had that in my house. When the Serb, our host, saw that, he offered us to eat with him and his family. We were sitting in the kitchen, it was like a living room today, had the same function. It had one big table and no chairs, just benches. I saw that his women are setting a table for a lot of people, I wondered if they expect more guests. Then some people started to sit down at that table, and I asked my aunt who they are, where did they come from. She shushed me out, and said it's his family — sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren. I had to be silent. It turned out that this family has 18 members, and the three of us, we are all eating together — like a family. Then the grandfather, our host, asked my aunt to tell a story. We, the Gypsies were known for our stories — sometimes it was a story from our lives, and sometimes my aunt would just invent one, right on the spot. It was my turn to tell a story, and I tried many times, but couldn't get the beginning right, since I mixed Romani with Serbian, and they co-

uldn't understand me. I was really upset, I even started to cry. Then I suggested that I could, instead of telling a story, play one. I saw gusle [an old fashion string instrument] near the table, and I knew how to sing accompanied by gusle, even if it is an ancient Serbian instrument.

I knew music well, right from the beginning. My host was delighted, saying that a song is even better than a story. So I did. When I finished, they were all crying, everybody in the room.

For the song is one true sad song. Here it is:

#### A Folk Song: Verica i Bora

Once upon a time  
There was a little girl  
People called her Verica (Faith)  
That was her name.  
Thin and short she was, not very tall  
With a tender look from her two dark eyes.  
Whenever Faith went to the ball  
She was the most beautiful of all  
Whenever she danced with her beauty she made the ball.

When she was sweet sixteen  
She was promised to the only son  
To the only son of her neighbors,  
To some Bora, the craftsman.  
Oh, how Bora enjoyed Faith  
Gloriously for three months  
Rich jewelry he bought her  
In pleasurable love with her to enter.

When the fourth month came  
Bora cancelled/denied his love to Faith  
And not to waste any chance  
He engaged with Mira with the dowry  
And when the fifth month came  
Very pregnant poor Faith felt  
For fifteen days she cut out her thoughts  
Until she reached the final thought.

Then the gun was prepared by Faith  
She hid it in the filling-cabinet.  
When the night before the Sunday came  
When Bora was ready to celebrate  
When the girls have made him a wreath  
To his gate Faith went  
And there she cried her eyes  
Through her tears she screamed his name.

Angry Bora runs to his gates:  
Crazy Faith where do you go this late?  
And why do you ask me for?  
Nothing, Bora, is that I ask you of but  
I came to congratulate you on your wedding  
And I brought back all the gifts you gave me  
That I have kept for five months.

Faith put her hands in her pockets  
To take out Bora's presents  
No gift went out from her pocket  
But the fifteenth squad revolver.  
Bora saw what would be  
And what will happen to him  
Bora runs like in a trotting race  
But three bullets caught him  
That was his fate.

Bora fell dead in his yard  
He fell and Faith says:  
Don't be sorry over your happiness  
I will lie my youth next to you  
Faith embraced him around his neck  
Like a sister with her true brother  
Faith held him on his neck  
She pulled the trigger of her own gun.

The revolver was ready to shoot  
All the bullets in Faith it put  
When that noisy shooting came  
Bora's parents horrified became  
Bora's mother ran outside to the yard  
She saw dead Bora laying on the ground:  
My son, Bora, what happened to you  
Is this true, is this true?



Instead tomorrow that I will merry be  
I will have to mourn in black and be gloomy  
Tomorrow you should have stood besides your bride  
Instead you will go into the ground.  
While people gathered around their bodies  
They heard a tiny voice crying  
A tiny voice from Faith's womb  
Who cursed his father and his mother to:  
Damned you, my father and my mother!  
All because your discord in love  
I have to rot in my mother's womb.  
This was a story about lovely Faith  
Who got killed by her own hand.

This is actually a true story; I've learned it from my old man.

Soon, I started to play on weddings; this was good money, but also a dangerous undertaking. People were dangerous. Especially in other villages — ours was OK, I knew everybody and they knew my father. But, I went from village to village, wherever there is a wedding, and never knew what kind of people I would come across. Sometimes, it was so difficult that I remembered my mother's milk, so hard it was. Many times they [the people we played for] did with us whatever they wanted to do, they dragged us around, made us kneel on corn and play, put honey into our hair. I don't know why they harassed us, but it was kind of an accepted behavior, since we were musicians, and plus Gypsies. They ill-treated Gypsies, they had the right to do everything to us.

Although, some would pay us very well, in spite of the harassment. Some didn't pay us at all. Once, we the boys from the band had to chase around a Serbian fellow because he caught our female singer, and wouldn't let go of her. He took her, and turned her upside down, with her head down and legs up, and made her sing. Well. We started off to scare him with guns, shoot near him and chased him around this restaurant, and threw him outside. Too much is too much, even for us. His behavior was without any culture: people with culture don't behave like that. The groom was really embarrassed, but he didn't say a word — it was a 500

people wedding. Actually, a life of a musician was really exciting. Today, musicians have much better conditions for work, but music was better before. I think that life was better, fuller in the past. I have never been richer in my life than today, but I still miss my former life. Whatever I do now, it's not enough. Before, I was satisfied with a piece of cornbread, and it was enough. I didn't chase around for more. I knew my place exactly.

The biggest wedding I played was in Knjaževac. In was in 1985. We first played in the Mačvanska Mitrovica town; we loved to play over there, for they have people with culture. And they treated us good, the same we were good to them. It was a fair where we played, and it was very merry. Then some Gypsies came over, these were from Knjaževac. At the fair, they saw a Gypsy girl they liked very much, and asked her parents if they want to marry the girl in Knjaževac, to one of them. They were Gurbeti also. They had circus and merry-go-round, and went from fair to fair to make a living. Kind of like Čergari, but they were Serbian Gypsies, like us. And the girl was really pretty; her father didn't know what to do, he didn't like that they move around so much like Čergari, but they were rich and had a circus, and that was something. So the marriage was arranged, and we were invited to play at the wedding. Our band was kind of famous at that time, we had a violin, a bass guitar, a rhythm guitar and drums. So her father said that he'll give his daughter if we come and play at the wedding; we used to change these female singers all the time — one would get married, or pregnant, or elope with some fellow, so we always had a different female to sing. I guess that the girl's father figured out, that if the wedding didn't work out, she could always come and sing with us. We didn't like the idea at all; that place Knjaževac was 300 kilometers away, and we didn't know these Roma fellows at all. We didn't trust them, we were afraid we would get beaten, or robbed or something.

Different Roma groups don't get along so well. Some Roma are really savages. Some behave like they are different people, not normal. In some places in Western Serbia,

the Roma buy women. When the band asks for money, they give a fortune. The same is for women: they buy them for money! Wild, isn't it? We don't have that custom. Anyway, we decided to go and play for these Roma, and I took with me my first cousin, a young man, just in case we have to run away. It's better if you have someone who is your own blood. And I took my own van, it was safer that way. When we got there, it was beyond my expectations. I know Gypsies, how they live and what they do. I expected to find their houses at the end of a village, or a town, because that's the way we live. At the end of settlements, or at the beginning. But these Roma have built their houses in the center. Their houses were in the center of the country-town, which was really strange. We got out from the van, and took off our shoes in front of the gate; we thought that's the custom. We didn't want to offend them right at the beginning, so we took off shoes, and proceeded in socks, although it was winter, and very cold. But that's the way to do. I saw that these Roma are very, very rich: their houses and gardens had everything on buttons, everything painted nicely and you could see a lot of money everywhere. That was 1985 — people didn't have much money back then. They received us nicely, and showed us where we will play: it was a big room in a Cultural Affairs building, that means official! People started to gather filling the room, to eat and drink, like at all weddings. It was strange that I couldn't see the girl and her groom anywhere, but I was afraid to ask. And we played, and played, and made a lot of money, all German marks, thousands of them. I kept looking for the girl that was to be married, but she was nowhere to be seen. I was afraid something happened to her, but couldn't ask. Then someone told us to shut up, because "the plate" is coming. I didn't know what it is. Which plate, for food? There was too much food around already. It turned out that "the plate" is one big plastic trough. I kept looking for what's gonna happen. Then we got an order to pay "the tus", and the soliciting started: first the best man got up, and announced: "I give a 1000DM to the couple, and my best man owes me



2000DM, which he owes me with interest". He threw a 1000DM into the trough. Then, next man announced: "I am a cross-cousin of the best man here; I give 500DM to the couple, and my cousin owes me 1000DM, no interest", and he threw money also into the trough. And the same thing kept happening until all tables had somebody announcing how much money they give as a present to the newlywed couple, and how much money their relatives owed to them, with or without interest rate. Every time somebody would put the money into the trough, we had to play the tus, and the atmosphere got really hot. This thing lasted for another 4 hours or so; I was really exhausted and scared. Only later I realized how this soliciting works: it's a good way to help the young couple, and to make some money at the same time. At the next wedding, the same thing happens, and money keeps going from one family to the other, without actually losing anything. That's good. That's how we get rich. This couple made 9000DM, at least, for the wedding.

We slept for only a couple of hours, when we were called again. They took us to a house, to play in front of a few people they called "friends", maybe 15 or so. We played some time, when we heard noise and voices, a woman screaming. The Roma brought out the bride from a house nearby, accompanied by an elderly woman carrying some white cloth with her. It turned out that the girl spent the night with her future husband, and as a proof of her chastity and virginity, her underwear is being exposed for everyone to see. Then, the girl's underwear was placed around her father's neck. He was really embarrassed. The music is playing, people are throwing serious money around, on us, on the girl, on the girl's father! Total chaos. They were putting so much money on the accordion, that I couldn't keep up with them, collecting money and putting it into our bag! If the girl weren't a virgin, she would be sent home with us, no doubt about that. Then everybody played the folk dance, "kolo". Only later we found out that these Roma people are very rich; they have around 20 houses in Knjazevac, and make serious money with their circus, monkeys, vampires and merry-go-rounds. When

I entered the house, I couldn't find my way out, it was so fixed and all on buttons. I personally earned 900 DM on that wedding. That's the thing with the Gypsies in general: we are all poor until we make a public celebration like this one. Then we get rich, at least for a while.

I've traveled a lot in those days. I've been in West Germany, for example. One German fellow arranged that we come and play in his restaurant. The name of my band was "Šabacki Romi", and we were famous. When we got to Germany, we found out that he's no German, but a Turk, which I didn't like. But he told us he'd pay us well, even if it were a Turkish place. He had a restaurant in a city called Bremenhafen, some 365 kilometers from Berlin; this was 1978, we had never been out of Yugoslavia before, and didn't know about their money. It was difficult for us in the beginning, because the audience was Turkish, and they didn't get our music at all. Only when we played *Una Paloma Bianca*, they applauded us, and that was the only salary we got. Applause. We got into an argument with the owner, too. Then we put some posters around the restaurant, and Yugoslavs came. Our people, our immigrants from Yugoslavia came to listen to our music, and we got paid well. I thought that their currency is funny—in all colors. We didn't know the value of it, so every night, we would split the earned money like "one of these for you, one for me, etc.". We didn't know what to do with their German money; we were hungry, for the restaurant gave us only one little potato and a soup each day. We didn't know if we have the money to get back home. But then one night a group of Serbs came; and they enjoyed our music very much. They gave us a lot of tips, and some extra money to go home. We were so desperate to go home that we tried to sell our instruments, to get the money. We didn't know the language, or which bus to take. But now we had the money for the trip, and took home a lot of extras. I didn't like West Germany at all.

On the other hand, I loved Luxemburg very much. We played there for two months in 1981, in Tito's time. Luxemburg is a small country, like a town, but very neat and rich. I

would leave my two houses here and go back there any minute, if only I could. That's how much I liked it. Their streets are so clean, like our pharmacies, or somebody's room. What impressed me the most, is that there is no crime, or danger: you can send your wife, or daughter, or daughter-in-law in the street at midnight, and nothing will happen to them. That's because they have culture. They are nice people with culture, for one thing. Next, I loved their cigarettes — only 10, or 12 in the box, but all in different colors, and they all cost the same. We played in a lot of places, 16 or so, in Luxemburg, and made approximately 2500 franks each evening, per musician. That's a lot of money, and we split everything in four, like brothers would do. We went to shop for food and meat in particular, but couldn't buy just any. They have a weird taste for meat. I wanted to eat some baby lamb, but couldn't find any, just some chicken and frog thighs.

I remember those days as my best. It was still Tito's time. [the former] Yugoslavia is gone forever, and there will never be a country like that. Ever. While Tito was alive, and some time after his death, I could travel everywhere freely. I could have slept in any channel, and smuggle whatever I wanted, coffee, or pigs, and have full pockets all the time. No one dared to touch me, or do bad things to me, I could move around in Slovenia, Croatia, or among the Muslims and Hungarians, and all people were nice at that time.

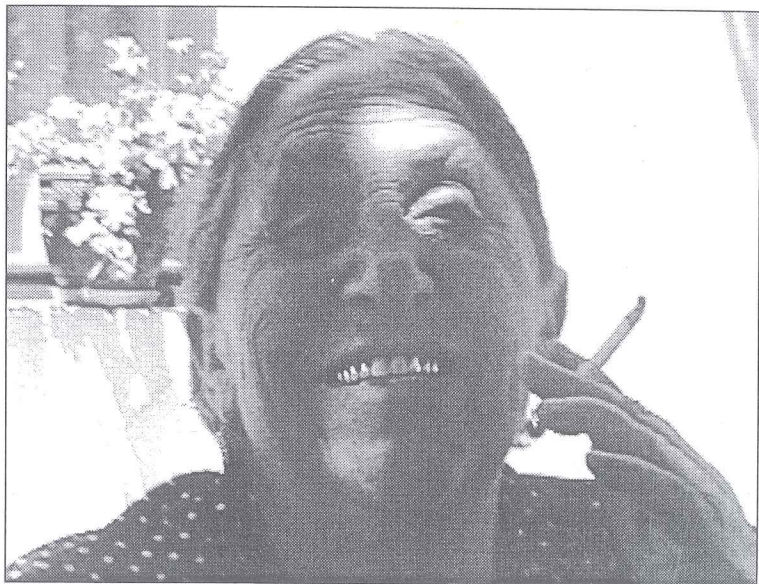
During Tito's regime, I traveled through all neighboring countries of former Yugoslavia. I liked it best in Luxembourg. But [former] Yugoslavia is the one and only country of gourmands... In other countries, if you don't work, you don't have anything to eat, but in Yugoslavia, you can eat and drink and don't have to work at all! Here, we enjoy beautiful women, have culture and intelligent people — who work very little and still have very much. That's why Yugoslavia is one rich, great country, where people enjoy life. In any other country in the world, if people would steal like they do here, that country would flunk, but here, you don't even feel it...the more you steal here, the more there is to steal. I would never live anywhere else.



## STORY II

### OLD STORIES ARE JUST LIKE SCHOOL

Lepa Djurić is from Čergari Gypsy tribe. Today, she lives in Dumača, a suburban area of Šabac, the biggest town in Mačva. Šabac has approximately 10.000 Gypsy inhabitants, and it is known as a "Gypsy town". Mrs. Djurić is around 73 years old. She lives with her 4 children and 8 grandchildren; she lost one daughter in Kosovo, during the 1999 war. Her looks are still remarkable, in spite of her age, and she must have been a great beauty in her time. She is a woman of status and respect in her Gypsy community; she is decorated with jewelry and most of her teeth are golden. Her family owns three houses, and is considered rich by Gypsy standards. Lepa's sons made their money mostly through trade. The Čergari Gypsies used to be nomadic; of all groups, they retained the most of their "Gypsy distinctiveness", by keeping apart from non-Gypsy and other Gypsy groups. Their name comes from the Turkish word čerga, or a "Gypsy



Lepa

tent". They speak Romani and Serbian. The interview took place in the summer of 2002.

Lepa's account appears in five sections, and contains material in this order: family history, childhood, marriage, and ethnic relations, while in the last section she recounts an ancient Gypsy story, "Proma and paramic". The complexity of the story, which includes the number of elements from well-known word fairy-tales and legends clearly shows how the Gypsy culture and tradition have mixed with non-Gypsy cultures. Gypsy culture responded to, in permanent dialogue with the outside. However, the main point of the story suggests that any influence from outside the Gypsy community can bring nothing but sorrow and injustice to the Gypsies themselves. The underlying message of this story, for generations of Gypsies, therefore, is not to trust and mix with an outsider who is often perceived as evil. This Gypsy tuition can be perceived as ethno-centrism, but also as a cautiousness derived from their past bitter experience with non-Gypsies. *Proma and Paramic* is put on paper here for the first time. The persistence of stories like this one



Lepa's grandchildren

implies that oral narrative is essential to Gypsy native tradition and that such a tradition offers the base of the educational model that preserves and constitutes generations of young people as a separate ethnic group.

Lepa grew up absorbing Gypsy traditions. She lived in a traditional Gypsy fashion for many years: she traveled in *cerga* a good deal as a child. On the other hand, Lepa's ability to move forward from her own experience when she explains Gypsy traditional behavior and ethnic relations with non-Gypsies, makes her life history an outstanding cultural document. According to her own words, storytelling has always been important as a crucial way of obtaining knowledge among Gypsies. Today, she considers it important to make a record of her memories about the past for her grandchildren and younger people. She credits her long life to the fact that her life was just as it should be.

### Lepa's story

#### *Family*

We were always on the move, that's how Čergari used to live before. My family stayed together all the time, we traveled together. We were always going places, traveling around Serbia. We had one nice animal drawn vehicle, horses, of course, for Gypsies love horses. Back in those days, if you had a vehicle with horses, and nice, big pillows, you were rich. We were proud of that. My family was into coppersmithing, making cauldrons from copper; my father and mother used to work together and sell their products to peasants [Serbs]. We would move from place to place, my mother and father and three kids: my two brothers and me, and we never had a house. We always got along really well with Serbs; we lived from them, from selling goods to them. We had to get along well. I'm from Topola, and people [Serbs] really accepted and loved us. We shared food, especially; a little of cornbread, onions, some bacon...whatever, people used to share with each other, and nobody was hungry back then. We didn't have shoes, like today; we



had opanke, just like Serbs. They were made of wood, and not very comfortable.

We had our coppersmithing, and the people, Serbs, needed us, and needed our products; so we would exchange a cauldron for some cornflower. I don't remember my grandparents; they have been dead for a long time. I lived with my mother and father. My father was Toma; he was a good man, hard-working and always had good relations with the Serbs. My mother was Zora, and she worked even more than my father. She used to help him in his work, and on top of that she had three children to raise. I don't know where my mother is from. I remember that my parents loved each other very much. When we, my brothers and I got older, we helped with trough-making too. We all worked, for it was a difficult time for everybody. We didn't go to school at all; when the time was right for me to start school, the war started. And anyway, things were different back then — we didn't need school to make troughs and sell them. We were just really good in making things with our own hands, which was enough for us to survive and live.

When the war started, we were in Smederevska Palanka; we knew about Hitler but couldn't imagine what will happen to us. I remember when the bombing started, it was a horror: houses and shops destroyed, horses becoming wild and crazy, people stealing food and flour from destroyed buildings... Only poor people took the goods. The war was particularly difficult on us; we couldn't travel the way we used to, and we had to be really careful, and to hide from the Germans. Germans killed a lot of Roma. If a German soldier would die, the German army would take revenge on ordinary people: kill 100 peasants and Roma for that one soldier. We were hiding in the woods, most of the time, and went out to villages only to exchange copper products for some food. We were careless one time, and got caught up in a line near Gornji Milanovac; Germans were taking us to Pozarevac, and we had to walk a long way. After a while, they suddenly stopped the line, formed a firing squad, and started to kill people. I was so scared. My mother cried. I tho-

ught I will die, and I was only, I think, 13 years old. The Germans were searching us for gold and jewelry, and then one of them said that they should let us go, since we are poor, and have nothing. By miracle, they let us live, my family and one other. I'll never forget that event. The rest from the line, not only Roma, but many Serbs, were either killed, or send to concentration camps. I don't know what happened to the survivors. I think that Roma are great sufferers; but we survived, and our kids survived, and that's what is most important. We always managed somehow, because we are Roma; that's how the Roma are.

When the war was over, Russians came, and many people, especially girls, went out to the streets to greet them. Girls threw flowers on them, offered them our wine and everything, and my mother said: "My poor mother and grandmother, and everybody thank you for expelling Germans from our country". For Hitler would kill us all, the Roma and Serbs together. We, the girls, had to watch ourselves; when the Russians would come along, to the village where we were staying, I used to put some coal and ashes to my face, to make it ugly. I was a really pretty girl: I had hair down to my waist, and big, round earrings. I was afraid that the soldiers would harm me, take me by force, because that's what soldiers did. And that's why our Gypsy girls made themselves ugly and unattractive, they had to hide their beauty and youth, and their chastity and virginity, for they had to respect the parents and keep their cheeks clean and pure from disgrace.

Before the war, Gypsies were paid half of a dinar, for a whole day of digging in the fields. But we managed among our people. Poor people were servants before, in the King's days.

After the war Tito came, and everything was different. A new time came, and it was really good for everybody, especially for us Roma. Although Tito was a Croatian, he opened up all countries — you didn't need a visa to travel anywhere, back then. He pulled out people from their poverty, even the ones without houses. At first, we

didn't have a house; then we took one for rent, and later got to buy one. That was something. Many Roma have left for Austria and Germany, got really good jobs over there, and built nice houses here. However, money wasn't enough: we didn't have the money to send our children to school; that's why they are all without school. Anyway, we could move freely all over our Yugoslavia, and all neighboring countries, and that was really good for us; many started to trade, mostly with cattle. Tito stayed with us—many Roma didn't have houses, but they got them under Tito.

Today Roma are not employed; they don't have any income, they are not educated. It was nice under Tito; we could work and travel and had no troubles at all.

#### *Marriage and children*

I married late, when I was 28 years old. My father didn't want to give me just to anybody, he waited and waited until the right man came along. My father was a Roma president, a president of our committee, and he wanted someone with money for me. This was my husband. He was a coppersmith, too. I married him, and that was my first and the last marriage; and it was registered too. That is because my father was such a good and nice man, and he chose for me a man from a good, friends' family. My father chose my husband for me; and it was a good choice. I had a really good husband, hard-working and honest.

We have 5 children together: two sons, and three daughters. I had my first child in 1957, my daughter that is now missing, Gordana. We used to live in Bramble, until my father-in-law gave away the house and the land to his daughter, so we moved here, to Dumača. My sons are successful traders, they are both married and I have 8 grandchildren from them. My daughters were not lucky — they were all married, but had to divorce. I don't know what happened to my daughter Gordana, she stayed in Kosovo during the war, and we didn't hear from her since. My sons have tried everything, search the land for her, but no luck. None of my



kids went to school, but they are doing just fine; they were never employed, but have worked for themselves, they messed around somewhat, and managed. Only Gordana liked school, she taught herself for 8 years, and she used to write poems. She also tried to organize Roma, into a society, to do something for our rights. But she disappeared. That is my only pain now.

### *Women*

When I was young, girls had to be virgins to get married; you couldn't do it otherwise. Girls were kept, watched over very carefully, none of them made love to boys, like these days. They were married at 13, or 14 years of age. I was an exception, I was from a really good family, and my father looked for me someone who was of the same rank, not some beggar. My husband was from a first class family. But a lot of men kept asking for me. But they didn't have any money, and I had to obey my father, that's how I was brought up, even if I was without any school. We had an "honor court", or in Romani Krisgomaji: our Roma committee, mostly old days people, and they judge you, if you do right or wrong. For example, they would be called up after the girls' first night with her husband, to see the girl's underwear, and if a girl was a virgin, then it was considered that the wedding could start. If not, old people would gather, and make a meeting, to inquire if a boy's father wants to accept a girl even if she's not a virgin. If the boy's father wanted a girl in spite of her being non-virgin, old people would decide that the wedding costs are to be paid half by a girl's father, and half by a boy's father. If she was a virgin, the music would play very loud, and everybody would dance and be merry. But then the boy's family pays for everything: some of the weddings lasted for 3 or more days! We have a saying "Give me your gold, and I will give you mine", for a true girl, that is, a virgin. We still buy a woman, sometimes for a great price — 2000 or 3000 German marks. It was important that the couple gets together

well: that a woman is hardworking and that she doesn't sleep late. If she behaved badly, her father was called up, and tried to make things up or to take her home. It wasn't a problem for a woman to get married many times: women were in demand always, among Roma, and among peasants, too. Only poor males couldn't find their patch. However, people from the committee tried always to preserve marriage, they tried to fix problems between people. It was important to preserve the marriage. If a woman were returned to her father, he would have to pay back the wedding costs, and her price too. If a divorce happens, and that happens often — a man goes after another woman usually—a woman might leave 2 or 3 of her children with the father, and take the rest of the kids with her.

These days, people have acquired much more freedom in their behavior, and divorces are more frequent. This trend started around 1991, when the war started. Young people went crazy, and they don't respect anybody anymore. They pass me by like I'm a Turkish graveyard — no good day, no good morning, no nothing. Many people went abroad, to a foreign country, and that's it. But, Roma love to move around very much, love to change places frequently. Many girls are not good girls today; they marry foreigners or even peasants. They are unfaithful and their behavior ain't good.

In the past, many of our women made their living by magic: fortune telling, healing and sometimes begging. Some women, especially old ones, were good in fortune telling, protection against evil eyes and healing. They really knew some magic, it worked. Of course, grandmothers are dead today, and only some do it today, but it was widespread in the past. Old women used to protect newborn babies in many magical ways, and it worked. Especially it was important to smudge a baby with burned charcoal. Some old women knew how to cure illness, how to make your stomach work right. A woman with the sick stomach has to lay down, on the ground, and a grandmother would put a pot made of clay onto the stomach. In the clay pot, a cloth with ashes

and lard is placed, and it was set on fire, with the lid tightly closed. The pot squeezes the stomach, and it works again like a Swiss clock. That pot would make stomach work right again. There was no medical doctor at that time; this was actually a way to deal with complications after abortion. Not many women did it, but some got sick after, and this was good cure. Women used to have 6 or 7 children, some 5 like I did.

### *Ethnic relations*

We are international people; we like to travel and go places but we don't mess and we don't try to mess with other people's business. We don't hate anybody. We just want justice and open road for our children so they can become nice and polite people. We, the Roma, we have many nations. These nations are something like tribes, and these tribes are very different among each other. For example, we don't marry each other, or at least, it was like that. Young people started to get more freedom and liberty in their behavior, so these days they don't watch so much. But before, it was the rule. No one would marry a Gurbet Gypsy, or someone from Šahara tribe, or Kanjara, for they are beggars and they don't marry. We didn't marry them because we had our pride. We used to go with our cergas [wagons] around, and were very proud of our nice cerga, and camps, and pillows. We were always honest, not like some people. That's changed today. Many girls are unfaithful, and don't want to work, and they marry an Italian, or a German, or even a peasant. My sister-in-law has a daughter-in-law who is peasant, and she doesn't like her at all, she wants to return her back to her family, but her son will not allow — he loves her. That girl even learned to speak perfect Romani, actually she speaks much better Romani than we do, and so they can't argue in front of her. That pisses off my sister-in-law.

My father was a Roma leader, he was in our committee, and he was very much respected. He also maintained





very good relationships with peasants. We don't hate anybody, not Muslims, not peasants, not other Roma, because we used to travel, and cooperate with everybody. Although, we never mix with them. My godfathers are Serbs, some rich people from Sipovnica, that's the place where my mother and father are from. My family was always a very good one, with the most culture among Roma; a Serbian priest was my father's very good friend, and the president of our municipality, too. We greeted them with respect, like guests and gave them always some food and wine. Only bad families keep to themselves, and don't talk with peasants. They are mostly poor families, but we accepted them too. The only thing is that these Roma from Mačvanski Pričino-  
vići and Tabanović — they marry and divorce many times, and that's no good. They are not honest people.

About 10 years ago, a hatred and envy began, among the peasants, and among the Roma too. They used to ask for our opinion before, and we all loved each other. My grandfathers, my ancestors were born here, in Serbia, and I was too. We are Orthodox, and we used to love our Serbs. We just never loved people who harassed us, and killed us. My children now keep to themselves, because of this hatred, they associate only with people with culture.

### *Proma and Paramic*

I've heard this story from my father, so it must be an old one. I used to tell this story to my children and grandchildren, when they were just little kids. It's about the girl and a young prince, we say Proma and Paramic. This is a good one: kids learn a lot from it.

Once upon a time, there was a young Gypsy girl who had two brothers. She was really a beauty, and good in school. The best pupil. She was so clever and bright, that soon she overcame her schoolteacher. She was more literate than he was. The schoolteacher liked her a lot, and wanted to take advantage of her — to sleep with her. He tried many times, but the girl resisted, for she was an honest





creature. When he finally got tired of trying, he got angry with her, so he went to the girl's father. Her family was the richest one in the county, and her father was a big man, a Roma, with a status and horses and everything. So, the schoolteacher came to the house, and he was offered food and coffee, but he said no. He said: "I didn't come for your food or coffee, but to tell you about your daughter's debauchery". And the schoolteacher told the girl's father that his daughter is a dishonest, and a promiscuous woman. Her father was devastated, and desperate to hear something like that about his only daughter; and he trusted the schoolteacher, for this fellow was respected by people [Serbs] the village: he was, after all, educated and literate. So, the father told his sons to take their sister to the woods, and to slay her, as a punishment for disgracing her family. The two brothers were very sad, but they had to obey the father's order. They took her to the place where there is no sound, there is no human hand, there is no rooster to sing or a voice to hear. A dog followed them along. They traveled for two days and two nights. When they arrived in a dense forest, the brothers said "It is a great sin to kill our sister. We will place her high on one tree with three branches, and build three posts around, and put three branches around to protect her from wild animals. And we will slay the dog, and take his heart to our father". That's what they said, and that's how they did it.

The forest where the brothers left the girl was an emperor's [Roma] forest, where he hunted every day. After three days, an emperor came to the forest to hunt; his dogs smelled the girl's flesh and started to bark at the tree where she was hiding. And the emperor said "If you are a wild animal I will shoot you, if you are not, come out and show your face". And the girl said "My master, I am no wild animal, I am a human being". Then he took her down from the tree, and asked her what she was up to. She responded that she went out of her village to find a job. The emperor asked her what does she know to do, and she said "I know how to clean, and cook, and how to serve". So he decided to take the girl





to his palace. So she became a servant in his palace; she was hardworking and honest, and everybody liked her.

In the meantime, young emperor decided to get married. He wanted a woman that could fit into his mother's shoes. He took his mother's shoe, and said that a girl who can wear this shoe will be his bride. He tried and tried, went everywhere around his empire, but none of the girls could fit into the shoe. He came back home. One day, he said that the new servant should try the shoe, too, which she did, and it fitted her perfectly. The prince's mother was furious, and told him that it would be the greatest disgrace for all of them if he married an ordinary servant. The prince stood by with his decision, and married the servant.

In the first year of their marriage, the girl bore him one son. In their second year, a second son, and in the third year, she gave him their third son. This way she got three empires. The prince was delighted, and out of his great love for his wife, he made her a golden swing. After their children grew up a little, the prince asked his wife if she has a family. "Yes", she responded, "but they live far and away, and there is no need to look for them anyway". However, he decided it was time for her to get together with her family again, now that she had three sons, and gave her an army and a major, the commander, to accompany her during her journey home. So they started to travel, the girl, her three sons, the major and the army. They traveled day and night until they finally reached a valley where they made the camp for the night. Her tent was in the middle, surrounded by the army. Later that night, the major entered her tent, and asked her in front of her children: "Will you make love to me? If not, I will slaughter your son". And she responded: "I will not have anything to do with you, ever, kill my son". And she was an empress, dressed in rich clothes, with epaulets. But the major killed her son. The next day they continued their journey; they traveled all night and day and by the nightfall they reached another valley. Her tent was in the middle, surrounded by the army. And the major entered her tent and asked again: "Will you sleep with me, or, if





not, I will kill your second son". This time, she responded: "I will. But first I'll go outside to see if it is raining or there are stars in the sky". She went outside and ran away as fast as she could. She met some people who were shepherds, and asked them to exchange their clothes with her, and so they did. She put their clothes on and gave them her nice dresses. In the morning she reached a roadhouse where her father used to drink coffee. She saw him, her father,



and she stayed at one corner, watching him. So, he was there and he asked her: "What is with you, you good-for-nothing bump? What are you looking for?" She replied: "I came to serve here. I know horses, and how to attend them, and how to keep them and feed them". He asked: "Where will you sleep?" And she said she could sleep in the stables, with horses. She was afraid that her brothers would recognize her. Her father agreed, and took her home. Three years went by.

During those three years, the emperor was seriously ill. It was a nervous breakdown. Near the prince's palace, there was one little house where an old woman lived. The



emperor went to see her, and she asked: "My precious emperor, what pain brings you to me?" The emperor said: "I don't have my wife anymore. I don't know where she is. I don't know where my sons are. What advice can you give me?" The old woman told him: "My advice to you is to go to every kingdom, and when people gather around you because you are a prince, ask everybody to tell a story. That's how you will find her traces". And so he did. He went everywhere. He finally reached the village of the girl's father. People gathered around him, to eat and drink, including the schoolteacher, and the major. And the emperor was sweating, and he said: "I'm not into food and drinks, I just want that you people tell me a story". So they did. The emperor heard a lot of different stories and they went on and on. But he wasn't satisfied. Finally, he asked: "Is there anybody else that could tell me a story?" And the people said: "Yes, there is one servant, he sleeps in the stables, but he is stinky and bad, and you don't want him to tell you a story". But the emperor insisted. So they brought the servant, she was dirty and smelly, and had poor, ripped clothes on. And she said: "My master, I will tell you a story. But you have to order to lock all doors, and gates and close all windows. And light a fire in the hearth". And they did the way she asked. They put the locks on every door, and closed all windows and lit a fire. And she began her story: "Do you see that man? He had one daughter. One day a schoolteacher came to him, and slandered his daughter, saying that she is a bad girl and that she sleeps around. And the father believed him. And her two brothers, these men over here, took her to the woods to slay her, and to bring her heart back to the father. But they killed the dog, and let her live. Then one emperor came to the forest, and noticed a girl. He took her to his palace, and married her. During the next three years, she gave him three sons, and therefore three empires. Tell me, my master, how would you recognize your wife? And the prince responded: "By the moon on her back and the sun on her chest". And she took her dirty clothes off, and there was the moon and there was the sun on her





chest. And the prince ordered that the schoolteacher and the major be thrown into the fire. And so they burned until nothing was left of them. After that she returned to her empire. And the moon and the sun were on her.

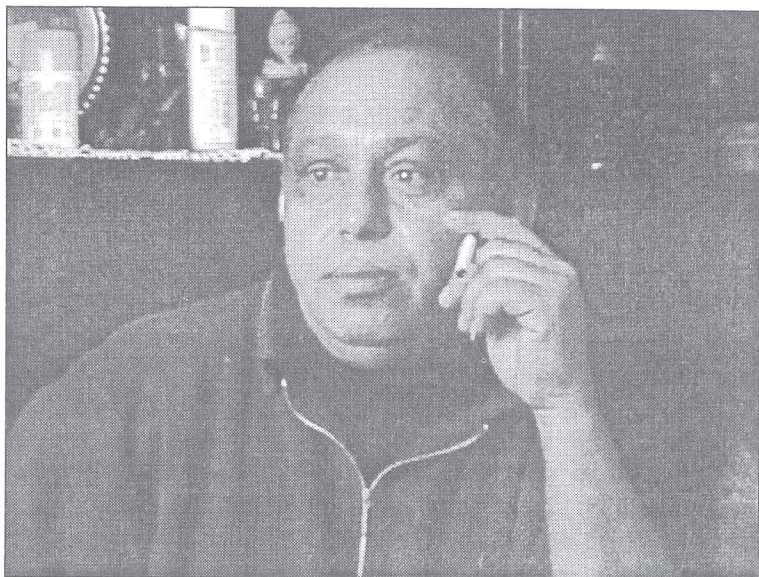
I think that a story like this is just like going to school. Many children will listen, the ones that want to know something, many will not. Our children learn from a story like this a proper way of behavior, to behave like Roma children: to be polite, and how to behave with other people. From this particular story, children learn that love wins always, and that to be faithful is the most important thing. They also learn about kin love and brotherly love, and a father's pride.

## STORY III

### A TRUE SERB

#### Djokara's story

Dragan Burić-Djokara is a 46-year-old musician from the Karavlox Gypsy tribe. He lives in the village of Dogwood with his wife, two adult children and a grandson. He has a comfortable house, a car and one little bar that he operates together with his wife. Djokara has a band in which he plays with his son, while his wife sings. Music is still their main source of income. They all speak Serbian as their first language. Djokara does not know Romanian, or Romani, the Gypsy language. He says that he is a 'true' Serb — he always felt and declared himself as such. The story that Djokara tells makes a significant contribution to an understanding of the flexibility of Gypsy ethnic identity. His account is presented in four sections: family history, childhood, marriage, and ethnic relations, in which we follow how he



Djokara

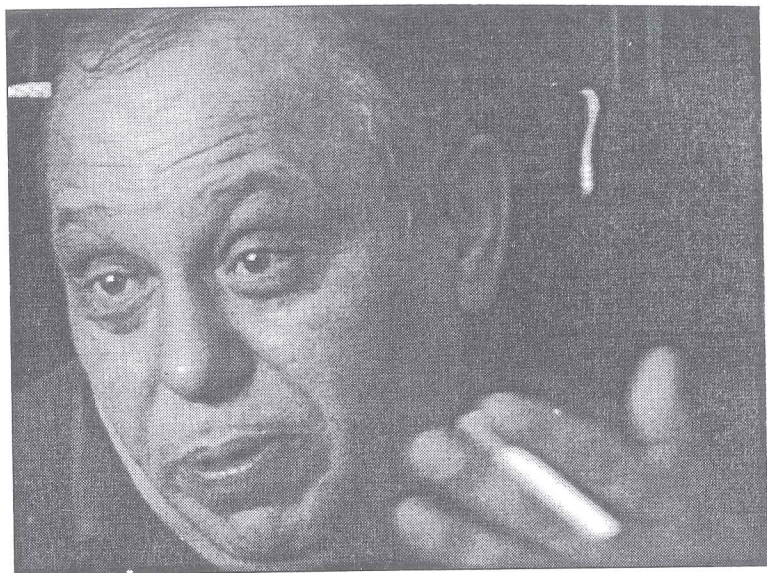


has pursued out a strategy worked out by his ancestors to negotiate ethnic and social identity and thus gain access to resources such as status. The Gypsies from his village rank at the top among most Gypsy tribes in Mačva. Their status, according to informants, comes from the fact that they have the best cooperation with the Serbs in their village. The interview took place during the winter of 2002–2003.

This is his story:

### *Childhood*

I was born in Skela, near Obrenovac. We lived there until 1978, then we came here, to Dogwood, and we live here since then. My mom was born and raised in Dogwood, she was only married in Skela, to my father Sreten. My childhood was a happy one, although our family was very poor. My mom and dad had three children: my sister, my brother and me. We are all approximately two years apart. My parents got along very well, they stayed together until death took them apart! They had what I called "an ideal" marriage; although, I have to say, if it weren't for my mom, we wouldn't do anything with our lives. My mom, Nadezda, stayed with us most of the time, and taught us how to behave, and taught us to love school. My father was away, most of the day, working. At night, he performed. My old man was a musician, he played violin, and actually, my grandfather and his brothers were musicians too. It runs in the family — I am a musician, I play violin, and my son inherited the talent for music too. This is our tradition, and not only that, but we all have a good ear for music. At that time, when I was born, playing music didn't pay very well. I remember that we used to live in a poor house made of mud, 4x4m. We had only two beds, I slept with my mom, because I was her youngest, and her favorite child. My mom was a great mother to us and a hard worker: she used to go around the village and do all kinds of jobs — cleaning, washing, cooking, she would also go out to the fields from time to time. But she never begged, ever. Gypsy women do that — beg for food or money, but my mom never did that. She earned every dinar.



She would go out into the fields, to work for a whole day; landlords usually gave workers some food, a breakfast, or something, a piece of meat...but my mom would never eat that, no, she brought home every piece of food, for us, kids, to share. That's how she was. She also never allowed me to accompany her when she worked in the fields — I remember that I cried every time she would go out, but she never let me, for it was too hot for a child to sit in the sun on the open field the whole day.

My father, also, used to take every job he could find, for he couldn't support us only with his violin. He was a strong, big, healthy man, and knew how to do a lot of things. He died two years ago, and my mom passed away in 1995. I am very glad that I was able to give them a different life — they sacrificed their whole lives for us, kids, and when we moved here and I started to play around Yugoslavia and the neighboring countries — I provided for them, took care of them financially. Both of my parents deserved that, after what they've been through, when we were little kids.

I was born in 1957. The late 50's and 1960's were very difficult times. There was never enough food, no matter how hard you worked or tried. Both of my parents worked, but I still remember the poverty around us, and that little house where we used to live. On the other hand, maybe those difficult life conditions made us all very attached to each other. My brother and sister, and myself, we were always very close. We still can't live without each other: my brother lives in this same house, just has the entrance on the other side, and my sister is married into a house only a 100m away from us.

We respected our parents — that's how we are brought up, not like the kids today. You give them one little finger, and that's not enough, no, they want the whole hand! We, the kids, all went to school, even if we were so poor. My mom insisted on our education. The nearest school was about 7km away from the place where we lived, and I had to take a bus every day to get to school. There was one part of the road that I needed to travel by foot, by some forest, and my mom would always wait for me there — during winter especially, to make sure I'm safe. We also didn't have appropriate clothes — no winter shoes, or gloves. But we were very fortunate, we had the best schoolteachers. My schoolteacher was especially fond of me. She didn't make any distinction between me and other kinds — like I'm a Gypsy kid or something. On the contrary, she did all she could so we can enroll in school like every other kid. I'm still very grateful to her. I was a very good student, always. I never needed any special help, to learn school things. I know there is a huge problem with Roma children today, in schools, but that's due to the Roma mentality; a lot depends on parents, on their attitudes, and how they advise their children. That's a real pity, a shame, for all those Roma children today, but that's the irresponsibility of their parents, nothing else. I realize that we are not the same, and we don't have the same capabilities. I know that I have Roma origin, but I have always tried to behave properly. I raised my children, especially my daughter, like God said we all should. I tried to give



my kids everything, and to bring them up to be good persons. I thank God that they didn't have to follow my footsteps, and suffer.

I have a primary education, I think it's like eight grades of elementary school, like that call it today. I am very sorry, even today, that I couldn't continue my schooling further. I still regret that today. But, after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I started to play with my father. When I was 10 years old, he bought me my first harmonica; after six months, I mastered it completely, that's how talented I was for music and playing. That was a very different time, than it is today. It was expected from me, and my brother, to learn how to play, and to become musicians. After all, that's what our family, our grandfathers used to do. I have to say that I loved music since very early age. My father taught me how to play, and I loved it. I was particularly good in playing kolo, our [Serb] dance: I would play it, and the whole room would get up to dance! That was exciting, especially since I was just a little boy. Some guests at weddings used to lift me up, on their shoulders, and I would play like that. I loved the attention I was getting, and I knew I was good. On the other hand, I should have pursued schooling, but the circumstances were the way they were, and I neglected further schooling, and became a musician. Who knows what could have happened if I continued my school? I was very good in school, always good with numbers and especially drawing. I could have been an architect, if I had different life circumstances. Later on, when I grew up, I paid myself some private music lessons in Belgrade, in one music school, to specialize. I learned a lot, and today there is no melody, or a song that I cannot pick up and play. Music is still what I make a living off, today. Maybe I'm lucky in that sense — I did and still do what I like the most. There is something about the rhythm that can carry you away, and that's what has happened to me. My brother also dropped-out school, to play, although he wasn't such a talent as I was. My sister, on the other hand, sang like a nightingale, it was such a joy to listen to her! Well, the saddest story of my childhood is

connected with her. I was always very attached to her; even I though was her younger brother, I felt a need to protect her, always, for she was the only girl in our family. That's how brothers are, toward their sisters. And she was a good person, too. I remember this as if it happened yesterday. It was 1968. I was 10 and half years old, my sister was around 13. My father's brother took her with him, to a shitty little place named Potoci, in Bosnia, to sing with his band. That place was behind the God's back, with one little furniture factory and a train that goes around once a week. And nothing else. When my uncle took her away, that broke my heart. I can still feel the pain of that separation today. She was just a little girl at the time, she even looked younger than her age; I guess that's why my uncle took her, for I was a kind of a sensation at ten, playing harmonica so good, and with my sis, it was the same. People would pay you more. He is my uncle, but I dislike what he did — he was using her. I don't know why my parents allowed that, maybe because we were always short on money, don't know. I think we were very good kids, respecting our parents, and school, and our schoolteacher. We had to obey, that's the key. I think that everything depends on where you were born; if I was born in Belgrade, who knows what would I become. I felt always that I could do whatever I wanted — no trouble in school at all, so talented and how, for music...it was just the life's conditions that determined which path to take, nothing else.

My sister came home after three months; she didn't say much about the place, and the restaurant where she had a job, but she told us that she managed to arrange a job for all of us — my father, my brother and me, to come back with her and perform in that same place. It turned out that the landlady, the owner of that restaurant came to like my sister very much, and when she heard that her whole family is into music, she has made the arrangement for all of us to come. That meant we all gonna make some money, thanks to my little sister! My father decided we should go, and bought us two new harmonicas, one for me,

and one for my brother. Actually, now when we were all back together, I was very excited about this trip. This was supposed to be my first trip, my first visit anywhere outside my village, and God knows what I expected. I had great expectations. I was just a 10-year old kid with a harmonica, but also a musician who's gonna make some serious money! I have to admit that it felt good, especially that my sister was back with us.

So we left. We only had money to get to that damned place, nothing more, not even for a piece of bread. We traveled by train the whole day, and my god, it was slow! It used the old-fashioned narrow rail tracks, and I thought we would never get to our destination. We had to take a connecting train in Mliniste, around 100km away from our final point. It was already dark, and getting cold. I remember I was very hungry, and I started asking for some food, at least some bread. But my father explained that we will have to wait until we get to that restaurant where we are suppose to play — maybe the landlady will give us some food. He didn't have any money, not even a dinar. So, we were sitting in a waiting room, at the station, and it felt like we were beggars or something, and I couldn't handle that. I cried loud, asking for my mom, and some food. That railway station was a horrible place: dirty, with some dim lights, and somehow everything looked old and beat up. Then my poor darling sister took off her sock, and there, in her elastics, she had two dinars, that she have saved for "rainy days", just like this one was. She bought us 1kg of bread, and I was very grateful, her gesture touched the bottom of my soul. She used that coin to tie/twist the elastics of her sock, and without it, her sock kept falling down. My darling sis! I tell this story to my kids, all the time. They can learn a lot from my life experience, don't know if they will ever use it.

Finally, we reached the place. I didn't like it, who knows what I have expected to find, but this was one lousy, dirty place to be. At least, our family was together. I have to say, the owner, the lady who liked my sister, she was ni-



ce. She was really nice to us. Her little restaurant was very primitive — no electric power, no heating, very modest all in all. She had put one little kerosene light on each table, and polyvinyl cloths. The guests were mostly factory workers; at that time, people were still uncivilized, and a restaurant with live band was not a good place to be. But, we were there, and we started to perform every night. I also accompanied my sister, and sang with her — my voice still didn't change, so I had a voice like a little girl, and our duets became so to say, famous. People gathered to listen to us — and my old man was also very good. The thing that I didn't like at all, is that my sister was exposed to all kinds of indecency. All female singers go through that, sooner or later. Some guests like to touch them, or to call them names, or to behave too familiar with them. And my sister was just a little girl, and very embarrassed. The first time a male guest touched her — I think he placed his hand on her — I started to cry, from anger and shame. And I was supposed to be a "real musician", but this was my sister, and it was too difficult to handle. Later on, I have learned to deal with all kinds of situations, and with people; that's what this profession is all about. We managed to earn some money, and after a month we got back home, to our mother.

Until the day he died, my father always worked on something. Even when he was old, he wanted to help. He died in my son's arms, literary. He died from throat cancer, in a hospital. He was 67 years old when he died. I used to tell him that he should slow down, and enjoy his retirement days, but he couldn't stop. He was just very diligent, and couldn't sit still. Always a fighter — that's what he was. He fought for us, to provide for us the best he could. I think he passed that down to me, because I'm the same with my kids. I would do anything for them.

### *Music*

The life of a musician can be very difficult. For the past 30 years, I go to bed in the morning, around 5 or 7 in

the morning, for I play the whole night. I sleep during the day — I get up around noon, or so. The basic thing is, you depend on other people, your audience. Whatever they say, or want, you learn that they have the right, always. That's the only way to survive in this profession. It took me a while to get that, but I mastered it, and now I'm fine. I first played with my father, for years. Then I got a band of my own, something more modern. The band is called "Demons", don't ask me why, my son named it. We had to adjust to current fashion, or to learn fashionable songs, always. My career was mostly good, in a sense that I don't remember that people harassed me because of my color — because I look like Roma. Maybe just a couple of times, but it wasn't personal...people would say cigani to us, or something. It was a different time than it is today, people didn't pay so much attention to nationalities then. Now, it's different. Luckily, even when there was a potential conflict, like — guests would get drunk and offend our female singer, or us — I always managed to calm things down. I know how to behave and how to soothe things. But, sometimes, I would get personally offended, when guests called me ciganin [Gypsy] — then my soul hurts, and I would think: Why am I not a Hungarian, why call me a Gypsy? People love to say that "Play, Gypsies"! Or they would curse our Gypsy mother. That always hurts me the most. I don't know if there is such a thing as a "Gypsy man" — for me, it looks like just as one bad, ugly word. I don't like that word, and I don't like to be called one. It's a pejorative term — anybody, even an American, or a German could be called a Gypsy, if that person behaves badly. I feel very bad when I hear that word. I managed to stay calm, always, and learn to put up with different people, even if they are mafia. If I had behaved differently, I would have never survived as a musician.

I've played for politicians, for mafia and for greatest gentlemen. For one job, I would make around 15.000 German marks. I used to fish in Plitvička Jezera [Lakes].

My music took me to Austria, Linc, in 1989. We had a very good job over there. That was still a very good time

for making money, for all of us. However, when the war started, in 1991, I came back home. I still don't know why I came back, why I brought my family here. Now, we can't travel — if we go to Belgrade to play, that's something. I wish that I could go around the country and play, the way I used to. But that's impossible now. I was in Bosnia last year, for two months, to play. They also got it bad. Today, it is a very difficult to survive from playing music. It's especially difficult for me, since my children are used to a good life, and now, I can't give them everything, the way they are used to. This is a great burden for me. I still feel responsible for them — even though my son is 21 years old; my daughter is 15 now. I don't know what will happen, I'm very concerned for the future. I have some 20 years of service as a musician, I paid into my retirement fund always, but that's not gonna come up with very much when I retire. I am a member of Independent Artists Organization of Serbia, but that's still no help. Before the war, this organization used to arrange jobs for us, musicians, in Yugoslavia, and abroad. Now, they won't do anything, they just ask for more money and more money, and we don't have anybody to play anymore. I think that our profession is dying out, and I'm sad because of it. This was a nice tradition, and a good life, especially when you are young.

I keep a few chickens, and a pig today, so my children won't be hungry. After all, I live in a village, and it is normal to have animals.

### *Ethnicity*

I am a Serb. I am a 100% original Serb. My father, and his father, and my grand-grand father were all born in Serbia. They always behaved like Serbs. I'm the same way. I love my country very much. This is where I was born. I don't know where my ancestors came from, but I feel I belong here. Never in my life I have felt like a Gypsy, not even for a moment. I have the same soul [like the Serbs], the same blood, the same upbringing, the same everything. That's



how I was raised. We were always Orthodox, always. My saint day, my slava is my Saint Arhandjel Mihajlo, we celebrate that. We have an icon, too. I always declared myself as a Serb, on all censuses. The same is true for my family, we all feel the same. My son, for example, he is a Serb too. We don't speak Gypsy language, we don't even know one word of it. We only speak Serbian, and we know some Romanian, but it's a dialect with around 30% of Serbian words. We are different than the people in Mačvancki Pričinović, for example. They all speak Gypsy language, and we don't understand them. They are Roma, Gurbeti. The others are Roma, not us. They say they are Gypsies, always did. I'm always afraid that I will offend someone by calling him Gurbet, or Roma, I almost apologize every time I have to say "You, from Gurbeti or Roma tribe...". That's funny, they apologize to me, sometimes, too, when they address me.

We always had very good relations with our neighbors; my first door neighbor [a Serb] is my godparent. The godparenting runs into our families for about 60 years. His grandfather baptized my mother, and his son did the same with me, and now his children are godparents to my kids. My son now started a new godparenting, with his best friend [a Serb], but I respected our family tradition — my godfather is over 70 years old today. My godfather is a very important to me, he is like my father, in a sense that I always respected him, and he took care of me, the best he could. His wife recently died, and he's very old, but he managed to be at my grandson's baptism, and he was the most welcomed person there. That's just our tradition. Who you gonna call if not your godfather? The funny thing is, they are all named the same. My godfather is named Sreten, just like my father, and my son, and his wife's name was Natasa, or Nadežda, just like my mom's and my daughter's. They gave us their family name, and we accepted it. My children are named after our godparents, but sometimes a confusion arises, when there is something official to sing, or to do, since we live next to each other, and they are all named the same.

My family has very good relations with almost everybody in this village. On the other hand, I can see today some difficulties arising — these modern kids are different than we were. Kids in the village are a little insolent today. Before, we never had any trouble at all. My mom and her family are from Dogwood — that's why we all came back here. When I first moved in here, some 25 years ago, everybody greeted me very warmly. There was no difference between me, and my first neighbor at all. I think we all had a different upbringing in those times. My first neighbor is my closest family, and we love each other still. Sometimes, he was closer to me than my own brother, or a father. I respect my neighbor very much; he is the first one to help me when I need help, and I'm the same way to him and his whole family. As kids, when I used to come to visit my grandparents here, in Dogwood, we played Cowboys and Indians — I was of course, the Indian. We go a long way back, like a true family. My son grew up with his [the neighbor's] kids, they are still best friends today, and tied with godparenting.

On the other hand, there is a kind of trouble in the air lately. This all started with the beginning of the war [1991] — people became nervous, or something, started paying attention to nationalities. And we had a lot of refugees coming here, from Bosnia. They stayed in my village, in some empty houses, or people just took them in. Anyway, a year and a half ago, the worst incident happened: one Gypsy boy got severely beaten by 10 or more villagers [Serbs]. I'm very sorry that such a thing could have happened here. It happened in our village center, where young people go out. In situations like this, I always think "Why am I not a Hungarian, why they call me a Gypsy, when I'm not?" Then, my soul hurts, from where did they get that I'm a Gypsy, why calling me like that? I'm not a Gypsy. I never stole anything. I would help everybody: I'm brought up that way, my kids are the same. We all act like our dear God told us to. By God's laws. We don't steal, we don't kill, we just play our music, that's all. That poor Gypsy boy didn't deserve what happened to him.

My son, on the other hand, never had any trouble, ever. That is because he behaves well. My son was involved in only one incident. He was out with his girlfriend, now his wife, and some female friends, in a restaurant, here in the village. They were still teenagers. And a couple of older men started to say things to them, to the girls. They even threatened that they will move out all Gypsies from this village. They cursed them: "I'll screw your Gypsy mother".

It's the same with these kids today, they call people names, like Gypsy or cigani. It happened that around 10 [Serbian] boys got together, young kids, around 15-16 years of age, at that center, where young people gather at night. That Gypsy boy, Slobodan was with a girl, she is a very pretty young girl. Actually, he was sitting with a few young girls. They were having drinks, quietly, minding their own business. Now, the point is, that [Serbian] boys like to look at Gypsy girls, especially when they are young and pretty. They would like to talk with them, or full around a little, who knows. Males [Serb] would always look at Gypsy females — not the other way around, a female [Serb] would never look at a male Gypsy. Anyway, I think, and I know this, since my son was there, he told me — these Serbs got jealous, they tried to prevent Slobodan to dance and talk with his female friends. They pushed him to the ground. The thing is, Dogwood is kind of uncivilized place — many young males have never been to the city [Sabac], they don't know how to behave. So, they started to beat up that poor boy, and some boys ran to the nearest bar, to ask for help. My son was sitting there, with his friends, Serbs. His best friends are Serbs. So everybody went to see what's going on, and these boys didn't want to participate — they helped to stop the fighting. Those were my son's friends, they are older boys, and different. My son got involved, and saw that our neighbor's kid is in the fight — they are Serbs — and they calmed down when my son intervened. The young fellow, that beat up Slobodan the most, our neighbor, said to my son "Don't worry, neighbor, everything is OK". Slobodan got a broken hand and some head injuries from this in-



cident. And they were just kids, schoolmates. This was a terrible event. The worst came later, when some Serbian boys, the same boys who participated in that fight, came to play football here, in this part of the village. Then they got beaten. I don't know what's with these kids. They are still children, maybe it's their puberty, but I doubt it. I think that something has changed, for the worse. Now, every time there is an argument between a peasant %SerbŠ and a Gypsy, the whole village takes sides. Peasants on one, and the rest on the other side. This is not gonna take us anywhere. Didn't we have enough of fighting and wars? When I think of it, it was always like that. Most arguments and fights were about girls. Usually, everything ended up with some bad words, and humiliation. But before, it was I against that one person, now it's like we are taking opposite sides, the whole village. I don't see anything good coming out of it.

These bad events, humiliations I had to take, didn't prevent me from feeling like a true Serb. I love my country, this is where I was born. If I was born in Zanzibar, I would feel the same. I don't hate anybody. I don't like to be humiliated. Why me? So what if I have dark skin, I have the same soul as anybody. Maybe I have greater Serbian soul than some Serbs. My kids were always an example in school: good students, always dressed well, better maybe than some people kids who had more money. My children always had good pocket money. They were clean, their mother always looked after that. I've always tried hard. My son is a Serb too, he is born here. I don't want to see him humiliated, ever, because someone calls him names. I sent him to high school, in Šabac, he was a good student always. He wanted to become an economist. His third day, kids tried to harm him with a screwdriver, because he is like a Gypsy. They tried to take his leather jacket. We came to visit him, my wife and daughter, and myself, to see his school, and how he's doing. I was very proud of him. We waited for him in the schoolyard. Some kids were near us, saying very bad, vulgar things about us. My daughter was there, I didn't

want her to hear any more of that crap. I pulled out my son from that school.

Maybe it's a mistake that we are here, in Dogwood, so mellow. But that's our characteristic. Roma in Mačvancki Pričinović, or even worse, in Draginje, they don't get humiliated, or beaten up. No, they fight back. If something like the event with that poor boy had happened over there, only ambulance could pick up parts from Serbs. They are Gurbeti, much more violent. On the other hand, we do the only way we know. We have a different mentality than the Roma. We are much more softer, and we never sold our girls. This is maybe not a nice thing to say, but we do have more culture. We don't have differences with peasants, not at all. Whatever they do, we do it, whatever they have, we have it. Actually, we understand ourselves as Serbs. Gypsies in Mačvancki Pričinović, they declare themselves to be Roma, always, but we never do. That's because we feel and see ourselves as Serbs. Gurbeti would speak their Gypsy language even in front of Tito. We all speak Serbian. I can understand some Romanian, but I can't speak it. We never used Romanian in this house. Not even in the village.

I was never into politics. However, I think that it would have been much better for all of us from ex-Yugoslavia, if we made a split right at the beginning. Serbia is Serbia, and it should stand alone. But God didn't let us split without any incident. In 1991, many males [Gypsy] from this village got drafted, and sent to Croatian war line. I could have stayed in Austria; we were there just at the outset of war. At that time, it was still relatively easy to get "papers" to stay and work there. But, I couldn't do it; I could have applied to get an asylum status, but I just couldn't do it, that was kind of shameful for me. Maybe I made a huge mistake: if we had done that, my children would be much better off today. Instead, I packed my family, and we went home, to Serbia. We traveled by car, and passed nearby Karlovci, just one day before the Croatian's HDZ slaughtered those 12 poor soldiers. This story followed us on our way home. But we were heading back home, and I thought that if it is

my destiny to die, then I would. If God decided that we should all be killed, that's it. Now I think I did the foolish thing. I regret the most because of my kids; if we had stayed, both of my kids would have a secure future. I'm very emotional when it comes to my home, and my hearth. I never approved of Milosevic's politics. In school, I was taught to love Tito and partisans, and to hate cetnik formations. Maybe that was wrong too. I'm not afraid in front of God. If only God would give us another Tito! If only God gave us another politician of that caliber, so my son can build his life! People say this and that about Tito, but that's besides the point — whatever he was, he was a master of politics, and I respect him for that. Although, I was never a member of a Communist Party. I didn't care about politics. We lived like in paradise when he ruled. He was the authority for the whole world, in those black African countries, everybody [foreign politicians] kneeled before him — I don't care if he was a hooligan. When he was alive, I was free to travel everywhere, to stop my car in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere, in Bosnia's mountains, among Muslims, and I was safe. I only wish that my son could live through a time like that — to be and feel safe in his own country. In Tito's time, and with our Yugoslav passport, there were no restrictions or visas for all of us. I was so proud to have a Yugoslav passport. That is so totally different than today. In 1990, I took a job in Austria; I was in front of one gas station, loading my car, when an elderly gentleman asked me where am I from. When I said "Serbia, Yugoslavia", he made a face expression, and said "Serbische Dreck" [Serbian shit]. That was terrible, it made me feel ashamed. I was also very much ashamed, and humiliated when Milosevic surrendered Kosovo. My son served in the Army, in Prizren. We used to go and visit him many times. I'm very sorry about Kosovo; that's the old Serbia, our land. But I think that we are to blame not only our politicians, but America, the most. If it weren't for the Americans, we would still live together, side by side, in our beautiful Yugoslavia. I'm sorry that my children won't be



able to live and travel the way we used to. Whatever happens in the future, it will never be the same.

*Marriage and family*

We didn't have mixed marriages with Roma. In the past, it was a big deal. Now, things are mixed up all together. Lately, a few peasant women got married to Romanians. They are all young couples, got married during the war years. Actually, it's still a big deal, not among young people so much, but their parents don't approve most of the time. They always looked at us like we are at some low position. I never minded. I would approve my son's marriage to every girl, as long as she is nice and from a good family. Also, a few males married Muslim women, the refugees from Bosnia. There are now 6 or 7 sisters, all Muslims that are married into this village. After the 1991, when the war started, many young people got married, including my son. I thought that he was too young, and he was, he was 17 at that time. But that was a special time, a war, a crisis. When the refugees started to come, first from Petrinje, Croatia, then from Bosnia, it was scary. Then I thought, "These people [the refugees] lost everything, many of their relatives are killed, who knows what will happen tomorrow". My son got married in 1999, during the bombing. We had his wedding while the bombs were falling. He actually got married because his girlfriend got pregnant. And, in a time like that, a baby seemed like a blessing. We didn't know where the war zone will end, and if we will survive.

In this village, people marry late — I got married when I was 25 years of age. I'm married to Biljana. She's a great wife and a good mother to my kids. She was my first true love. My wife is from Tabanović, another Romanian village. My aunt is married there. I met my future wife when she was just a kid. I'm older than she is, five years. I dated many girls from her village, and she knew about it. I remember her — she had nice braids, and I used to pull her by her hair. She was very beautiful, even today, she has the most wonderful

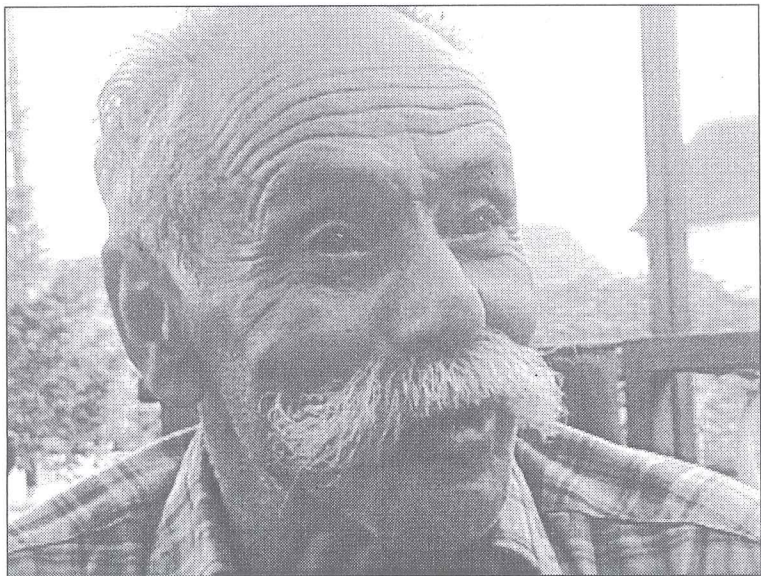
green eyes. But she was too young for me, at that time. We had some kind of sympathy for each other, but I didn't want to get serious until I served in the Army. I was 20 when I went into the Army, in 1977. After that, when I came to visit my aunt and saw Biljana, I knew she was the one. However, I was still not good financially at that time, and I didn't want to drag her with me into poverty. I first wanted to create something, so I can provide a decent life for my wife. Also, I wanted to become known as a good musician, as a good, respectable and stable man, before I got married. So, we dated for about five years. Finally, I was able to marry her. We got married on January 8<sup>th</sup>. She had a good voice, and we started to perform together. I took her to Italy, on our honeymoon. We played there on some Roma wedding. Those were the Cergari Roma, who escaped from Yugoslavia before 1941, to Italy. They were very rich. I don't know what they did, but they had a lot of money. These Gypsies were from the old kind — they even had their Roma tsar appearing. He was their judge and their tsar. That old man, he was around 70 years of age, was so respected, I've never seen something like that before. He was really the authority for all of them. That's their Roma tradition. We earned so much money then. I remember I bought a car in Italy. Those were the days!!! Actually, I ended up in an Italian hospital after that wedding. I played for three consecutive days, a harmonica can be heavy after a while, and my foot capillary broke. The hospital was great — they gave us a menu every day, to choose from like five meals! I enjoyed their pasta very much. We traveled to Italy, Germany, Austria and all over former Yugoslavia. I used to make 4000-5000DM per night! In 1980, I bought my first Mercedes. But those days are gone now.

Now we all live here in Dogwood. My son is married, and recently got a little baby boy. I'm very proud to be a grandfather. My daughter is still in school. My brother is still in Austria, he used to work with his two sons in a plaster shop. But he got very sick: a brain cancer, but he is doing better now, thank God. My brother and I were like

twins, never apart, always there for each other. He lends me money, 500DM, but I don't have to give it back to him. That's how close we are. So, my brother and I succeeded to get out of that poverty of our childhood, and to build a nice life. The most important, we managed to raise our children well and to keep our family together. The only thing I'm sorry about is that my mother died. I wish she could see us today, she would enjoy her grandchildren and great-grandson. She would enjoy a better life.



Mačva Gypsies



## CONCLUSION

Arensberg (1988:105) has argued that: "To understand the local past, we must first know the local present: only then it is clear how such traditions move and how they build on their force among men". Gypsies' life stories presented here tell as much about their present as about their past, but foremost they tell about individual experience. Nevertheless, what people say about themselves are data to be interpreted, not the truth (Ruby 1991). In Gypsy language, there is no word for "custom". For repeated actions and rituals the Gypsy people usually say: "That's how our ancestors did it, so that's how we do it. It's good to do this way" (Djurić 1987:253). The Gypsies preserved almost intact old traditions that go way back. Transmitting such a successful behavior — a particular tradition— to descendants may not only increase the number of one's descendants but also the frequency of that particular behavior. Such traditions, because they are inheritable and replicable, can influence their own frequency in succeeding generations (Steadman 1995).

Social life is fundamental to the way of life among rural Gypsies in Mačva. All informants insisted that the most important thing about their times past was that they did not mix with other Gypsy groups. Within Mačva Gypsies, their social stratification and limited marriage choices preserved the local, village traditions, both in terms of marriage and occupations. These "caste" behaviors have found their main manifestation and most elaborate organization at the match in marriage. The function of these behaviors, in their own settings, was to preserve local/village tradition and distinctiveness. As Arensberg (1988:105) argued: "For tradition works locally". Therefore, most likely the Gypsy particular occupation created the local kin group/village individuality. Gypsies became more accepted and tolerated in places where their particular occupation was in need. It was perhaps the local group intention to preserve the particular occupation, by not mixing and not creating wider kinship and marriage



ties with Gypsies in other villages, especially if they were from a different group. In this sense, when an ethnic group — Gypsies — became endogamous on the local level, they became almost identical to tribes, whose identification is distinguished by common ancestry. Individuals in a tribe assume they are a set of co-descendants, and given the regular occurrence of marriage through time within that set, the assumption is surely true (Steadman 1992). A tribe, or an “ethnic” local Gypsy group may be also culturally distinctive: their clothing and language may communicate their ancestry, and their family names often indicate their “ethnic”/local identity. Such features are used by individuals involved to identify genealogical distance, and on the basis of which they may systematically discriminate and favor members of their own group over outsiders (*ibid.*). Gypsy traditions, therefore, reflect up to date concerns and purposes as well as an inherited legacy.

On the other hand, endogamy toward the peasants— Serbs, in Mačva villages was self-maintained as much as it was imposed. It was difficult for any Gypsy to marry into “peasants”. Among Gypsies themselves, for males, it was tolerated to marry outside the “group”: a marriage with a peasant girl was always considered as an achievement, as an advantage for the particular male and his family. In the case of a mixed marriage, not only has the man’s status gone up, but his potential children have acquired wider kinship ties and better cooperation with the Serbs in the village. Gypsy girls, on the other hand, were more closely watched over, but if the opportunity was good, their marriage to peasants would be tolerated too: “Why would I forbid my daughter to marry into a rich, peasant house? Even if the house is not rich, the most important thing is that people [in the house] are good. In spite of everything [different ethnic background], it’s wise to wish altogether the best for your daughter: I don’t want her to be hungry or to work like a mule, it’s much better if the family is rich”, explains the Gypsy father of two teenage daughters.

In Europe, Gypsies’ social isolation is partially self-imposed. Gypsies may very well suffered from what Hardin named modern “tribalism”:



Any group of people that perceives itself as a distinct group, and which is so perceived by the outside world, may be called a tribe. The group might be a race, as ordinarily defined, but it need not to be... The essential characteristic of a tribe is that it should follow a double standard of morality — one kind of behavior for in-group relation, another for out-group. It is one of the unfortunate and inescapable characteristics of tribalism that it eventually evokes counter-tribalism (Hardin 1972, cited in Wilson 2000:565).

The unfortunate effect of this modern tribalism is that

Fearful of the hostile groups around them, the tribe refuses to concede to common good. It is less likely to voluntarily curb its population growth ... competitors may even race to outbreed each other. Justice and liberty decline ... Xenophobia becomes a political virtue. History is replete with the escalation of this process to the point that the society breaks down or goes to war. No nation has been completely immune (Wilson 2000:565).

On the other hand, reproduction, according to an evolutionary approach, should only be suppressed under poor conditions when those conditions are likely to improve in the foreseeable future (Wasser & Place 2001:142). For example, if females suppressed reproduction under poor conditions that were unlikely to improve, they would never produce any offspring. In Europe, the poor conditions of Gypsy women — their living conditions, education, income and future prospects in general — are unlikely to improve, based on their long-term past. The selection for the Gypsy traditions can account for the widespread existence of their sexual and reproductive behavior.

Deep social changes are needed for Gypsies to become integrated into modern European society. Gypsies' cultural and economic development, and the prevention of discrimination against them will only be successful if their traditions are better understood. The "Gypsy problem", their high rates of teenage pregnancy, large number of children, unemployment or delinquency cannot be solved only by advice-giving work or humanitarian benefits, since many key determinants of their behavior are not changed in this way (Bereckei

1993). Today, faced with many life difficulties and changing social systems, the aim of the Gypsy sexual and reproductive behavior is to achieve the effect of the behavior which in the past has contributed to the replication — either through enhanced reproduction, i.e., natural selection, or through memory and learned behavior, i.e., traditions. Whether using “r” or “K” behavior, Gypsies are just replicating the behavior of their ancestors — a particular tradition — who not only survived with the same behavior, but left descendants who did the same. Who will be the most successful at leaving descendants in the future?



## ADDENDUM

WE DONT REMEMBER MUCH FROM OUR PAST TIMES;  
THERE WERE A FEW STORIES, ALL ABOUT SOME EMPERORS  
AND DRAGONS, BUT NOBODY REMEMBERS THEM TODAY.

A Gypsy from Bramble

Gypsy traditional oral narratives are a part of the Gypsy folk culture, the spiritual production of the populace accumulated over a lengthy period of time. Still today, Gypsy culture largely remains in the oral form, and this form of existence determines many of its other characteristics. As it is not fixed in the form of written documents, Gypsy folk culture undergoes continuous change, incorporating the anonymous creative production of numerous individuals. Gypsy oral culture, therefore, is a form of collective creation.

Gypsy stories from the village Bramble

### *A blacksmith Bilc*

Once, there was this Rom [a man], people used to call him Bilc, but his real name was Mihajlo. He worked as a craftsman, sometimes as a blacksmith. He worked in front of his own house, while his wife used to help him. Our women always help around our jobs — who's gonna help you, if not your own wife? So, once, she went outside to help him; she was making underwear for him at the same time. She was supposed to make "turevina", a special kind of male underwear that Muslims wear. It has one "extra" part of textile on its back that sticks out. Anyway, she didn't make it right, it was too small or too big for her man, so when he saw that, he got very angry. So, he got angry, and banged his wife on her forehead with a hammer. She felt dead instantly. It wasn't his intention, to kill his wife, but it happened. He got scared: what's he gonna do now, she's dead, her family lives in the sa-



me village, their kin will kill him. He started to think, and came to the solution: he will drag her body into the house, and wait for the night to fall. He did as he thought. When the night fell, his relatives came for a visit. They made a plan to take his dead wife to a nearby forest, and to bury her. They covered her with leafs. And that's how she stayed, his dead wife. One day went by, another day went by, and another and another. And she is not in her home, she is not showing her face, and her relatives started to look for her: where is he, what's going on? A couple of kids finally found her, buried under the pile of leaves: the kids were looking after their cattle in the forest, and they immediately reported the dead body to the local policeman. Bilc was taken away; however, he couldn't be taken to the official court, since he belonged to the Roma community. It was his wife's family to make a judgment on what will be his punishment. That was the time when Roma had their own committee, *kris*, to judge and sentence. *Kris* still exists among the Cergari Roma, even today. Then, his wife's brothers, and his brothers agreed on his punishment: Bilc is to climb on certain high tree, on its top, to cross his legs and to light up a cigarette. If he falls, he's done with his life — they will kill him; if he doesn't fall, he will be forgiven. Bilc made it: he managed to climb on the top, to cross his legs, light up a cigarette and he didn't fall down. And everything was forgiven. This is a true story. That's how the laws were among Roma: to climb, to cross legs without falling down. My grandmother told me about this story; actually, this fellow Mihajlo is a cross-cousin of mine, but this story is transmitted through generations in my family, and that's how I learned about it. Until modernization [electric power] came, we used to sit around the fire and tell stories. Roma history begins with stories.

### *To marry a girl*

A long time ago there was this young man who wanted to get married. He liked one girl especially, but other young males liked the same girl too. Her father couldn't decide who will be her groom, so he said that all males have to compete with each other, and the one who wins, the best one, will get to marry his daughter. There were four or five young males to compete. They had to climb on the top of the highest mountain, and to jump down, using "free fall". So they

did. They all jumped down, and all got hurt or injured, except our boy. And he got the bride. The rest ... stayed to heal and to wait some other opportunity, to get wives for themselves.

*My Dzakulica [my sack-y]*

Once upon a time there was one man. He wasn't rich, but he wasn't poor either, he had his cattle and his own piece of land. And he had his wife, Stana. Everyday, he used to go out in his fields, to work, attend cattle and so on. One day, after a long day of work, he came home, and his wife said: "Oh, man, I have a great pain in my bones". And he loved his wife, he loved his wife terribly. He loved his wife more than he loved his land and cattle. And he asked her: "My wife, what should I do? Where do I go to find you a medicine?" She responded: "Anywhere, just go and do something". So, he said: "I'll do anything for you". So he went around, to other villages, but didn't find a cure. After a few days, his wife went to bed, and wouldn't get up: "Oh, man, my bones hurt so much, look how they crackle". He saw for himself, she crackles, and got really worried. And poor man, he took off all of his dirty clothes, took a bag with some cheese, bacon and onion, and went on this long journey: to find her a medicine. And she said: "Oh, man, just get me some sea foam, and I'll get better for sure". So he went to search for the sea, to scoop some foam. And he walked, and walked, and walked endlessly. All day and all night long. He slept everywhere and anywhere; before birds start to sing, at dawn, he would get up and continue his journey. He traveled for seven days and six nights; when the seventh night fell, he came across a little house. This house belonged to Steva, a Gypsy blacksmith. The Gypsy asked him: "Hello, my friend, where do you go?" And the man replied: "Well, you know, my wife is seriously ill, I'm going to the sea, to get some sea foam for her, and then she will recover". Steva took a good look at the man, and asked him to come in, to have some food and drinks. Steva's house was poor, little, just one small room, where he lived with his wife and their children. Steva asked: "Hey, my friend, do you have any idea how far is the sea?" The man replied: "I don't know, but I have to find it. It doesn't matter how far I have to travel". Steva said: "How long have you been traveling?" The man said: "I've been on the road for seven days and seven

nights". Steva argued: "You have to go seven more days and seven more nights to reach the sea. But, I'll tell you something: do not go, stay here, with us, spend the night, and we'll talk when the morning comes". The man accepted, he was tired and hungry; Steva's wife set the table and they shared food. They ate together. In the morning, they had breakfast, and the Gypsy said: "Listen, my friend, do you really believe that your wife is ill?" And the man said: "I saw for my own eyes, her bones are cracking". The Gypsy said: "Com' on, bones don't crack". And the man got angry: "Don't say things like that, my brother". The Gypsy tried to calm him down: "Please don't get upset. I'm just trying to help". And then he explained. And the man said, still offended: "Look how you are; I'm talking to you right from my soul, and you make fun of me, and don't believe me when I say that my wife is really ill". The Gypsy said: "I know you're a good and honest man, but your wife is not sick. In fact, there's nothing wrong with her". The man then suggested: "If you don't believe me, come with me to my home, and you'll see then for yourself, but first I have to get her a medicine". Then the Gypsy, blacksmith, said: "Listen, I'll go with you; but when we approach your house, you'll get into one sack. And then, when I sing, I'll tell you what you have to do, and your wife will recover, for she's not ill at all". And the poor man, what could he do, he crossed himself with both hands and decided to trust the Gypsy. What could the poor man do, when you are in trouble, or in pain, you believe in almost anything. Anyway, he agreed to the plan. All these happened some 1000 years ago; people were primitive, and believed in everything. So, they started a journey, again seven days and seven nights until they reached the man's house. Some 100 meters before the house, the Gypsy ordered that the man go into the sack; the man complained again, "Hey, don't be like that, go and see that my wife is ill", but the Gypsy was determined. He tied the sack and approached the gate. "Hey, master, master, let me in". No response. And the Gypsy saw lights and music coming out of the house. Again: "Master, master, let me in". And he called three times. Finally, Stana came out: "What do you want, you poor Gypsy?" The Gypsy replied: "Please, let me in. I'm cold and hungry, I traveled a long way". She said: "My master is not at home, I cannot let you in". The Gypsy cried again: "Please, I don't have to eat, just let me sit by your fire, I'm very cold". Nothing, she went outside.



The Gypsy said: "Please, please, please! God will give you health and fortune, just let me in". Then, her lover came out of the house, and asked: "What is it, you poor wretch, what do you want?" And the Gypsy said again: "Please let me in, I'm cold and tired, I won't stay long". And the lover agreed: "Well, come in and sit by the fire". And the Gypsy sat by the fire. After a while, the wife asked: "Hey, you, are you warm enough? If you are, go, continue your journey". The Gypsy said: "Thank you, I'm much better now. But, please don't chase me off yet. I know to sing". And the lover said: "OK, then, sing for us". The wife didn't like the idea: "No way, just get out of my house". And the Gypsy replied: "My dear, I will sing you a song, you don't have to pay me for it, you don't have to feed me, just listen". Both the wife and her lover accepted. And the Gypsy started to sing, and said like this: "My Dzakulica [my sack-y], my Dzakulica, there is an ax in the corner, my Dzakulica, my Dzakulica, so go take the ax, and bang the mistress, my Dzakulica". And the wife listened, and laughed, and laughed: "Oh, Gypsy, what a good song this is. Sing it again, sing it again!" And the Gypsy sang it again. And while he did so, he untied he sack. And suddenly, the man jumped out, took the ax and banged his wife on her head; boom, boom, he banged and banged everything, but the lover managed to escape somehow. What will be now? The man said to the Gypsy: "If you want to eat and drink, just say so. In the morning, you will choose a cow, or a bull, or whatever you want, that will be my gift to you". And that's how the story goes. At the end, everybody is satisfied: the cuckold man, the Gypsy with a cow. And the Gypsy was right all along the way. Stana and her husband were Egyptians, non-Roma; this story took place in Egypt, and the lover was an outsider, non-Roma.

### *To Marry the Emperor's Daughter*

This event happened in some ancient times. There was one great emperor, who ruled many peoples. He had a very beautiful daughter, whom he adored. The emperor wanted to marry her to the first among the best of all men: the strongest, the tallest, and the richest. When the time was right, many suitors gathered from all over the empire. But none was good enough for the emperor's daughter. So, the emperor made a decision: suitors will all compete, not with

each other, but with cold weather. The task was like this: the suitor has to climb the highest mountain, in the middle of winter, naked, without any covers and he must not fall asleep. Many have tried, but none succeeded. Then, one poor man appeared: he was a Gypsy, without anything or anybody, but who wanted desperately to marry the emperor's daughter. His problem was — he didn't know how to do it. The Gypsy would give his life, just to marry the girl. He thought about it, and decided to go and see a medicine man, known for his wisdom. So he did. The Gypsy came to see the wise man, and told him: "I want to marry the emperor's daughter. I'm poor and I'm sick of being poor and nobody. I want to have a wife who could finally make me happy". The medicine man responded: "My friend, that's not the problem at all. How would you do it? Just you listen to me, that's how". The Gypsy argued: "Dear God, how will I do it? Many of the best men in this empire have died on the mountain, from cold. How could I endure such weather, being so weak and malnourished?" The wise man said: "You just hang in there, listen to my advice, and you'll make it". The Gypsy agreed. "You say that the task is to climb the highest mountain, naked, with no covers, and that you must not fall asleep, or you'll die?" asked the medicine man. "Here is what you'll do. You will make it, on the top of the mountain, naked, and you will not fall asleep. You will succeed where everybody else have failed. And here is why: I will light a huge fire at the foothill of the mountain, and I will keep it all night long. You will look at the fire, and you will imagine that it's heating you, warming you up so you won't freeze. But, you must not fall asleep, not even for a second, otherwise you'll die like the rest" said the medicine man. The Gypsy went in front of the emperor, and told him that he is ready to go through all the trials, just to marry his daughter. Everybody laughed at him: look at him, he's a Gypsy, weak and poor, and he wants to marry the princess! The emperor allowed him to try, for he was certain that the Gypsy could not make it. So, the Gypsy man climbed the mountain, took off his dirty clothes, and stayed awake the whole night. He was looking at the fire, imagining that he's not cold, and hungry and scared. And he succeeded. Just the way the medicine man told him. And the emperor couldn't deny his word: he had to give his daughter for the Gypsy. And so, in those ancient times, the Gypsy beca-

me happy, and had many children. And this is how our Roma ancestors would say: and we were there too, we ate and celebrated!

*Why Roma celebrate Djurdjevdan*

Once upon a time, many years ago, the Roma emperor ruled the empire of the ancient Egypt. His empire was near one large and deep lake, and his people inhabited areas around it. Those were Roma settlements, mostly. The lake was of a crucial importance for the Roma: they used its water and their cattle used it. However, one dreadful dragon lived in the lake; and every day, in the twilight, the dragon would come out of the water and attack the Roma people. The animal had killed many of them. The Roma were terrified, and asked of their emperor to help. Because the dragon killed and ate only the Roma people. The dragon would take a Roma child, or a woman, or a man, and that went on endlessly. The Roma emperor made a tough decision: to save his people, he ordered that each and every house must give one of its members as a sacrifice to the terrible dragon. The Roma obeyed. And every household gave one child, one woman, one man, one brother, one father, as a sacrifice to the dragon. And that's how it was: the dragon would appear from the lake, take his victim and return to the lake until the next day. The people hoped that the dragon would leave them alone eventually. But, the time has come for the emperor to offer his sacrifice: his precious daughter. The emperor couldn't bear it, and he ordered the army to fight the dragon. And the army came. Among many soldiers, there was Saint Djordje, he was the greatest warrior of all, and he killed the dragon after a long fight. After that, everything ended well, and the Roma decided to celebrate Djurdjevdan, in the honor of the soldier Saint Djordje who defeated the dragon.



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## Rezime

### PRIPOVEDANJE ROMA/CIGANA: OD BEDE DO KULTURE

Ova knjiga pokušava da objasni i opiše romske reproduktivne strategije primenjujući principe moderne evolucione teorije. Opisana su i analizirana seksualna i reproduktivna ponašanja različitih grupa-plemena Roma u Srbiji. Proučavane karakteristike obuhvataju stope fertiliteta, mortalitet, obrazovanje, i roditeljsko staranje, a takođe i kulturne i tradicionalne norme Roma koje se tiču idealnog seksualnog ponašanja. Zaključak je da romska plemena koriste različite reproduktivne strategije (r i K). Razlozi koji dovode do ovih različitih adaptacija su spremnost Roma da modifikuju i oblikuju svoje ponašanje i reprodukciju da bi ostvarili najdelotvorniju strategiju u datom okruženju. Analiza se zasniva na dostupnim demografskim podacima, istraživanju koje je uradio autor u beogradskoj ginekološko akušerskoj bolnici Narodni Front, i terenskom istraživanju među Romima u Mačvi. Radi zaštite informanata, i po njihovoj izričitoj želji, za imena sela, kao i vlastita imena, korišćeni su pseudonimi, osim u slučajevima kada su se sagovornici složili da se upotrebi i označi njihov pravi identitet. Sakupljeni podaci obuhvataju bračne i reproduktivne istorije, i kulturno očekivane norme ponašanja kod Roma u selu „Dogwood“. Ovi podaci su kasnije upoređeni i obogaćeni zvaničnim demografskim podacima. Romi u selu Dogwood propadaju Karavlasima. Dodatne informacije su prikupljene na terenskom istraživanju u Šapcu i Dumači, i selima „Cedar“, „Bramble“ i „Cock“, gde žive Romi koji sebe nazivaju Gurbeti ili Srpski Cigani.

Romi su prisutni u Evropi još od srednjeg veka, te se tako mogu nazvati jednim od evropskih naroda. Romske i ne romske populacije su živele jedne pored drugih tokom nekoliko vekova, ali je obostrano iskustvo više nego nezadovoljavajuće. Romska integraci-

ja u moderno evropsko društvo je neznatna; romsku etničku grupu odlikuje masovno siromaštvo, veliki procenat nezaposlenosti, delikvencije i minimalnog obrazovanja. Zanimljivo je da je istorija Roma u Evropi istorija diskriminacije i progona jednog naroda, iako su Romi jedna od retkih etničkih grupa koja nikada nije polagala pravo na teritoriju.

U čitavoj Centralnoj i Istocnoj Evropi, demografske karakteristike romske etničke grupe se bitno razlikuju od većinskih naroda: tako Romi, u proseku, imaju veliki fertilitet i mortalitet, što ih čini veoma mladom populacijom, čiji se porast očekuje u decenijama koje slede. U isto vreme, demografi predviđaju da će se sve ostale populacije u post-komunističkim zemljama smanjiti za jednu trećinu u ovom veku, kao posledica tranzicije, izrazito niskog fertiliteta, ekonomskih teškoća i migracija. Naime, post-komunističke zemlje, uključujući i Srbiju, imaju najniže stope fertiliteta na svetu: 1.3 dece po ženi.

Najčešće objašnjenje ovako niskog fertiliteta svodi se na ekonomski faktor: dok direktni troškovi rađanja i podizanja dece rastu, prosečan dohodak se smanjuje. S druge strane, romska populacija u celini je najviše pogođena ekonomskim i tranzicionim promenama, a ipak doživljava relativni rast populacije u celini. Zbog toga, osnovno naučno pitanje jeste: zašto romska etnička grupa ne prati demografsku tranziciju većinskih populacija u Evropi?

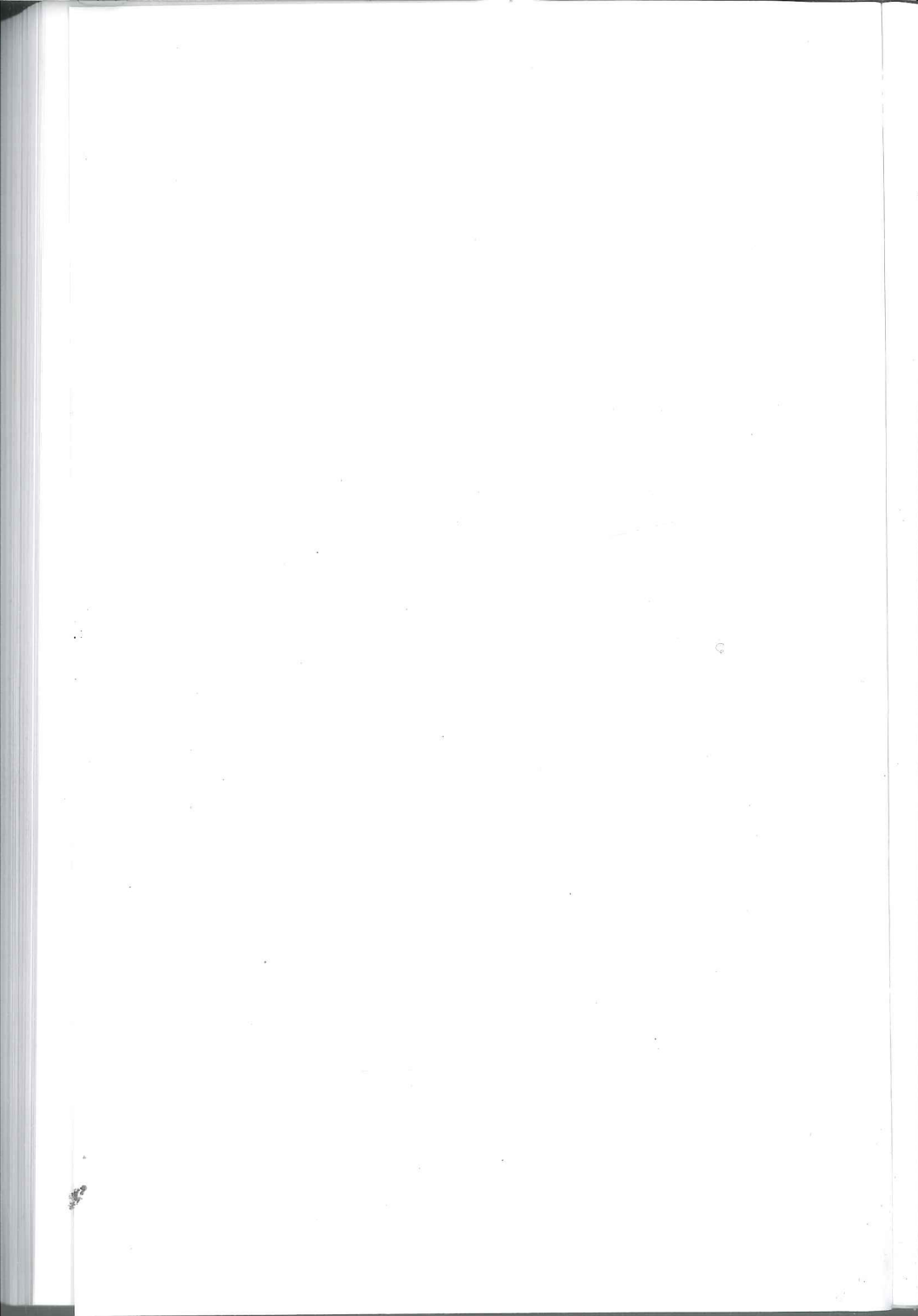
Romi u većini evropskih zemalja i dalje poštuju tradicionalne obrasce određenog seksualnog i reproduktivnog ponašanja: endogamija, kako prema ne-Romima tako i plemenska, kupovina devojke, rani brakovi, veliki broj dece, i česti razvodi, kao i namerna društvena/grupna izolacija. Etnicitet Roma je postao veoma složeno i osporavano pitanje, zahvaljujući pre svega društvenim i sredinskim uslovima koje su Romi zatekli po dolasku u Evropu, naročito na Balkanu. Većina Roma se danas ne smatra pripadnicima jedne ujedinjene i homogene etničke grupe, već se identifikuje sa podgrupom/plemenom iz koje potiče, a čija religija i jezik najviše zavise od lokacije i okolnosti. Ne postoji jasna svest o jedinstvu romskog naroda: mnogi Romi ne nazivaju sebe Romima, i odbijaju svaku vezu sa romskim narodom. To je naročito karakteristično za Srbiju, gde mnogo Roma sebe naziva Ciganima, dimljenim Srbima ili samo Srbima. U Centralnoj i Istočnoj Evropi danas, možda jedina specifična karak-



teristika koju dele sva romska plemena jeste njihova pronatalistička, endogamna tradicija koja je očigledno pomogla Romima u prošlosti ne samo da prežive nego i da ostave potomke koji koriste istu reproduktivnu strategiju. Zbog toga, romska situacija koju karakteriše izrazita društvena segregacija i nizak socio-ekonomski položaj, delimično može da bude i rezultat sopstvenog opredeljenja. Ovo rezultira u tradicionalnom odbijanju Roma da prihvate i postanu deo veće društvene hierarhije zemalja u kojima žive, gde srodničke veze i dalje predstavljaju značajan faktor u socijalnim i ekonomskim odnosima. Ova specifična romska tradicija — kultura nasleđena od predaka i preneti oralnom tradicijom na potomstvo — ne samo da je pomogla i omogućila Romima preživljavanje tokom vekova nedaća, nego je i pomogla da se očuva romski identitet, ali na štetu zajedničkog života i saradnje sa ne-Romima.

Ova teza je obrađena u drugom delu knjige, koji predstavlja usmeno pripovedanje: tri životne priče Roma. Protagonisti ovih priča pripadaju različitim romskim grupama: Gurbetima, Čergarima i Karavlasima, i njihova iskustva i tradicije, iako romske u osnovi, su različite. Takva različitost i jedinstvenost je rezultat drugačijih i specifičnih životnih okolnosti i adaptacija njihovih romskih predaka na mikro-kulture i sredinu u kojoj su živeli. Mačvanski Romi su većinom izgubili karakterističnu kulturu evropskog dela romske populacije. Njihove priče pokazuju fleksibilnost romskog etničkog identiteta, i otkrivaju odnos između životnih okolnosti i očekivanih normi kulturnog ponašanja, koje se modifikuju u zavisnosti od situacije i društvene sredine.

„Romski problem“, maloletničke trudnoće, fertilitet, nisko obrazovanje, nezaposlenost i neprilagođenost modernom životu, ne može se rešiti humanitarnom pomoću i pokušaju njihovog modelovanja po principima većine. Mnoge odrednice njihovog specifičnog kulturnog i reproduktivnog ponašanja biće teško promeniti na ovaj način. Romski kulturni i ekonomski napredak, i prevencija diskriminacije prema njima će jedino biti uspešni ako se njihova tradicija bolje upozna i razume.



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