

Reviews

Un mondo di mondi. Antropologia delle culture rom. [A world of worlds. An anthropology of Romani culture] *Leonardo Piasere*. Naples: Lancora, 1999. 238 pp. Lire 36.000 (pbk.). ISBN 88-8325-003-6.

Reviewed by Csaba Prónai

Un mondo di mondi is a collection of studies written by Leonardo Piasere in the 1990s. The principles of selection seem to be based on clear-cut criteria. The chapter 'Un mondo di mondi' (Chapter 5)—which lent its title to the volume—gives a key to the principles of selection, therefore it is worth starting our review with this chapter.

The fact that Piasere himself assigns key significance to this particular chapter is indicated by his placing it in the centre of the physical space of the volume, as the fifth in a series of the nine chapters making up the book. 'Un mondo di mondi', rendered word by word, would be 'A World of Worlds'. The chapter, however, claims not only that Gypsies can 'experience and create' worlds different from those of non-Gypsies, but also that worlds of individual groups are different when compared to one another as well (p. 87). This is just what 'Un mondo di mondi' sets out to demonstrate, using the examples of two Gypsy communities studied by the author as a participant observer. One of the two groups is referred to throughout the chapter as 'romá', while the other is 'roma' (p. 85).

'Romá' is the plural of 'rom' and Piasere uses it as an emic name for the latest arrivals from Serbia and Bosnia, who have immigrated since the 1960s. 'Xoraxané romá' is also plural and it denotes one group of 'romá', where Piasere did participant observation from late 1977 to the summer of 1979, near Verona (p. 53).

'Roma' is also a plural of 'rom', but it's only used as an emic name by the groups of Gypsies that came to Italy after First World War, in the so-called third wave of immigrants from Croatia and Slovenia. One of these groups is

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called 'Slovénsko Roma', which term will be used here in the plural. Piasere started to study one community of Slovénsko Roma in north of Italy at the turn of 1980–81, and this fieldwork lasted at least until 1985, with a 'peak point' between April 1981 and August 1982 (p. 53).

'Un mondo di mondi' gives a sensitive account of differences between the territorial systems of Xoraxané Romá and Slovénsko Roma. The former group does not stick to any given territory or part of Italy and shows no respect for territorial boundaries of others either. By contrast, Slovénsko Roma strive to protect their own territories, come what may. While the economic system, the reactions of Italians and their irregular migration patterns all pushed Xoraxané Romá towards a multi-central pattern and dispersion, Slovénsko Roma possess a uni-central system in the sense that 'each local group has its own [. . .], strongly cohesive centre' (p. 93).

This is the point where Chapter 6, 'La retorica della roulette' has direct connections with the previous chapter, 'Un mondo di mondi'. Here Piasere analyses the territorial characteristics of Slovénsko Roma, striving to investigate the relationship between space and kinship (p. 108). He arrives to a Durkheimian consequence saying that his empiric study confirms theory that the spatial arrangement of the caravans is defined by the relationship between Slovénsko Roma and Gage, and intra-group relationships. He hastens to add, however, that the relationship between Slovénsko Roma and Gage includes the very fact that the 'system of architectural rules' of the caravan camp is interpreted differently by Slovénsko Roma and the Gage (p. 117). The point Piasere is making is exactly this: before we, Gage try to do anything for the Gypsies, it is worth while asking the people we are trying to help (p. 118). 'Slovénsko roma' are fully aware of the 'worlds' of Gage, so translating the 'territorial principle' into their language poses no problem (p. 102). By contrast, we know nothing of 'their geography', their world is misrepresented (and therefore unrepresented) 'in our maps'. What Piasere claims is that in order to understand how their territorial characteristics came about and how they make or don't make themselves at home in a particular place, we must find out their cognitive categories (p. 99).

The problem of 'worlds of worlds' is what Piasere carries on in Chapter 7, 'Ethnoantropologie a confronto', this time in the field of literary anthropology. He compares a novel by a non-Gypsy writer, Carlo Sgorlon's *Il calderas* with 'Popolo mio, dei rom', by a Gypsy poet, Mansueto Levacovich in terms of ideas the two works of literature convey concerning the classification of mankind.

In Sgorlon, the Gypsy people (Zingari) are one of the numerous groups of humanity (Umanita), which can be divided further under various headings (Rom, Sindhi, etc.), whereas in Levacovich, the various peoples making up mankind (Manusha) are automatically classified according to their being Gypsy or non-Gypsy (Gage) (p. 121). In the latter case, we end up with two parallel worlds, where everything exists in two versions: there will be Italian non-Gypsies and Italian Gypsies, French non-Gypsies and French Gypsies, etc.—‘worlds of worlds’.

From a Gypsy perspective each Gypsy group has its non-Gypsy counterpart, and individual groups differ not only from their non-Gypsy counterpart, but also from one another within the Gypsy world—in terms of their relationship with non-Gypsies they live side by side with one another (!). This is why Piasere in ‘Un mondo di mondi’ focusses on three sets of relationships (p. 87–90): one within the group, one between the group and other Gypsy groups and one between the group and non-Gypsies.

The same methodological considerations guide him through the most complex chapter of the book, Chapter 8, ‘Attorcigliamenti semantici’, where he sets out to compare kinship terminologies of several Gypsy groups. On the basis of address terms he proves that there are major differences (between Kalderash, Xoraxané, Slovénko), while having analysed reference terms, he drafts a probable scenario of how differences evolved (p. 161).

Piasere subscribes to the suggestion that Gypsy kinship terminologies evolved by selection from non-Gypsy systems, therefore their structure is determined by the relationship between the given group and non-Gypsy groups living around it throughout its history (p. 152). However, he also manages to prove that Gypsy systems are subject to two influences. ‘One is that regulating the relation of the intra-group connections and address terms, while the other is the force coordinating the relation of Gypsy–non-Gypsy relationship and reference terms.’ Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to call the latter mechanism that of linguistic acculturation, because the non-Gypsy terminologies in question are more than just ‘endured’—they are accepted. Various Gypsy groups time and again rely on these ‘terminological inventories’, and therefore the transition from Gypsy ‘world’ into non-Gypsy one is never automatic: it always involves selection (p. 161).

Individual Gypsy groups—including Xoraxané Romá and Slovensko Roma featuring in ‘Un mondo di mondi’—adopt certain elements of the non-Gypsy world, their history is connected to that of non-Gypsy peoples, but there are always items that disconnect them, items that can not be found

in the surrounding non-Gypsy world (p. 162). One of the reasons why typically unique worlds created by Gypsies will differ from one another is that they have been in contact with differing non-Gypsy groups.

If we consider what has just been said, differences in the relationship of the group and its environment as presented in Chapter 5 gain a historical perspective. Italy is a 'territory to be protected' for Slovénsko Roma, because they had arrived much earlier than Xoraxané Romá, for whom Italy is 'the world of plenty'. In Chapter 6, Piasere claims, on the one hand, that 'Sovénsko Roma seal their right to stay in the given territory by burying their dead in a local cemetery not only against non-Gypsies, but also all other Gypsy groups (p. 98). On the other hand, he points out that they go to cemetery in a different way than non-Gypsies. Although Slovénsko Roma draw a strict line between themselves and Xoraxané Romá, it is just as important for them to go to mass, to school or to cemetery, etc.: 'Gypsy way' (*po románe*) and not 'Gage way' (*po gagikáne*) (p. 101). So after all the wall between the worlds of worlds is thickest between Gypsies and non-Gypsies, as Chapter 7 exemplifies. And this is what Piasere confirms in Chapter 8, too, even though in the last paragraph (p. 164) he stresses the intercultural status of Gypsy groups.

The last chapter, 'Segni', connects here by proving that to completely discard idea of a Gypsy 'secret writing system' is just as incorrect as to overemphasise it (pp. 171–2, p. 182). There can exist Gypsies who do use 'secret' signs, but in these cases all that secrecy means is that these are signs reserved for a certain person in Gypsy–Gypsy communication rather than something mystical (p. 205). What he regards here as most important is the effort to exclude writing from Gypsy–Gypsy relations by creating a special writing system that is not in conflict with cognitive structure of Gypsy–Gypsy relations (p. 168). This is not to say that there are no such signs in the social and economic environment of non-Gypsies! Moreover, a sign will be least conspicuous for those outside the group if it is also part of the non-Gypsy world, if it comes from that world (p. 206–7). This train of thought is very much like that put forward in the preceding chapters, which claim that Gypsy culture exists both 'immersed' into and cut off from the world of non-Gypsies.

Un mondo di mondi carries the same message if we start reading from the central chapter backwards. The major difference between the two reverse reading procedures is that by moving backward we get deeper and deeper into the world of non-Gypsies. Chapter 4, 'L'etnografia come esperienza',

takes us 'only' into Piasere's 'world', while Chapter 3, 'L'anomalia perfette' to the world of anthropologists and Gypsy researchers. While Chapter 2, 'Il bouno zingaro del tempo che fu', is about the relationship between Gage and Gypsies in Italy, Chapter 1, 'Quanto pou essere pluri-etnico uno stato?' deals with the general possibilities of communication between Gage worlds and Gypsy worlds. On the other hand, as we start from 'Un mondo di mondi' and move towards the beginning of the book, we find less and less empirical material that comes from fieldwork done by Piasere. They do tend to disappear time and again if we go forward, towards the end, but never as drastically as here—and never so completely.

In Chapter 4 Piasere makes honest confessions about his research, which had made him realise that 'there are several worlds in our world' and that 'we are not aware of this'. This is why he states both at the beginning of the text (p. 53), and at the end (p. 83) that experiences he gained working among Gypsies and his everyday experiences are not strictly separated in his mind. It is the researcher who establishes the connection between two 'great' worlds, that of Gypsies and non-Gypsies. In fact, we are talking about three worlds, since within the Gypsy world, Piasere writes about his dialogue both with *Xoraxané Romá* and *Slovénsko Roma*, which were very different in nature.

In Chapter 3 the diversity of Gypsies, if mentioned at all, is not presented in the inductive perspective of the participant observer immersed in the world of Gypsies, since the concern of this chapter is the sphere of scholarship which is the product of the classification system of non-Gypsies. No wonder that anthropological Gypsy research is only mentioned in this chapter as an 'invisible ghetto' (p. 40). Groups included in 'Gypsy' category created by non-Gypsies can not be analysed by their components (p. 42), since those for whose sake it was created are in 'another world'. Gypsies exist for the world of scholarship as 'a perfect anomaly', as stated in the title. This might be favourable in terms of symbolic analysis, yet makes the question 'undigestable' from an anthropological perspective (p. 39).

Chapter 2, where Piasere deals with relations between Gypsy and non-Gypsy groups, is closely connected to the previous ones in that he states that 'any abstract 'Gypsy' exists only as a phantasmagory of its creators' (p. 22). It is non-Gypsies, he claims, who should be the first target group—they should do away with the notion of the substantive Gypsy in their heads. This is a prerequisite for the success of any development projects for Gypsies (p. 33).

Chapter 1 has the most general perspective, it is the most Gage-centred, at least in comparison with other chapters in the book. Here Piasere explores

the question how a legal system of a state can accommodate the ('legal') systems of several ethnic groups. We are at one of the major points, and just as we have got farthest, the people for whose sake the point is being made have got farthest from us.

Which world is the best of all possible worlds?—questions of this type render Gypsy culture invisible for us. Yet it is there, and the fact that we can't see them does not mean that they can't see us either. Moreover, having read *Un mondo di mondi*, we can be fairly sure that they do: our worlds are always visible from their worlds. We ought to change our thinking, and it is something we could best learn from them. 'Gypsies have been intercultural ever since they have been Gypsies. Anthropologists are like newborn babies compared to them!', Piasere says (p. 164). How could Gage find a group that knows more about the working mechanism of intercultural relationships? (p. 34)

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Die Nachkriegsdeutschen und ihre Zigeuner. Die Behandlung der Sinti und Roma im Schatten von Auschwitz [Post-war Germans and their Gypsies. The treatment of Sinti and Roma under the shadow of Auschwitz]. *Gilad Margalit*. Berlin: Metropol 2001 (Reihe Dokumente, Texte, Materialien/Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin; Band 36). 304 pp. ISBN 3-932482-38-7.

Reviewed by Michael Zimmermann

Comparing the surveys written so far about Gypsy-policy in the Federal Republic of Germany the study of the Israeli historian Gilad Margalit marks a new quality. The author for the first time systematically examines the western-German policy concerning Gypsies after World War II.

After a brief introduction surveying the general lines of Gypsy-policy from the fifteenth century until the end of the Third Reich the author examines the policy of law and order that was defined as 'fighting the Gypsy menace'. This policy continued until the 1960s, as the author points out, afterwards a period of reluctant acceptance of Sinti and Roma as persecutees began. His research includes the position of German judiciary towards Gypsy-

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persecution as well as the image of Gypsies in German political culture. The latter he describes as settled somewhere between romanticism and racism. Finally he examines the development of a western-German discourse on the persecution of Gypsies by National Socialism.

The allied forces showed little interest in the 'Gypsy question', states Margalit. The Americans nevertheless invalidated the Bavarian 'Law for the Combating of Gypsies, Travellers, and the Work-Shy' from 1926 because it was inconsistent with the principle of equality before the law. Nevertheless German police as well as the Ministries of the Interior tended to put the restrictive Gypsy policy of the Weimar Republic into force again. They proclaimed in a traditional way the 'Gypsy question' to be an integral part of combating criminality. This political discourse included two ambivalent opinions. The first intended an 'improvement' of the Gypsies by a 'settlement policy'. The second and predominant position showed a preference for their expulsion or at least the restrictive regulation of their freedom of movement. Alongside from this position there was a cautious reform movement supported by some politicians and some members of the Ministries of Justice. They rejected the re-establishing of the Weimar Gypsy legislation because it included discrimination. This would evoke reminiscence of the National Socialistic era, moreover it would restrict constitutional rights. Altogether a procedure remained that proclaimed the equality of Gypsies before the law but maintained their discrimination in practice.

According to Margalit the records of the Bavarian diet concerning a restrictive law that dealt with 'travellers' show that at least in the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany there existed two contradictory discourses on the 'Gypsies'. Racist and discriminating remarks were uttered quite frequently during non-public board meetings and remained usually unopposed—whereas in public committee meetings such stereotypes were hardly ever expressed. This behaviour could be interpreted as a more or less involuntary response to the taboo on expressing anti-Semitism in public. The prejudice of antisocial Gypsies however was prevalent in the early post-war years also among NS-persecutees. Stereotypes of this kind often led to the refusal of the status of NS-persecutees for Gypsies. This status was guaranteed to them only on the premises of a permanent residence and regular 'controlled' work which meant usually an employment contract.

The predominant pattern of arguments concerning indemnification of Gypsies can be found in a principle verdict pronounced by the Federal court of justice on 7 January 1956. In an incongruous way it assumed that

racist motivated persecution of Gypsies did not take place until Himmler's order from the 16 December 1942. It includes the command to carry them off by force to concentration camps and the corresponding order of performance of the Reich main security office. This verdict was revised seven years later after protests even from within the judicial system.

A further aspect of Margalit's analysis is the preliminary investigation against Robert Ritter, who before 1945 cooperated closely with the Reich criminal police office in the matter of Gypsy persecution and against Ritter's collaborator Eva Justin. These proceedings were quashed without an indictment. Maybe the author should have completed his statement by explaining the post-war careers of the jointly responsible criminal investigators and the absolutely insufficient preliminary investigations against them. Police as well as district attorneys regarded the arguments of the accused as plausible, namely that the 'racial hygiene'—which was renamed 'social hygiene' after 1945—and also the 'criminal biology' were genuine scientific methods that could not be classified as an integral part of National Socialistic racial ideology.

By describing the discourse of National Socialistic Gypsy persecution Margalit discerns a 'narrative' that legitimized this kind of persecution as part of fighting ordinary criminality, a 'quasi-Jewish narrative' that classified Gypsy persecution a crime analogous to the Holocaust, and a 'syncretic narrative' that refers to a certain fault in the behaviour of Gypsies themselves but which condemns the murderous policy against them nevertheless as an atrocious and criminal action.

Regarding Gilad Margalit's study it remains a matter for further discussion that his research sometimes fails to add an equally distinguished terminology to his analysis of Gypsy persecution. Thus he often applies the terms 'German collective memory' or 'German collective consciousness' that show a certain lack of analytical quality. The last chapter of the book: 'The "discovery" of Gypsy persecutes and their "rank" within the hierarchy of National Socialist victims' is settled between distinguished analysis and speculation. Thus it is rather problematical to argue that the intensive German preoccupation with Gypsy persecution starting in the eighties had a primarily instrumental character and had the intention to diminish the significance of the Holocaust. It should instead be kept in mind that the history of such 'forgotten victims' of National Socialism, as the Gypsies were in the eighties, didn't have a definite location in public history. Also it has to be stated that there has been scarcely any historical research about

Gypsy persecution and that therefore the exact conditions of both kinds of persecution could not have been compared immediately. Such critical considerations, however, cannot really diminish the qualities of this study that provides a profound research of Gypsy policy in post-war Germany and deserves many open-minded readers.

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Zurück nach Nirgendwo. Bosnische Roma—Flüchtlinge in Berlin [Back to nowhere: Bosnian Romani refugees in Berlin]. *Brigitte Mihok*. Berlin: Metropol, 2001. 164 pp. ISBN 3-932482-45-X

On the margins: Roma and public services in Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia (with a supplement on housing in the Czech Republic). *Ina Zoon and Mark Norman Templeton* (eds.). New York: Open Society Institute, 2001. 234 pp. ISBN 1-891385-18-6

Reviewed by Claude Cahn

Sometime in early 1999, while my organization—the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)—was working on research toward a lawsuit and report about the segregation of Romani children in schools for the mentally handicapped in the Czech Republic, I had the pleasure of watching Deborah Winterbourne, a seasoned British asylum lawyer and, at the time, staff attorney for the ERRC, field the following question from a Czech journalist: ‘Doesn’t it trouble you to be so confident in your assessment that the problem of Czech schooling is racism? Why don’t you want to think about the possibility of other causes?’ Debbie responded, ‘I think you misunderstand me. I *have* thought about the problem extensively. I have scrutinized all of the arguments about the issue of minorities and schooling carefully and at length, and I have decided: I think the problem is racism.’

The two books under review here are examples of a growing body of literature which has decided that the issue of Roma in Europe is predomi-

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nantly one of racism in Europe.¹ Even the most dimly aware can hardly avoid the conclusion that Europe has a serious problem of racism. A few personal reminiscences in recent memory that occur to me: The Black Canadian who, after working for six months in the Czech Republic, published an article in a local daily entitled, 'I Really Come Originally from Canada'; The Danish businessman I met on a plane to Skopje who asked me, 'Hmmm . . . the Gypsies . . . Are they a pure race?'; The US clarinet player I knew named Evie Monzingo who repeatedly confounded Hungarians by being unable to answer the question, 'What are your (ethnic) origins?' And then of course the more public ones: The Italian football fans shouting 'The Train Leaves for Auschwitz'; The mainstream German politician who, in answer to mild proposals to vaguely liberalize immigration rules, authored the slogan 'Children Instead of Indians' ('Kinder statt Inder'); The stampede of centrist European governments (Austria, Belgium, the UK, etc.) which have assuaged fears of a loss of voters to racist and xenophobic parties by adopting their programs; Jörg Haider; the German and Croatian Constitutions; etc.

Within the framework of rights as practiced in Europe, Ms Zoon's book has broken new ground. As dominated by the major international organizations such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch*, rights arguments have in the last decade been primarily dominated by what are known as 'civil and political rights', for example efforts to eradicate torture or to force undemocratic regimes to free political prisoners. Recent evidence shows that such fights can be won. For example, the 'apartheid' regime in South Africa withered under international pressure. Similarly, force as a means of extracting testimony in criminal procedures is now widely viewed as out-of-bounds (or at least it has been prior to September 11), probably as a real result of the efforts of groups such as *Amnesty*. And some rights activists claim responsibility for the collapse of the Soviet Union, a huge victory, if you indulge the rights community enough to allow them that glory.

In the post-1989 world, as pogroms against Roma broke out in Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine and skinhead movements began killing Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, the rights community trained their focus on the Romani issue as among Europe's most pressing. And in light of

1. I should state what is called my 'subjective position' in contemporary US academic jargon: my organization is among a number of groups and individuals presently working under this premise, and Ms Zoon is a member of our Board of Directors.

the emergency facing Roma in Europe, an emergency (thus far) culminating in July 1999 with the wholesale ethnic cleansing by ethnic Albanians of Roma from Kosovo, there has been much merit to the civil and political rights approach. However, it is increasingly clear that focusing on violence as the single determining component of the rights situation of Roma in Europe excludes a range of important phenomena. Hence the importance of a comprehensive exploration of the situation of Roma with respect to their access to basic social and economic rights.

On the Margins focuses on the access of Roma to social protection, housing and health care in three countries—Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia (there is also an appendix on housing in the Czech Republic). In doing so, the study describes a kind of front line in a cold war between Roma and the societies in which they live, a front line operating at the level of the local municipal authority. It turns out the immense energies are devoted by Roma, at least in the four countries described, to negotiating to secure access to services to which, in principle, all citizens are entitled. As one Romanian social worker quoted in *On the Margins* confessed, ‘We give money to those who deserve it, old people who cannot work anymore, not to the Gypsies.’ The documentation offered by Ms Zoon—empirical data collected in the course of a number of field missions in the countries at issue—is rich in its anecdotal power to convey that this dynamic is so widespread as to be almost universal, and that it occurs almost anywhere that something is by law supposed to be provided by a public authority. Ms Zoon is persuasive in conveying that public authorities, faced with Roma, become almost instantly ungenerous, although by law they are obliged to be, as the saying goes, ‘public servants’.

Ms Zoon is originally from Romania and has done extensive human rights work in that country. She has additionally lived for long periods of time in the Czech Republic. The material presented on these two countries is stronger: she knows the field better, and there is a more intimate quality to her disgust at the conduct of the local bureaucracy. For a quick taste, see on page 124 her description of the Romanian local authority which re-housed a group of Roma in an abandoned pigsty, which includes the following passage: ‘Residents also reported that they were not required to pay rent, but they had to improvise their own infrastructure and services, without any assistance from city hall in money, materials, or equipment. Leasing contracts do not exist, and residences do not have addresses. When residents have to fill out forms, they write in the space for the address: ‘to the pigs’ (la

porci)'. Not only is the poetry of local cruelty stronger in the Romanian and Czech chapters, Zoon also knows and describes well the tangle of rules (for Roma, read: 'obstacles') in these countries.

Material in *On the Margins* is organized with field research findings following international and domestic legal standards for each given theme, and the book concludes with a series of recommendations. Those familiar with the human rights reporting genre will recognize the logic of this approach. The premises are, among other things:

- There are international legal standards to which states should adhere (and not merely performative rituals in front of bodies such as the United Nations);
- There is a community of policy-makers and practitioners which pays keen attention to—and strives to meet—these international standards;
- Or at least, any given country can be embarrassed in front of its peers if it is shown to be falling dramatically below expected/required standards.

There are indications that these premises are fairly well-founded, especially when combined with some leverage. After all, under an international sanctions regime, apartheid really did collapse. Similarly, the public in Slovakia for instance today lives in dread that the Romani issue will keep that country excluded from membership in the European Union, and real policy is made under this pressure. For those who doubt that such standards really exist and who like their social commentary to rest on the traditional bedrock of ethics, morality and persuasive writing, the clinical format of 'international standards' and exhortative speech may rankle. It is probably true that at the end of the day, Richard Wright, Athol Fugard and similarly powerful writers exploring the role of race in society have done more to form civil rights consciousness than the United Nations. But then this is one of the strengths of Zoon: No matter how hard she tries to remain clinical, her acid Eastern European tone seeps into her writing, to excellent effect.

Ms Mihok's book is rather less constrained by an international law framework and if anything owes its methodology to sociology. It is nevertheless a book of similar ambitions: To illuminate a dark corner of reality, revealing a subject to which an ethical person should respond. Ms Mihok's subject is post-1989 Berlin, and it is thanks to her that we now know more about the situation of Roma in that city than in any other place in Germany.

Berlin after 1989 (and especially after German reunification in 1990) enjoyed a decade of respite from its intense history. Throughout the cold

war, East Berlin had been the capital of the German Democratic Republic ('East Germany'), while West Berlin had been a protected outpost of the Federal Republic of Germany ('West Germany'), inhabited by the remnant of an old bourgeoisie, recent immigrants—predominantly Turkish—and increasingly by a generation of disaffected West German youth who moved to West Berlin to avoid military conscription: Residents of Berlin were exempt. After 1990, Berlin was a capital city no more, and the fusion of the increasingly bitter and disaffected post-capital East Berlin and the now aging post-Babylon West Berlin gave united Berlin something of an identity crisis, albeit among not a very large number of people: Today's Berlin has less than half the population that it had before World War II. Throughout much of the 1990s, Berlin had a conservative city government enamored of heavy-handed police tactics, and this gave rise to some of the noteworthy features of Berlin city life, notably periodic reports of torture of detained Vietnamese accused of selling cigarettes on the street illegally, and ritual street battles with 'anarchists'. The latter has become local custom on days such as May 1 (International Workers' Day) and October 3, the anniversary of German reunification: police assemble in riot gear armed with tear gas and fire hoses atop armored vans, and anarchists gather in the Kreuzberg and/or Prenzlauerberg neighborhoods with various impromptu weaponry (cobblestones, etc.). Then the two sides provoke each other until a street war breaks out. It is hard to tell which side enjoys the event more.

Into this Berlin arrived, in the early 1990s, just under 30,000 refugees of the genocidal war in Bosnia. It was not immediately apparent, but this group included probably around 7000 Roma. German authorities did not register persons according to ethnicity, and for various reasons, when asked, many Roma in any case stated that they were one of the three major groups—Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Or else, when they stated that they were Roma, they were disregarded as irrelevant in what was a war heavily scrutinized by media and many others trying to make sense of war in Europe. Following the Dayton agreement of 1995 (specifically following a decision taken by the German Interior Minister Conference in September 1996), German authorities exercised a range of carrot-and-stick measures aimed at trying to force the Bosnians to go back to Bosnia. These were for the most part effective in making people leave: The Bosnian refugee population of Berlin is today under 10,000. However, this group is increasingly Romani; while many Bosnians have, under duress, decided that it was possible to conceive of life in a post-war Bosnia splintered on ethnic lines, Roma—in no place

a ruling ethnic majority—have withstood both the temptation of the carrot and the at times very heavy application of the stick.

This side of Berlin is not much seen by those not actively looking for it. It rarely is accorded scrutiny by the local press and is generally not very public, in a city that has no natural center of gravity. The Bosnian Roma of Berlin live in nondescript dormitories, often located in industrial areas or out of the way rubble sites, with a guard at the gate, common kitchens, rules posted from 'Die Direktion.' The story of the Berlin Roma is rife with stories of, for example, persons who have been in Germany for nearly ten years, have had two or three children born in Germany, all of whom attend German schools, but who nevertheless have never been able to acquire anything more than the status of 'tolerated' (*geduldet*)—in practice nothing more than a temporary stop on deportation. This document must be renewed periodically—sometimes as frequently as every three months—and the renewal process is generally accompanied by shouting and verbal abuse ('What are you still doing here?!' etc.). At the federal level there have been repeated decrees to allow long-term refugees to have access to normal residence permits. However, in practice these are frequently inapplicable. For instance, one recent federal decree allowed anyone who had been legally working for two years to have access to a residence permit. In Berlin, however, refugees are banned from working, so no one is eligible.

The city government of Berlin, notably the office called the 'Ausländerbeauftragte' (Foreigner Commission) of the Berlin Senate's Office for Health and Social Affairs, attempted to ameliorate the force of the September 1996 Interior Ministers' decision by developing—in cooperation with Bosnian Romani refugees—a project whereby individuals would not be forced to leave Germany individually, if they consented to going back 'voluntarily' as a group to their original village. The idea was that group return was more humane, especially if accompanied by development projects to ease 'reintegration.' The *ERRC* did not endorse such projects on grounds that there was no reason why Germany could not simply integrate those persons who wished to remain in Germany, and desist from humiliating and degrading carrot-and-stick treatment of individuals altogether. Bureaucratic obstacles in Germany have in any case to date ensured that none of these development projects have happened; in mid-1999, participants in the program were told that the project was canceled since European Union funding had fallen through. In early 2000, the Berlin office again invited participants

in the project to the Foreigner Commission office (but not all of them, since key participants had in the meantime emigrated to the US), and told them that the project could again start, with the assistance of an Austrian donor. Unfortunately, crucial elements of the project, such as a job creation program, would be funded insufficiently for them actually to proceed. It is unclear what has hindered the Berlin authorities themselves from spending public money on the project. Ms Mihok recounts the history of this senseless waste of human energy in its ugly detail, concluding that 'The actual problems in the repatriation issue were from the beginning burdened by a lack of will on the part of decision makers to get to know the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina . . . A lack of organizational capacity and deficiencies in concepts concerning financial support for the return projects are only two aspects of this problem. Politicians also made clear that the civil war refugees would be taken in during existing civil war conditions, and thereafter they were under obligation to leave.'

Both of these books make depressing reading. They will also disappoint anyone in search of juicy anthropological tidbits about the lives of Gypsies, as well as anyone looking for an overview of Romani history. For better or worse, both books leave unexplored the question of the impact of bureaucratic practice on shaping Romani consciousness. Neither work can stand on its own as a single source on Roma, although both books will be crucial for persons engaging in more intensive research on the subject and are especially advisable reading for policy makers. Where they do stand on their own is in mapping out the social history of the present in the places they describe. Anyone with an interest in Central and Eastern Europe and Germany will find them revealing.

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A false dawn: My life as a Gypsy woman in Slovakia. *Ilona Lacková.* Recorded, translated from Romani and edited by Milena Hübschmannová; translated from Czech by Carleton Bulkin. Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes (Gypsy Research Centre) and University of Hertfordshire Press, 1999. 224 pp. ISBN 1-902806-00-X.

Rokkering to the Gorjios: In the early nineteen seventies British Romany Gypsies speak of their hopes, fears and aspirations. *Jeremy Sandford, compiler and editor.* Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes (Gypsy Research

Centre) and University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000 (First published 1973 as *Gypsies*). 176 pp. ISBN 1-902806-04-2.

Reviewed by Susan Tebbutt

The oral tradition, an important feature of Romani culture, is at the centre of two new additions to the Interface Collection, which is developed by the Gypsy Research Centre in Paris with the support of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. Work on Ilona Lacková's *A false dawn: My life as a Gypsy woman in Slovakia* started in 1976; interviews for Jeremy Sandford's *Rokkering to the Gorjios* (originally published in 1973 as *Gypsies*) were also conducted in the 1970s. What do the two volumes contribute to Romani Studies in the twenty-first century?

Lacková's conviction that there is 'no darkness not followed by the dawn' (p. 114) is symptomatic of her optimistic attitude to life. This reference to an old Romany saying is typical of the colourful way in which Romany culture is introduced naturally to the reader, rather than added on as an afterthought. In the eight sections of the autobiography Lacková talks in her mother tongue, Romani, about her childhood and early years, the Second World War, her successful post-war career promoting Romani culture and civil rights, and her retirement. In her early forties she was the first Romany woman to graduate from Charles University in Prague, and the volume celebrates her narrative skills as well as disseminating information about her pioneering work helping the Romany community in Slovakia.

There is never a dull moment in the autobiography, which is peppered with rhythmical repetition, dramatic dialogue and unusual, at times incredible, incidents. Lacková is a born story-teller whose self-confessed love of the 'romantic novellas' she read 'so voraciously' as a girl (p. 208) is much in evidence in her tales of a 'three-meter-tall bandit', accidents with axes, encounters with *mule* (souls of the dead) or other picaresque episodes. Although there is much hardship in her life, the section on the forced labour camp at Petic is brief, and Lacková emerges at the end of the Second World War relatively unscathed. The volume should not be seen as representative of the experience of the Slovakian Romanies during the Nazi period.

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Lacková's words have been translated first by Milena Hübschmannová into Czech and then by Carleton Bulkin into English. It is a tribute to their skills as translators that the English is extremely colourful and dynamic, conveying the inventiveness, originality and humour of the narrative style. Ilona recounts how she was addressed by a good-looking boy when she and her friends were potato picking:

Ha, gurlies, if'n yew c'd only see m'oonkle! What a mewzishun he be! We had never heard anyone in our whole lives who spoke like that. Svidník is far from Prešov and people didn't go there for fairs, so we didn't know the Roma there. The girls started to squeal and aped him: m'oonkle! moonkle! (p. 70).

This sparkle of the language is missing from Jeremy Sandford's *Rokkering to the Gorjios*, despite the enthusiastic promise in the foreword by Charles Smith, Chair of the Gypsy Council, that the book will 'inspire and motivate' (p. 11). Since most of the eighteen accounts are fairly short, the Romanies do not emerge as individuals, with the exception of Mr. Johnny (Pops) Connors, whose story is very moving.

The five main sections of *Rokkering to the Gorjios*, each with a short explanatory introduction, deal with the life, harassment and fears of people in England who live in caravans, tents, a canal boat, houses and horse-drawn caravans. The change from *Gypsies*, the original title of Sandford's volume, was presumably meant to attract a wider audience by the use of the two Romany terms, but may well simply deter all but those already familiar with the terms. The change of title may, however, be because one chapter is not about the Gypsies at all. Sandford includes a chapter on the 'Water Gypsies' because 'they seemed to me to have many things in common with land Gypsies'. He adds 'I now feel that the similarities may be more due to lifestyles being in some way similar, rather than a more direct presence of Romany, Tinker or Pavee blood' (p. 75).

This vagueness in the presentation of 'Gypsies' is also evident in what I feel is a major weakness of the volume, the use of photographs. The captions are extremely vague, and give no indication as to the year or even decade in which the photo was taken. There is additional information at the back of the volume about the name of the photographer (where known), but not always information on who or where the Gypsies are. This adds to the general impression that all Gypsies are interchangeable, and that it is acceptable to illustrate one person's story with the image of an anonymous stranger.

By contrast, all the photographs in *A false dawn* are clearly captioned

and related to the text, with the year given in all but two cases (pp. 147, 198). Although the quality of the photography is not as 'high' as in Sandford's volume, which is described on the back cover as 'lavishly illustrated with stunning period photographs', the Slovakian photos contribute far more to the presentation of Romanies as individuals.

There are minor problems in both volumes with the inclusion of Romany terms. *A false dawn* has a clear 'Glossary of Romani words and meanings' (although one or two terms are misplaced alphabetically). All these terms are easily identifiable since they are italicised in the text. In *Rokkering to the Gorjios* the distinction between capitalized and uncapitalized Gypsy (as explained on p. 10) is not applied consistently, and this can be misleading. Sandford's volume includes a 'Glossary' of Romany or Cant words, but some are spelt differently in the text itself, none of the words are italicized, and some unfamiliar terms are not included.

To conclude, although it claims to be a 'classic about Gypsy life and culture', *Rokkering to the Gorjios* does not add substantially to the field. Donald Kenrick and Colin Clark's *Moving on: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain* (University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield, 1995) is more up to date on the struggle of the Gypsies today, and the personal accounts in Southwark Traveller Women's Group's volume *Moving Stories: Traveller Women Write* (London: Traveller Education Team, 1992) and Yorkshire Art Circus' *Static: Life on the site* (Castleford: Yorkshire Art Circus, 1998) are more gripping. Even at the start of the twenty-first century there has been very little information in English available about or by Romanies in Eastern Europe, and the Lacková volume provides an unusual and stimulating addition to the field. *A false dawn* could well become one of the classics of the European Romany literary heritage.