

# Exploring new worlds in American Romani Studies: Social and cultural attitudes among the American Mačvaia

RENA C. GROPPER and CAROL MILLER

Borrowing from Marshall Sahlins's recent constructive criticism of anthropology, we examine some of the fundamental assumptions invoked in Romani studies since its inception. Utilizing interactions with the same groups of Roma over half a century allows testing those assumptions against actual fieldwork. We contrast the concept of *romanía* ('Gypsiness') with the scholars' concept of 'real Gypsy' and document many changes in attitudes and practices we have witnessed, some minor and transient and others more radical and seemingly permanent. We offer the concept of 'selective multiculturalism,' the idea that individuals can be fully comfortable in more than one culture, and ask that scholars consider its use in future research. We also suggest that future investigations be conducted with Roma as peer participants in the process.

## Introduction

The change in title of our periodical from *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* to *Romani Studies* augurs well for a critical review and partial restructuring of our scholarly endeavors. We are heartened by the increasing participation of researchers from eastern Europe and elsewhere and look forward to their

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Rena Gropper is professor emerita in the Department of Anthropology, Hunter College of the City University of New York. She has been associating with Roma since 1947. Correspondence address: 65-07 110 Street, Forest Hills, NY 11375-1423, USA. Email: [RenaGropper@msn.com](mailto:RenaGropper@msn.com)

Carol Miller is an independent scholar who has worked with Mačvaia since 1966. Correspondence address: 18237 Seventh Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98166, USA. Email: [edamomy@earthlink.net](mailto:edamomy@earthlink.net)

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future investigations. Exemplary scholarship accepts the need for standing on the shoulders of one's predecessors to foster the advance of endeavor and insight. We feel we have been remiss in our duties in this respect. Over our professional lifetimes, some of us who have worked in the field more or less steadily have unofficially discussed and shared our concerns about what we perceive to be less than ideal working assumptions embraced by many of our colleagues. We have never committed our trepidations to writing. The recent critical review by a senior anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, addressing the tacit assumptions and its resultant errors of our field has encouraged us to share our misgivings now.

The first order of business is to introduce ourselves. Gropper has worked with Roma along the east coast of the United States since 1947, originally investigating Kalderaš groups and then expanding her association to Mačvaia as well. Miller has concentrated on the west coast of the United States and the Mačvaia who are based in California, having begun her work in 1966. During the nearly thirty-five years she has studied the California Mačvaia, a group that seems relatively more inbred than many other Roma groups, she has continually been challenged to assess what was tradition, which customs had been borrowed, and what was changing. Like those with whom Gropper interacted, the Gypsies she met were no isolated village of natives that would welcome any stranger with a medical kit of antibiotics and adhesive tape. This was a group with a thousand-year history of harassment and persecution, one that had defined their distance from outsiders with beliefs about disease and bad luck, and honed hard fear into a guarded suspicion.

We will argue four main themes in this article. First, Romani studies have had an ethnocentric bias since their inception. The second point we make is that the terminology Romani groups use to refer to themselves and others has a fluidity based on both change over time and the context of the moment of utterance. The third theme of the inevitability of change in most aspects of culture is documented by the data collected by Miller and Gropper over the course of their research careers. Finally, we point to the need of Romani groups to be aware in depth of the outsider groups' culture(s) as well as their own, leading to an inevitable multiculturalism.

### **Romani studies**

From inception, Romani studies have been the meeting place of a number of research traditions (Rogers 1995: 38): history and other humanities, folk-

lore, linguistics, and some of the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology). At times the association has been uncomfortable. But interaction among the various research traditions always holds the promise of a cross-fertilization that will produce a *Wunderkind*. Since all of our contributing research traditions emanate from European and North American forbears, we share similar strengths of which we are justifiably proud and kindred weaknesses of which we often are unaware.

In this article, we are proposing a reevaluation of the perspectives that 'Gypsy studies' has adopted over the years. As we said, we are not alone in thinking that we should mend our ways inasmuch as Marshall Sahlins (1999: i–xxiii) has raised similar issues for anthropology in general, and we are indebted to his essay for encouraging us to proceed.

#### *Early Ethnocentric Bias*

When the Gypsy Lore Society was founded in 1888, the intellectual climate of the day assumed that the most advanced thinking occurred in individuals who had received a university education from a well-known institution housed in western Europe or North America. Such individuals were also believed to have come from upper socioeconomic backgrounds. A further presumption was made that these people had the right, perhaps even the duty, to establish criteria for acceptable scholarship worldwide. One can refer to 'intellectual imperialism' as the mental set of the day. As a result, many concepts formulated and promulgated by the then intellectual establishment were somewhat biased toward Colonial Euroamerican beliefs and values.

#### *Marginality*

One such concept is that of marginality. Upper socioeconomic status and identity with EuroAmerican cultures constitute the center of social groupings, and everyone else therefore is to be located on the periphery. Marginal people and groups cannot participate fully in the activities and perquisites of society, and they are considered undesirable elements in the overall social structure, to be contained and controlled for the good of the general public.

Non-Gypsies assign high socioeconomic status on the basis of possessing wealth in the form of real estate, bank accounts and costly material possessions. Some non-Gypsy groups also accord status on the basis of a person's family background. But, of course, most non-Gypsies would automatically assign a Gypsy family low status.

The Roma accept wealth as a criterion of status, not in terms of its accumulation as much as on the basis of spending it freely, displaying generosity and hospitality to other Roma. Family background accords only provisional prestige, one that must be validated continuously throughout a person's lifetime. Being accepted as a Rom entails affirmation by upholding *romanía* ('Gypsiness') at all times. Indeed, outsiders who marry into a Rom group (except for the California Mačvaia who never ritually accept an outsider) are watched carefully, but unobtrusively. If they honor *romanía*, they gain grudging acceptance as Rom themselves.

Scholars need to turn this perspective around and acknowledge that 'Gypsies' regard non-Gypsies as only of marginal importance to their own concerns. The Roma who taught us their culture were primarily interested in non-Gypsies only as a source of income and material goods, and as a potential physical threat to Romani well-being. In 1968, Miller wrote that the Roma are firmly convinced that non-Gypsies are immoral and dirty, totally ignorant of proper rules of honoring *marime* (ritual impurity) (Miller 1968). Association with non-Gypsies should be kept to a minimum. The Roma marginalize the *gadje* (non-Gypsies).

### 'Authenticity' of Gypsy groups

Gypsies present an ideal example of what Sahllins calls the tendency of indigenous people to take cultural responsibility for what is done to them. Like the Eskimos 'who are still there, and still undeniably Eskimo', so are the Roma Gypsies. Here and there and still as Gypsy as ever. Of course, there are many kinds at this point in time, most of them unstudied; Gypsies that other Gypsies refuse to recognize as Gypsy, so we may be stretching it a bit to consider these citizens of the world as a single people. Since leaving India a thousand years back as one or several groups, they have traveled, changed, adapted, and, against the odds, survived. The Roma, a number of groups with disparate histories, many of whom speak some variant of *romanes*, can be conservatively described as multicultural. Their existence into the twenty-first century is a powerful testimony to the art of adaptation.

#### *Scholarly Designations*

Non-Gypsy scholars have granted themselves the right to decide who the 'real Gypsies' are. No acknowledgement is made of the wide disparity for various Rom groups among the lists of credentials that need to be verified in

these evaluations. The Rom themselves aid and abet this by ranking various groups as better or worse than others in upholding *romanía*. That is, Rom individuals assign relative status to the *Romani* groups with which they associate. They also refer to 'our kind of Roma' or 'not our kind of Roma'. When *gadje* (non-Gypsies) show prejudice toward and accuse Roma of various crimes, resident Roma hasten to protest that the miscreants are different, not the same kind of 'Gypsy' as the locals. What the *gadje* do not know is that the labeling and hierarchies of legitimacy and prestige differ, depending on whether the Roma are talking to non-Gypsies or among themselves. Apparently this situation has confused many scholars and reinforced the belief that 'Gypsies' have trouble recognizing who is or is not a 'real Gypsy'. Less than half of the Mačvaia Miller asked thought The Gypsy Kings were really Gypsies. In France, she found the situation quite different.

Referring to Margaret Jolly (1992), Sahllins (1999: ii) scolds: 'when we change it's called progress, but when they [tribal groups] do—notably when they adopt some of our progressive things—it's a kind of adulteration, a *loss* of their culture'.

Part of the discussion among scholars is based on assumptions that are themselves unexamined. One supposition, referred to by Sahllins, is that groups other than our own do not change their behavior. Another is that the groupings labeled 'tribes' by social scientists should exhibit consistent identification with the same name and remain in the same locale over time. The belief that nomadic groups do not move is obviously fallacious. Wars, change in the climate, the incursion of agricultural and pastoral groups, and now lumber and oil companies are some of the instruments of displacement. The insistence that a group's name should not change implies that the same language continues to be spoken unaltered, and anthropologists have been aware for almost fifty years that dropping one language and adopting another as the indigenous tongue has occurred in the past and is happening today as well.

Oddly, scholars in Romani studies, have known for many years that Gypsy groups in Europe lacked the category 'Mačvaia', but have not questioned the legitimacy of the group's membership as Roma in North America. (According to one informant who grew up in Serbia, they were known there as *Grasnaria* ['the people of the horses']. However, a search through the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* did not uncover this designation in any of the issues.) Gropper's literature search for her dissertation (most of the sources are listed in Cotten 1950: 300–3 and Gropper 1975: 209–27) found that scholarly terminology referred to the country or region in which a group had been

encountered. Less frequently, designation by major occupation was used. Whether these typologies were imposed by the scholars or by their informants is not clear. Fraser (1992) provides a convenient summary of scholarly usage. Grellman (1807) alluded to a division between gold-washers and other groups in Transylvania and the Banat; he also claimed the nomadic groups in Transylvania set themselves apart from the 'sedentaries' whom they regarded as inferior (Fraser 1992: 195). Hungarian musicians were reported to call themselves 'Romungre' (op. cit.: 201). In the early 1800s, researchers (e.g., Gjorgjević 1929: 7–25 and Popp Serboianu 1930: 45–53) mentioned occupation-based terminology in Wallachia and Moldavia: 'Lingurari' or spoon-makers, 'Ursari' or bear leaders (who also worked as blacksmiths and tinkers), 'Rudari' or miners, and 'Aurari' or goldsmiths, in addition to the 'Lăieși' who worked metal, told fortunes, and begged. The latter group was also called 'Netotsi' with a derogatory connotation (Fraser 1992: 223). The scholars of the second half of the nineteenth century referred to Rom groups, such as the 'Kalderaša' (Coppersmiths), 'Lovara' (horse-dealers), and 'Čurara' (sieve-makers). They also employed 'Boyaš' for gold-washers, 'Rudari' for miners, and 'Ursari' for the bear-leaders. Subsequently, the *Kalderaša* were divided into 'Greeks,' 'Serbians,' and 'Russians' (Fraser 1992: 228). Fraser (1992: 235–6) also reminds us that the term 'Ludar' is equated with 'Rudari.' (They sometimes call themselves 'Turkish' as well as 'Hungarian'.) Fraser (p. 236) also tells us that the 'Mačvaia' are Serbian Rom from Mačva county. Lockwood's review (1985: 96) said the term was not mentioned by Uhlik 1955, Gjorgjević 1932, or 'Petulengro' 1915–16.

For the situation in the United States, Brown expressed frustration with 'strict classification' and asserted, 'One can only call them Nomads, or simply gypsies [*sic*]'. He (1924: 18–20) specifies two groups, 'Mačvaya' and 'Mačvana' as well as 'Kalderaš'. 'Mačvaia' is a term recognized by Brown (1927) and (1936), Dunin (1985), and Salo and Salo (1986). They, like Fraser (1992), attribute its origin to Mačva county in then Yugoslavia.

### *Other Scholarly Beliefs*

The assumption that tribal people do not intermarry is also fallacious. Rekdal's description of bias in Africa can be extended to Romani studies of the time:

The precolonial and colonial European image . . . was that of a continent of tribes—mutually exclusive groups of people that could be distinguished from each other on

the basis of a number of linguistic, cultural, and racial characteristics. Early missionaries and explorers reported clear-cut intertribal boundaries [. . .]’ (Rekdal 1999: 460).

Rekdal goes on to demonstrate that the East Africans he has studied have relocated a number of times in the past, and each time the result has been intermarriage with their new neighbors.

We have already alluded to the (sometimes reluctant) acceptance of outsiders who marry into Roma groups. However, Gropper was asked by a *Mačvanka* to accept marriage to one of her sons, and the proposal was made more attractive by offering to set the couple up immediately in its own household (almost unheard of in the 1950s) and the promise to provide a new car.

### Ethnicity

Scholars and Roma alike agree that a sociocultural chasm of gargantuan proportions divides ‘Gypsy’ from ‘non-Gypsy’. Beyond that, differentiations in the United States vary tremendously. A Rom may self-identify differently depending on the person to whom he is talking. His reference to other individuals and groupings may not necessarily coincide with their self-designations.

The situation we are describing is one of ethnic identity, a concept first described by Fredrik Barth (1970). Ethnicity is used flexibly for various purposes, often politically motivated. Ethnic identities can be diagrammed as concentric circles, and the choice of a particular ring is contingent upon particular circumstances. These terms are not to be confused with a Linnaean taxonomy, supposedly reflecting biological descent (itself under attack today [see Pennisi 2001: 2304–7]). Ethnicity implies an awareness of oneself as a member of a particular group set apart from other sociocultural groups. Salo (1979: 74) explains: ‘Ethnic identity is a composite of various perceptions and evaluations about the nature and worth of ethnic groups in contrast to one’s own.’

#### *Ethnicity on the East Coast*

When Gropper began work on New York City’s Lower East Side in the late 1940s, *Kalderaš Rom* informants mentioned two *vitsi* (plural of *vitsa*, a descent group) of ‘Kalderaš’ and a small group of ‘Russ’ (musical entertainers from Russia) in the immediate vicinity and a few ‘Frinkuria’ (‘French

Gypsies') from New Jersey who visited often, sometimes providing some of the music for weddings and other parties. One Kalderaš *vitsa* had accepted some of the 'Russ' as brides; this is the group now referred to as *Russuria* (see Weybright 1945; Wright 1946, 1947). I was told the second *vitsa* had a large component of 'Arxentinos' as a result of extensive intermarriage down in Brazil prior to entering the United States and basing in Chicago for a while (see Weybright 1938). This *vitsa* was then called 'Bimbulešti,' but is now termed 'Bimburia.' I suspect the change in designation from one with a suffix implying a *vitsa* to one referencing a larger (i.e., tribal) category can be attributed to the desire of other *Kalderaš vitsi* to be set apart from a group held in disrepute by many Roma. The Kalderaš referred to a 'Mačvaia' group based in Harlem and Brooklyn. In the 1950s, she associated with Mačvaia (the term of self-reference, not *Mačvana*) and 'Meksikaia' as well. Jan Yoors (personal communication, 1952) told her that the so-called 'French Gypsies' in New Jersey were *Lovara*. When asked, Yoors said the *Lovara* felt the other Roma were unfamiliar with the *Lowara* as a group and, being few in numbers, preferred the protection of affiliation with a more numerous group; they hoped that the Kalderaš simply would assume they were Kalderaš who had entered the United States from France.

The *Meksikaia* were recent arrivals and were exploring possible identification with the more prestigious Mačvaia rather than the Kalderaš. Today, all Rom groups classify them as a Kalderaš group. For the last few decades Kalderaš from Canada have used New York City as a home base; they refer to themselves as 'Canadesuria,' a term adopted by the other Rom groups. There has also been an influx of *Lovara* from Europe. This brief synopsis of designations can be compared to that used in 1955 by a former captain of the New York City Police Department's Pickpocket and Confidence Squad and reported by Joseph Mitchell (1992: 164–209). Captain Daniel J. Champion referred to eight 'principal tribes: Russians, Serbians, Kalderašh, Argentines, Argentinos, Mexicans, Machwaya, and Greeks'. Each of these tribes had its own 'vitsa' subgroups and common surnames used by members of the group. Champion said all the Mačvaia belong to the *Koleshti vitsa* but prefer being called Mačvaia (Mitchell 1992: 189).

#### *West Coast designations*

The Mačvaia tend to call all other kinds of Gypsies, 'people we don't know,' 'Kalderaša,' or to designate them by country of origin—*Russuria* ('Russian'), for example. Currently, there is one *Frensúsuria* ('French') family in Sacra-

mento and many *Meksikaia* ('Mexican') families well established, territorially speaking, in California. Kalderaša who have, on occasion, found their way into Mačvaia gossip stories are the *Lemeršti* ('Lambs'), *Sapora* ('Snakes'), and *Nangoro* ('Naked People'), as well as local *Kineršti* and *Bimburia*.

Regarding the large, sedentary groups, the San Francisco Bay Area is much as it was thirty years ago: Mačvaia (fortune telling), *Meksikaia* and *Kineršti* (both buy and sell cars), *Bimburia* (the women sell flowers in the Marina/Fisherman's Wharf area and recently started telling fortunes) as well as a family called 'The Lucky Brothers', who moved from the East Coast in the early 1980s. In Los Angeles, Mačvaia have recently been made well aware of the *Meksikaia* ('They have started telling fortunes!'). Unless they are living in isolated California areas and desperate for company, Mačvaia tend to disdain 'those other kinds.' According to a 72-year-old Uwanovič woman who has been in Los Angeles for half a century, 'Every year, there seem to be more Gypsies. Such a mixture. But Mačvaia are settled here, pay taxes; sometimes they even send their children to school. Those others, I really don't know any of them. Sometimes, if I see a woman at the grocery store who doesn't look too—well—I might say hello. Exchange names. Tribes. That's it. They don't invite us to their houses. We don't invite them to ours. But they crash our parties. They drink and eat up everything they can. They know we celebrate on Sunday and they call the halls and find out about our parties. If it's a wedding, they never give *daro* ('bridewealth'). When it comes to business, they are hit and run, grab the money and run. They dirty up the town and ruin business for the rest of us.'

The Northwest cities of Portland (Costellos and Rišteršti), Seattle/Tacoma (*Kineršti* and Rišteršti) and Spokane (Marx) are the territory of Kalderaša who have left the old religion behind and become Born-Again Christians. Thirty years ago, Seattle also had five Mačvaia families, and Oregon two, but now Mačvaia and any other 'tribe' that engages in the 'sin' of fortune telling, are unwelcome. To avoid some of the *Kineršti*'s lower status, many of the young *Kineršti* people online now refer to themselves as 'Kay' boys and girls. Will the 'Kays' become another *vitsa*? The Roma Gypsies in the Northwest tend to refer to the *Boyaša* as 'some other kind.'

#### *Internal changes in the Mačvaia Vitsa*

At the end of the eighteen hundreds, seven families of Mačvaia began arriving in the United States. Most seem to have been related in some way, and the rest were described as 'friends.' In the succeeding generations, several

formerly Kalderaš families have been incorporated into the Mačvaia. The Merinos were first—this lineage began with an Italian Kalderaša Rom. Then, a San Diego Marx family married into the Mačvaia for several generations and became ‘the same as Mačvaia.’ One Canadesuria family, whose grandmother was Merino, has recently been given several Mačvaia brides. But they have not established a fortune telling territory and often return to Canada for this reason. Twenty-five years ago, a family from ‘back east’ who call themselves ‘The Ruperts’—after a beer, they say—gave a daughter to one of the Adams’ families and subsequently moved to Los Angeles. Most have business places and are telling fortunes. All the Mačvaia seem to have heard about the Ruperts and to have seen them at parties, which suggests a growing incorporation. Thirty years ago, the first generation of a combined Mačvaia/Kalderaš Stevens family contested territory with the Mačvaia and were resentfully described as overly aggressive. Now, they are well intermarried into the Mačvaia group, active in ‘Mačvaia kris’, and accepted. Werner Cohn (1973) conducted a preliminary linguistic investigation to estimate felt distance between various groups of ‘Gypsies’, eliciting the words for ego’s own group and those of other ‘Gypsy’ and the non-Gypsies. Matt Salo’s 1979 article concentrated on ethnicity among three Romani groups: the Rom, Ludar, and Romničels. He reports on both self-designation and the vocabulary used to refer to the other groups and the non-Gypsies.

### *Observed culture change*

We who work with Romani groups need to acknowledge that these groups are considerably less interested in historical continuity than we are. Thus, if scholars investigate a group today, how are they to know whether or not that group is the descendant of a group in the past? Those of us who have been in contact with the same groups over the course of time can document the incorporation of new elements and the dropping or retention of items we noted when we first started our research. We shall outline briefly the changes we have seen since 1947.

Before we begin, however, we need to warn those who are comparative newcomers to the field that our older informants often bemoan the changes they have seen as indications that their culture is disappearing. We have all had the experience of hearing our older informants grumble about the changes that have occurred over their lifetimes. ‘We are not like we used to be’ is uttered in one version or another. Depending on the Rom’s mood, we may even be told that the way of life is disappearing totally, with the impli-

cation that the Roma *qua* Roma are vanishing. When the Roma are in this negative posture, they are no different from the generations of scholars who have announced that they will be the last to see the Roma and their culture. Perhaps this very fear of disappearing somehow acts to reinforce Romani determination to maintain their cultures.

There is a genuine concern about possible alterations in *romanía*, reduction in the authority and perquisites formerly assigned to the older people and/or males, and what they perceive as increasingly poor health (at least for the Kalderaš; see Thomas 1988). Many changes are accepted, however, and some Roma say that more than a few are a distinct improvement over the old ways. We discuss first some of the numerous changes in material possessions and some of the repercussions of these changes witnessed since 1947 (see Cotten 1988, Gropper 1967, Gropper 1975) with occasional reference to the reminiscences of older informants about events before we began to associate with them. Then we review other cultural aspects.

### *Housing*

Some of the old women Miller got to know had been born at the turn of the century. They could talk about the days of traveling along dirt roads in rural country settings, at first by horse and wagon, and then by car and tent. This was a period when, according to their happy recall, trust abided—visitors gave their money to their hosts for safekeeping—and everything was shared communally. To each according to need was the prevailing belief and ethic, one to which The God, a forgiving and kindly God, was expected to subscribe as well. By the 1930s, tents were abandoned for storefronts and the women no longer needed to travel door to door. Giving readings became a ‘business.’ To advertise their occult expertise, they would sit in the window of their storefront where clients could see them. By the 1940s, some of the people were moving into apartments or houses. As landlords began to object to the number of people per unit, the extended family was forced to rent several apartments.

The Roma were beginning to base themselves in urban New York City when Gropper introduced herself to them. They dislike the idea of potential defilement that could arise from having menstruating women walking over their heads in multistoried buildings, but they wanted street-level locations to entice customers into their *ofisuria* (‘locations’). At that time, single storey buildings consisting of just a store (known as ‘taxpayers’) were much more common in New York City than they are now. Displays of dream-books and a

few objects symbolizing piety combined with the practice of having a seated woman or two visible from the sidewalk to entice customers inside. The rear of the store was curtained off as a living area for the Roma, and a middle area was partitioned during the day to serve as 'private' cubicles for consultations between a customer and a seer. Curtains could be rearranged at night so that the family had more space to lay out feather beds for sleeping.

Even the largest stores available lacked sufficient space to house entire extended families. The Roma had to spread out, taking whatever empty stores became available. Having pay telephones installed allowed family members to stay in touch as often as they desired, and a willingness to drive to a number of different locations regularly not only provided frequent opportunities to get together with other Roma, but also helped them to become familiar with urban streets that might provide lucrative business locations.

Instead of walking to *gadje* houses to solicit readings, the women began to sit in store-front windows waiting for potential customers. Since most customers arrived after work or dinner, the Roma began to arise at mid-morning or later and go to sleep well after midnight. Initially, the Roma changed store-front locations every few months. Sometimes they discovered that the *ofisa* was not situated close enough to a steady flow of pedestrian traffic to generate much business. Sometimes a landlord (or agent), becoming aware that he had inadvertently rented the store to Gypsies who were living there as well as using the location for business, evicted them as quickly as possible. At other times, the Roma moved because they had found a more promising location.

Past patterns of keeping the living quarters clean continued much as before. Beating the rugs on clotheslines outdoors was replaced by sweeping. (As recently as the 1950s, some households were still cleaning their carpeting by sprinkling water and vigorously sweeping with a broom.) Bathroom showers and numerous plastic laundry tubs for washing men's or women's clothing, and another for washing the dishes, allowed the Roma to avoid *marime* ('ritual defilement').

Eventually, the Roma accepted living and working in apartment buildings, separating business locations and living quarters, using private telephones, vacuum cleaners, toaster ovens, microwaves, automatic coffee makers. Many locations allowed the reader-advisors to attract a group of steady customers, and it was no longer necessary to keep on the move. Today Roma often buy their own housing and/or use large campers. In some areas they commission houses to be built to their specifications. Now both in New York and California customers are drawn to business locations in a variety of ways.

Most important are the possibility of advertising by neon signs in the front window, distribution of flyers in the streets and on subways and buses, listings in telephone yellow pages, advertisements in local (and particularly ethnic) newspapers, and even radio spots in some cities.

In the early 1950s, the Kalderaš in New York combined photographic equipment that produced a strip of small portraits within a quarter of an hour. While the customers waited for the prints to be developed, the Romni (female Rom) told their fortunes, ostensibly without charging for the reading, and thereby circumventing any local ordinances making such activity illegal. In California, a shoe-shine stand in the store was more likely to provide the delay necessary to persuade a customer to agree to a reading. Always on a hunt for new ways to generate income (well documented in Salo 1986, for example), the Roma were pushed to a more active search when the old stand-bys like smithing and horse-trading no longer made sense. Owning junkyards and performing asphaltting and roofing work were learned from the Romničels (Rom groups of British provenience) (Salo 1979: 90). Learning from other, kindred groups is documented for many Roma (see Hübschmanová 1988). Mending furnaces and cars and trading in used automobiles were logical transitions. Today, investing in the stock market and becoming the proprietor of a motel, video store, or restaurant is considered acceptable. Among the California Mačvaia, the various groups of Roma are ranked high or low according to these different modes of earning income. Picking pockets and thievery have the lowest status. On the East Coast, pick-pocketing and thievery are discouraged because 'they spoil the neighborhood,' causing considerable hostility toward the recently arrived Lowara.

### *Gender and age roles*

When the Mačvaia were traveling, the status of men was predicated on the following: husband, father, protector, household authority, ritual head, horse trader, *kris* (*romanía* law, judge, and jury). In the 1920s, horses were replaced by cars. By the 1960s, however, most of the Mačvaia had settled in Los Angeles and the men's car trader occupation had been replaced by formal socializing, which involved keeping tabs on the community and who needed what, networking through hospitality patterns, visiting other households to be served appropriately and shown honor, checking on the adherence of their hosts to the preferred Mačvaia ritual standards. This was the period when the men met in *kris* and placed a US\$5,000 ceiling on bride price—ostensibly so the poorer Mačvaia could afford to marry their sons to Mačvaia brides.

This was also the period when they changed the rule of *marimé* outcasting by defilement to black-ball outcasting, thereby shifting the only direct political power to which a woman could lay claim into the male domain. Besides attending numerous public events, the men gallantly upheld the Mačvaia value on auspicious and lucky behaviors by frequently going in groups to night clubs, golfing, fishing, and gambling.

Currently, the formal test of witnessing hospitality has been abandoned, and the emphasis is on recreation. The men play golf, bet on athletic events and horse races. Since the death of disco, they seem to have lost some enthusiasm for night clubs.

What about the women? By the 1940s, the Mačvanka's economic role had expanded from part-time to full-time fortune telling. Household decisions were made in terms of potential business and important matters like securing a territory, a license, advertising, etc. Much like when the people were traveling, the Mačvanka was expected to be a wife, mother, provider. She was dependent upon a father, husband, or brother for representation at *kris*. By the 1960s, a few women bought and had begun to drive cars, and a few had already become addicted to the game of bingo. Their activities now include movies, rock concerts, spectator sports, bingo games, and betting on the horses. Many communicate in English with other young Roma on the Internet. Currently on the West Coast, young women drive everywhere, and they are no longer required to travel in the company of other women.

In the late 1940s on the East Coast, a Romni relied on her male relatives for transportation. (The men often forged their driver's licenses.) Later, using taxicabs was the favored means of getting around, especially when radio-dispatching became popular. The young women also began to drive and own cars themselves (taking a leaf from their brothers to obtain driver's licenses). The young women also learned how to arrange for their own business locations without the assistance of the men. Additionally, airplane travel became commonplace (although many Roma still are uncomfortable without solid ground under their feet). This speedy transport allows women to make frequent visits to their own kin, for the family cannot refuse on the basis that the daughters-in-law may be away for unacceptably long periods of time. If the woman makes pre-arrangements with her relatives, she can assert she is going to visit her kin even when she is not.

The young girls have undergone a truly remarkable change in their expectations. Girls no longer accede without question to the wishes and demands of their elders. At the turn of the century, girls were quite naïve; until mar-

riage, they knew nothing about sex and having children. The young bride had the lowest status in her new family and was expected to show everyone deference and service. Nowadays girls refuse to remain in an unpleasant marital situation (Miller 1988). A mother-in-law saves for years to buy a wife for her son, and, if she proves too demanding, she will lose her daughter-in-law. A girl will not stay with a husband unless he shows some measure of independence from his parents, and she will not marry until there is the assurance of her own apartment. In all likelihood brides have been influenced by the American career women for whom they read, and they avidly watch television where equal rights for women have been dramatized and discussed. Multimedia communication between the Gypsy and non-Gypsy world has undoubtedly been a major factor in instituting these and other changes. Perhaps women had already begun to reassess their value and conceptualize themselves as career women when, earlier in the century, they called their newly established business place in a storefront an *ofisa* (office). The ease with which a woman can get around, together with the current norm of nuclear family households, liberated young women from the close and constant supervision of their mothers-in-law and husbands. In the past, men normally favored their mothers over their wives. Now, husbands tend to listen to their spouses. When the people were nomads, raising children outdoors was said to be easy. According to 'Old Bibi,' 'They only showed up for supper.' Raising children indoors has proved more difficult, and the birth-rate in California fell from approximately eleven children per family to 4.5 in the 1960s. Now according to Miller's estimate it is a modest three.

Youngsters are no longer immersed from birth in the sound of *romanes*. They tend to watch television all day and are more adept in English. They continue to display the charismatic self-assurance that comes from the immediate support and devoted attention of family. Families still function as corporate units. Although the autonomy of the elders has eroded, their advice, support and money are still welcome and, indeed, required. Uncles, aunts, grandparents, older siblings are not always available, and baby sitters may be hired on occasion. Other family members will often 'borrow' a child for a week. In the nuclear household where the woman is the breadwinner, fathers usually care for children while the mother works.

### *Health and old age*

Pregnancy is no longer regarded as the normal state for young wives, and babies are delivered in hospitals. Wives now complain about pregnancy dif-

faculties, and people have become more concerned about possible risks to the woman and fetus. According to Thomas (1988), the East Coast Kalderaš experience more illness and die at an earlier age than in the past. Some Mačvaia, however, claim they are living longer. 'Fatima', who has had two heart bypasses, says the increased longevity is because of '... improved technology. Before, we died like flies.' Until the 1970s, having an operation and/or dying without the support of all one's relatives, and many others 'helping', was considered a shame, the saddest thing imaginable. And living alone was not much better. When Miller began her study, elders were just beginning to live by themselves on the windfall of their social security (American old age) government checks. Now it is acceptable for them to have their own private space, to be cared for by a live-in nurse. To die 'alone'—without the company of other Roma—is no longer such a tragedy and scandal.

Without daughters-in-law willing to take orders, older women find their anticipated high family status eroded. However, they are still expected to be deferential to their own husbands in public (Miller 1994, Nyman 1997, Silverman 1981). The older men expect their wives to furnish cash and services upon demand. Today, women past their childbearing years often refuse to obey the men's orders or to share living-quarters with their mates. Many enjoy being able to determine for themselves the nature and degree of social interaction they will have with other Roma. They appreciate the option of privacy as desired as well as the decreased need to provide services or project a constant, exaggerated public image to relatives and acquaintances. Without the financial back-up of their wives, older men are often forced to rely on their meager social security checks to keep them going.

### *Leadership and kris*

Decreasing reference is made to 'kings' when interacting with the *gadje*. One West Coast Kalderaš leader in the 1970s accommodated the non-Gypsy preference for a more democratic political structure and insisted he was a 'Gypsy senator.' Most of the Roma today impatiently dismiss the concept of king, and many question the amount of authority granted to any of the present-day leaders. For a while, they acknowledged the institution of the *kris romani* (Romani court or trial) as a source of legitimate authority and influence for respected elder-leaders. However, the East Coast Roma have played their own court system against that of the *gadje* to such an extent that neither system is granted much respect today. Moreover, the great increase in divorce cases overloaded the *kris*, causing a back-log that made it almost inoperable.

Rule by *kris* is still a significant factor within the smaller West Coast Mačvaia group. Apparently *kris* success depends upon intermarriage and the decision of kinsmen: when they get together, Mačvaia can almost always find some kind of blood or marital relationship. Determined to keep control over marriage arrangements, the local *kris* recently met to address the problem of endemic elopements. They have established a fine of US\$ 15,000 to be paid to the girl's family—an amount similar to what a public wedding might cost the groom's family. For the moment, this has stymied some of the prospective runaways and required prospective grooms to reconsider.

For the past two decades, the custody of children after divorce has proved a problem. In the 1930s, the groom's family had all the rights. When his son died, Mačvano 'Marko' sent his daughter-in-law back to her family and kept his five grandchildren. Nowadays the first child usually goes to the groom's family, the second to the bride's. But these decisions normally tend to be made case by case. The elders, anxious to avoid American courts and costly custody hearings, will get on the telephone and try to work out an equitable arrangement.

Another development on the political scene has been the institution of an International Romani Union (see Hancock 1988). Whereas sporadic attempts to unite Romani groups under one leadership had been documented in the past, they did not last long and were not taken very seriously by the Roma themselves. The new organization was granted NGO (non-government organization) status by the United Nations in 1979 (Volland 1979). It has held five international World Romani Congresses, the last in 2000. A few of the Roma in the United States, mostly leaders or would-be leaders, were mildly interested in the Union in the 1970s. But interest has waned. If they know about it at all, the Roma usually consider the Romani Union as an elaborate (but commendable) attempt to exert pressure on the European nations that would include reparations for the Roma with those being granted to Jews and other groups who had been sent to concentration and slave labor camps during World War II. Since the Roma in the United States and Canada had no direct financial claims to make, their immediate concern was concentrated on being included in the various Holocaust Memorial museums that were being planned and constructed. Here, too, discovery that no financial advantage was in the offing served to dampen enthusiasm considerably.

In the early 1970s, another, more promising avenue for obtaining money was found. For a time, the United States recognized, honored and fostered

ethnic variation in public schooling. Allocation of national funds for special ethnic schools utilized non-English languages for reading and writing, and adults from various ethnic groups were hired as paraprofessionals (see, e.g., Egan 1980, Kaldi 1983, Kearney 1981, Vogel 1979). The Roma saw these schools as an opportunity to obtain money from the government, and some of the Roma also liked the idea of segregated schooling for their children, especially their daughters. Ability to read street and road signs was a help when taking driving tests, and the application forms for credit cards, safe-deposit boxes, etc., sometimes had to be completed on the spot, rather than being taken home for completion (where the Romni could enlist the help of a *gadjo*). Another advantage of ethnic schools was that the Roma no longer needed to arrange for supervised, private tutoring. Such tutoring, while very expensive, had been mandatory in cities such as New York City where proven school truancy led to stringent fines and even threats of incarceration. Later in the 1970s when political power shifted to the Republican Party, money for ethnic schools disappeared. Currently, on the West Coast, most of the Mačvaia are back to tutoring. The shootings, kidnappings and use of drugs associated with public schools—as witnessed on television—have terrified them. Even those who went to school themselves, who sent their own children to school whenever they could (e.g., when they were not out of town, were not staying up all night for ritual events, or did not need the school-children to babysit), are forbidding their grandchildren to risk the violence they perceive as endemic to the school situation.

### *Drug use*

In the late 1940s recreational drug use was not a frequent practice in New York. Several young men were approached by outsiders and asked if they would act as couriers or dealers. The youths' interpretation of this recruitment effort was that it was an outgrowth of the numbers rackets. Roma do not accept employment by the *gadje* if it can be avoided, so few even considered the offer. Gropper knows of only one man who experimented with drug-dealing, and he quickly abandoned dealing when he realized the harm drugs can do to young children.

Romani drug dependency started as physicians were increasingly consulted for aches and pains that had once been accepted as inevitable. Painkillers were much appreciated. Some of the doctors dispensed tranquilizers such as Valium too freely, unaware of the ease with which one can become dependent on them. The Roma believed prescription drugs were completely

safe to ingest. They also accepted the notion that, if a little is good, more will be better. Painkillers seemed like the ideal cure for almost any ailment, including momentary depression. The death of several Mačvaia adults from over-medication (ingesting large amounts of multiple pills at the same time) has made the group more cautious of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. More intimate association with *gadje* by the younger men taught them about recreational drug use, which they equated with alcohol consumption—potentially dangerous in large amounts, but acceptably risky. Now, marijuana (and other drugs) has high prevalence among the Roma on the East Coast and constitutes a major concern for their families.

### Religion

The main focus of Miller's original study centered on ritual and belief, and the first celebration she was invited to attend, a *slava* for a saint, was more impressive than anything she had expected—a sumptuous table, a serious ritual including a prayer and a four-foot candle, as well as an inspiring degree of camaraderie. But then she learned it was 'no good', as evidenced by the lack of singing and dancing. When she asked, 'Why didn't they sing and dance?', her hostess answered that the 'feeling' was not right—feelings inspire and direct activity. During the previous week one of the Kalderaš men had knocked a Mačvano to the grass in the parking strip. Mačvaia believe in the integrity of matching powers. To be effective, they explained, a *slava* has to be perfect, perfect in terms of effort and presentation, perfect in terms of community harmony and good will—this is what was lacking: perfect enough so the saint, who is entire and blissful perfection, can pay a visit. 'Saint Anne wanted to drop in. But she couldn't.'

When Miller read a written description of the Serbian *slava*, she was a bit chagrined to find that, except for the temporary appearance of a Serbian Orthodox priest, it seemed identical to the Mačvaia *slava*. Obviously at some time, Mačvaia (who have Serbian surnames and came from Serbia), had borrowed the *slava*. But not without major adjustments. It seems the most important feature of a successful Mačvaia *slava* celebration, the perfect feeling, a brotherly-love feeling that must prevail throughout the local community, was particularly Gypsy. Aha, she thought, the meeting of sacred and social in this fashion is a tradition. But that was several decades back and, to the present generation, pan-Roma community harmony is no longer expected. Conflicts between various *vitsi* have proved impossible to settle to the mutual satisfaction of both parties. Nowadays the

other Rom *vitsi* are unlikely to be invited to Mačvaia community events. Harmony and good will are still the expectation, however, among those Mačvaia in attendance.

### *Celebrations*

In the old traveling days, the people, who had meager English-speaking skills, stopped at farms to beg for whatever surplus was available: apples, potatoes, milk for the baby. If the harvest had been good, farmers were often generous. The Mačvaia men might sell a horse, the women give a reading. It was a time when ‘everything was trade or free.’ As an old Mačvanka put it, ‘Now, money wants to drive everybody crazy.’

Then, the ritual celebrations were relatively simple and the preparations brief. Until the 1940s, the cost was perhaps one hundred dollars for a holiday, two hundred dollars for a *slava* or *pačiv* (party in somebody’s honor), three or four hundred at the most for a *pomana* (death commemoration). Only the latter was likely to include guests from far away. Traveling was difficult, and usually no more than 30 people, including children, were likely to attend. The feast offerings to God, the saints, and The Dead were made outdoors or on a table in the tent. The musicians were mostly relatives; it was thought to be bad luck to hire a band of outsider musicians.

By the 1960s, these modest ritual events had become increasingly formal, costly, and spectacular. Reputations were built on the size and opulence of these occasions, the number of people who came, the quality of the music and dancing. People traveled from one end of California to the other to attend. Los Angeles became the Mačvaia ceremonial center. The favorite hall, ‘The Proud Bird,’ located conveniently near the airport, had folding doors which could be opened as needed, and was designed to hold thousands.

Ten *slava* celebrants (*slavaria*) might combine their efforts and the resulting *slava* event—the kind people say ‘will never be forgotten’—would be discussed and evaluated for days. New clothes mean new luck and were mandatory. Most women had two or three new dresses in perpetual process at the dressmakers. Party clothes and jewelry were a costly extravagance. Even so, the business of fortune telling was often neglected for the pleasure and glory of a three-day celebration. Everything revolved around seeing the public—who came, who didn’t—and being seen.

Ostentatious rituals and generous parties signify the ethic of hospitable sharing that provides proof of the sponsor’s wealth, luck, and blessedness. The more that is given, the greater likelihood of future luck. Social power was

lost if the host proved ungenerous. Because everyone wants to get near those who are lucky (luck being contagious), the events of the more fortunate were most likely to be well attended. Components of luck, respect, purity, brotherly love, the sacred, central concepts to the Mačvaia belief system, were signified, acted out, underwritten, sustained, and shared.

During this past decade, the change in ritual style has been dramatic. Public events have fallen off. Only the wealthy seem able to afford them. In Los Angeles, as long as a month can pass without an invitation to a wedding, engagement, *slava*, holiday, or *pomana* (death remembrance). When asked why social events have declined, Mačvaia complain that income from fortune-telling has diminished and their business has suffered since the *gadje* began television advertising as psychic readers. Rents have risen tenfold in California cities, and rentals have become impossible to obtain without a peerless rental record. (Previously, skipping out on bills was the norm and a credit record was regarded as a *gadjo* obsession.) One Mačvano says he quit doing *slava* 'because it wasn't doing anything for me.' His sister no longer keeps her shrine alongside her tarot cards for good luck. She has more luck, she says, when she explains to her clients that she will meditate on their problems than she had when she promised to pray. Open-door hospitality, the drop-in-any-time policy confirming the moral and ethical status of a household, has given way to locked doors and the advice to 'call before you come.' People's delight in singing and dancing and coming together to make good luck has apparently waned. Regarding the feasts (and all public rituals include a sumptuous table), one buxom Mačvanka complained, 'I can't eat like that any more. I have to be careful with my diet.' In the 1960s, the memory of hunger and food shortage was still fresh, and the topic of dieting tended to be treated as a hilarious joke.

Relations with other Roma have become strained as conflicts between groups over territory, divorce, and child custody have proved impossible to settle. Mačvaia rituals are now exclusively Mačvaia. The rituals' location is announced at the last minute, thus offering welcome to those who are wanted and keeping other Roma away. The changing expectations of young people and their increased independence from the rule of their elders have created problems within the group regarding marriage and the cost of weddings. For example, a few years ago, 'Laura' bought two daughters-in-law and presented them to the public with two 'Cinderella, US \$15,000' weddings. But then the young brides left, and she only got US\$ 2,500 back from each of the families. 'Laura' now says it is crazy to spend a lot on fancy weddings: 'I told my son to

run away with the girl he likes, and I will set the couple up in business with the money I might have spent on the wedding.’

Except that the number has been cut from six to three, one set of rituals remains relatively unchanged. Largely because these are final farewells to beloved family members, death commemorations continue to challenge a family’s financial liquidity. Even when the Dead One was not especially well thought of or beloved, Mačvaia beliefs encourage open-handed offerings. Apparently, the family’s prospective luck depends on the wishes and disposition of the Dead Ones, and the status of the newly dead in Heaven depends in part on whatever generosity the living relatives show.

The Roma have always had a keen interest in religious phenomena, both for possible use with their customers and among themselves. In the 1940s and 1950s, Gropper was privy to a number of such instances, none of which were instigated by the Roma themselves although all were eagerly followed by them. Reports of miracles came from fortune telling customers, as well as radio and television programs. This information quickly disseminated among the Roma via telephone. For instance, in the early 1950s a tree in Philadelphia was reported to house the Virgin Mary among its leaves. Prayers uttered at the base of the tree were said to cure illness and to resolve personal and family problems of all kinds. People flocked to the area from all over the New England and Middle Atlantic states. Roma also drove to the site, some returning with photographs purporting to show the Virgin in the foliage. After visiting, Roma reported relief from pain, restoration of visual acuity, and other miraculous recoveries. As the crowds became dangerous and hostile, fewer miracles were noted by the Roma, and interest faded rapidly.

In the mid 1960s, a Mačvanka received several visits from a female saint—opinion varied as to just which saint it was. One of the saint’s messages was the need to separate liquor and cigarettes from the shrine, and, as a result, shrine items were removed from the *slava* table to an adjoining area. The saints’ oil and a teaspoon traveled through the States with directions to light the shrine candle after dark, dip the teaspoon in the oil, and see the saint. When someone realized that success depended on a reflection from the icons, the people lost belief. The miracles ceased.

In the early 1970s, news spread of a Rom to whom God had spoken directly, designating him spokesman for the deity. The Rom’s mission was to restore the Roma to a purified *romanía* so they could withstand all the evil to which they were being exposed—drugs, illness, loss of luck, prejudice. Anthropologists refer to such a religious movement that promises a better life through

the restoration of earlier practices as a 'revitalization movement' (Wallace 1956). It began when a Rom from an undistinguished and relatively poor family in New England arose one day and began to shave in his bathroom. He heard a voice declaring that he, the Rom, had been chosen to spread the news that God was giving the Roma a chance to mend their mistaken ways and return to their former existence as healthy, happy, and lucky people. Recent adoption of outsider behavior, such as various figurines (leprechauns, elves, Santa Claus, Buddhas, etc.) on the altars, women's use of wigs, acceptance of recreational drug use, and gambling had to be eschewed and proper *romania* restored.

The list of items to be dropped included both things that had indeed been borrowed within that generation and some from earlier generations. Little figurines as part of the displays of religious symbols had been used, possibly, for many years. Gambling was an ancient preoccupation of the Roma (part of their horse trading activities). Wigs were a very recent incorporation, but nothing was said of the extensive use of cosmetics (something that had been prohibited in the 1940s).

At first, nearby Roma were informed of the phenomenon and invited to visit the family to hear what the spokesman had to say. The visitors were treated according to the usual patterns of social interaction, and offered the hospitality of food and drink. News of the phenomenon spread; the size of the audience increased. Roma from all over the United States came. As a result, the man's family had to hire a hall and arrange for catering to accommodate the crowds. The family began to ask for donations from the audience to help defray some of the expenses. Inasmuch as numerous healing miracles were experienced, contributions were generous. However, some of the leaders of other groups began to suspect that more money was being collected than was being spent. Furthermore, crowding was so dense that the possibility of accidents arose. Some children suffered minor harm, or were lost and had to be found. The number of miracles diminished. Interest in this movement waned, and it stopped after several months. Currently, any report of miracles seems to involve only one or two families.

The Romani version of Born-again Christianity was imported from Europe (see Sato 1988, for example). Pentecostalism has spread widely among Roma and is still with us. Pentecostalism forbids the use of cigarettes and alcohol. Shrine items and statues are forbidden. Fortune telling is a prohibited occupation, and adherents must not use Romani healers. Christ, not Saints, is the relevant deity, and attendance at *slavi* is discouraged. Heaven

has replaced The Other Side, and the Dead become angels, not ancestors, so attendance at *pomani* is considered heretical.

Pentecostalism has not become popular among the California Mačvaia. Those who do embrace this brand of Christianity usually continue telling fortunes, but in a Christian mode: 'I'll pray to Christ for you.' They are likely to abandon prayer statues and the *slava*. But they usually continue their offerings to the Dead Ones and *pomani*, as well as the use of alcohol and cigarettes.

*Discussion: What continues*

Certain behaviors and customs seem particularly resistant to change. Raising children according to *romanía* and getting them married to other Roma, preferably Mačvaia, is still a primary rule. For the Mačvaia, marrying an outsider is a kind of social death. On the premise that American schools are dangerous owing to the drugs, teacher abuse, killings, and the kidnappings they see graphically displayed on their television screens, Roma prefer their children to learn what they need to know at home. Also, it hasn't escaped the notice of the elders that those young people who go as far as high school become less obedient.

The rule against adults working for outsiders continues. The rule against sharing information about themselves with outsiders persists. Fear of mistreatment and a scapegoat mentality underlie the people's reluctance to admit they are Gypsy. (The only Gypsies who get any kind of newspaper publicity are criminals so that is, in a way, a valid fear.) Two young Mačvaia men were recently beaten up in a random attack by a gang of five African American men, and no one pressed charges. The father said he feared retaliation because 'they might find out where I live and hurt my family.' In part because of the lack of acculturation to American ways via public schooling, cultural differences still prevail. American society emphasizes individuality and independence. What counts in Rom society even now is empathy, kindness and interdependence. The nature of each encounter with outsiders is critically evaluated in this regard. A visit to a doctor with a brusque, no-nonsense manner can make them suspect that 'he wouldn't give me a pill. He doesn't want me to get well.'

These rules and attitudes are among those that continue to war against assimilation. It is this also that keeps 'Gypsies' a somewhat mythical concept to American outsiders. A prevailing belief in the United States is that foreigners are eager to assimilate and should be obliged to do so within a generation.

The Mačvaia people have been in this country for as long as five generations without losing their culture. Having watched changes over more than half a century and knowing the genealogies and marital histories of the Roma involved, we can attest to the continuity of the groups. No matter how different today's Roma seem in contrast to the Roma with whom we began our interactions, these groups are the direct descendants.

Sometimes contacted by newspaper reporters and asked about Gypsies, we are grateful to Sahlins's article for arming us with a strong, defensible retort. When a reporter indignantly asks why the Gypsies have not assimilated, instead of referring to their long history of persecution or the differences between the East and West, we can now suggest that the reporter get over his or her ethnocentric colonial bias and try to develop a multicultural post-modern view.

The question that troubles us is this: if some of us had not devoted ourselves to long-term research spanning fifty years or so, would we accept these changes as modifications of a single group of cultures? Assuredly, we do not question extensive changes in the groups during the 500+ years they have been in Europe. We know that, in Europe, residences changed from tents to wagons, then to apartments, houses or campers. David Smith (1969) has documented extensive changes to Romnichel caravans in Great Britain during the last century. We know transportation changed from the use of horses for ground travel, and ships to cross non-contiguous areas, to automobiles (and campers) on land, and airplanes. Islam and various forms of Christianity have been adopted by the Romani groups in Europe. There is a general acceptance as Romani of the Gitano groups based in the caves of Granada and the Russian groups residing in Moscow. Why should the transition of American Roma to urban residences, which had been a temporary seasonal pattern for many Romani groups for several generations (e.g., Robertson 1984), cause scholars trauma? Many semi-nomadic groups have followed regular seasonal routes of travel. Is moving around a large metropolis so different? We can only conclude that urban residence and a strong inclination to maintain long-term residences were part of the cultural repertoire that could be called upon whenever and wherever circumstances made them sensible options (and Nemeth [1986] would insist they are characteristic of all 'service nomads'). Indeed, when asked about her traveling days, 'Old Bibi', who was 95 at her last birthday, said, 'We had to travel. Nobody let us stay anywhere very long.'

What seems to disturb our scholars is the perceptual dissonance between what we observe happening around the world and unrealistic expectations

arising from our own stereotypes. We see changes occurring all around us, but we insist that the Roma should not change. We refuse to follow their example, resisting the need to update our own attitudes and make the discordance vanish. How can we change our attitudes and what research tools would work?

### Selective multiculturalism

From research traditions less frequently associated with Romani studies, those of the health care professions, Hovey (1999: 193) asks us to consider '... the possibility that individuals may be fully integrated into more than one culture.' If we combine this idea with Sahlins's (1999: ix-x) concept of the 'indigenization of modernity', a new approach to the issue of change and continuity begins to emerge.

Certainly, we have known since the inception of Romani studies that knowledge of some aspects of the non-Romani groups with which the Roma have interacted is essential to their ability to make a living and, as stated earlier, to protect themselves. Furthermore, the active search for additional information is a continuous activity. Television is an invaluable way to accumulate and update understanding of the world; it was adopted early and eagerly. News programs are an obvious data source. Soap operas reveal details of clothing styles, interior decoration, methods of cleaning and washing, and social interactions. Commercials not only show new objects available for purchase but also furnish clues to *gadjo* values and desires.

On the other hand, the break-up of extended families as residential units was an imposed change. Yet it was solved in ways consonant with Romani behavior and values. Owning one's house answers many problems of maintaining *romanía*. One of the first alterations is the installation of a new kitchen sink. Often, replacement of equipment in the bathroom(s) occurs. If the house has been purchased, the rooms on the ground-floor can be combined by tearing down separating walls to produce a wider expanse more reminiscent of former outdoor encampments and consonant with entertaining large groups.

Changes in the host country have accelerated additional readjustments in Romani cultures. Nevertheless, the cultures have continued. Some changes available for adoption were rejected from the start, such as becoming plumbers and doing year-round factory work. Others were adopted enthusiastically. In other words, the Roma are active, often willing, participants in the incor-

poration of alien elements. We scholars are in error when we assume that the Roma have had only a passive role in this process. We call this new process 'selective multiculturalism,' and we suggest that it is a worldwide, desirable phenomenon. We define selective multiculturalism as the set of activities involving inspecting, learning, and assessing cultural behaviors used by other groups with whom one interacts, and then deciding which new patterns of behavior will be adopted and the circumstances under which they will be invoked. In other words, selection refers to sampling new behaviors and specifying the occasions that will trigger their onset. Thus, unless an outsider spends considerable time with a Rom group, one would be unaware of this phenomenon. Let us follow the lead of those we have been studying and who have been changing, and accept these recommended modifications to our work, so that Romani studies can then fine-tune and augment its meritable aspects and courageously eliminate those features that have proved detrimental. Instead of taking all our underlying approaches from the research traditions that have trained us, let us lead the way by encouraging the active participation of the Roma themselves in the pursuit of additional knowledge and theory. This should speed the process satisfactorily.

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