

MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS: GROWING UP GYPSIES.

THE CASE OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIAN YOUNG GYPSIES IN BOLOGNA, ITALY.

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The main hypothesis of this paper is that, while all young people – and especially poor young ones - face multiple transitions (De Luigi, N., Martelli, A., Zurla, P., 2004; Schizzerotto, A., Lucchini, M., 2004; Aassve, A., Iacovou, M., Mencarini, L., 2006); and young immigrants also have to bridge between different contexts (Nelken, D., 2007); young Gypsies often find themselves confronted with the almost impossible task of facing the transitions common to all, having to bridge between different contexts and also having to cope with peculiar discriminations, due to anti-Gypsyism, surviving and resurgent in our societies even now, following their remote and recent history of deadly persecution as Gypsies.

Anti-Gypsyism – as well as anti-Semitism and all racism - and its survival and resurgence, in reality, tell more about ourselves, about Italian and European society, than they tell about Gypsies (Impagliazzo, M., 2008).

In this paper anyhow I will mainly focus on young Gypsies, on their ways of confronting their remote and recent history, and its “denied memory” (Bensoussan, G., 2009), along with present situations.

I assume that inquiring into the ways in which some of them confront both such history and their present difficulties can foster better comprehension on our part of the dynamics of youth and of minority youth in general, while also making us more thoughtful about the kind of overall society we are building, in Italy and perhaps in Europe at large (see Prodi, R., 2004).

I will focus on the situation of some Roma Gypsies from former Yugoslavia, who were in Italy or arrived in the country at the time of Yugoslavian collapse and wars, in the early 1990s. They share their age condition with all youth; they share their condition of immigrants – better: evacuees – with some; moreover, they are Roma Gypsies.

These years still represented the early stages of immigration in Italy, and among many I remember one international seminar about it in which a local scholar asked to an eminent American expert what could we do to grant social integration. The answer was: *never harm your minorities to such an extent that they cannot forget*. This, I think, constitutes a central point in the problem of growing up Gypsies: as a minority, they already were unbearably harmed in the past, and they often still are, with little or no acknowledgement and recognition of their real history and condition. Nevertheless, the ways in which the older Gypsies handle and transmit memory and the younger ones receive and transform it testify for a strong will to become and be part of the overall society. Unfortunately, such will is often misunderstood and defeated, leading to extreme estrangement and to its perpetuation from one generation to another.

1. Is growing up Gypsies different?

I will start by assuming that growing up Gypsies is different than growing up for most youth, even when second or third generation immigrants. Not that I like to endorse such a difference, I simply take note of its existence.

Some have argued that Gypsies grow up without any adolescence (Kárpáti, A., 1996, pp. 29-42). Some others pointed to their extreme discrimination in a social environment which is now marked by the upsurge of a third generation of human rights (Cemlyn, S., 2005, 2008).

Beyond explanations focusing on specific features of the group they belong to, or on changes in the social environment in which such a group subsists, I would rather suggest that growing up Gypsies is different, nowadays, in Europe, also because they were – and often still are – harmed to such an extent that it cannot be forgotten. And yet they cannot remember fully and meaningfully, for both external and internal reasons. On one side, their history and memory have been badly set apart from the history and memories of other groups and peoples, and of Europe as a whole, as I will show. On the other side, the older ones had problems in remembering and testifying what happened to them – and this is common to so many Jews and others who directly experienced a genocidal era – but they also want to preserve their peculiar “education of freedom” for children and youngsters.

Gypsies were deeply involved in what D.Diner (2001) has called the “civilizational rupture” of 1933-1945 Europe, namely its becoming genocidal (Bensoussan, G., 2009).

It can be discussed if and to which extent they suffered a genocide exactly in the same terms as the Jews did (G.Lewy, 2000; Luzzatto, A., 2008), but for sure they were persecuted, and persecuted on specifically racial grounds, long before being sent to camps since 1943. And a large part of them, one every four or five, was exterminated. Historical records and memories still have to be better known and compared, and this has barely started to be done.

What is even more difficult to know and compare is what happened afterwards, once war and genocide were over. If for Jews it took a time to get the experience of *Shoah* acknowledged by both institutions and public opinions over Europe and beyond its boundaries, and to get some recognition (de Bernart, M., 2008), in the case of Gypsies the experience of *O Baro Porrajmos* (the “great devouring” of the human race) mostly went unacknowledged, up to very recent times and still now. Generation after generation, Gypsies – be they Roma or Sinti or others – living in former Western and former Eastern Europe had to cope with such an experience in almost complete isolation. Coupled with ongoing discriminations, this is the fact which seemingly makes a difference in growing up Gypsies. For the fourth or fifth generation now, it means growing up with some cognizance of terrible events happening in the past to Gypsies as such, without exactly knowing what such events were in fact, when and how and why did they happen, in which ways they concerned Gypsies as such, in which relationship with the rest of society. The result is that often one feels that it is simply terrible to be a Gypsy as such – this I have often registered with Roma and Sinti men and women of all generations, though here I mainly deal with the younger ones – and this comes to constitute a deeply rooted feeling one has to cope with lifelong, all the more so when growing up.

This problem is not only that a “Gypsy is beautiful” perspective does not exist, somehow similar to the “Black is beautiful” one which fostered some pride on the part of Blacks and some recognition on the part of others. This problem is not even only one of reparations and legal acknowledgements – both late and still largely unaccomplished. This problem concerns the very core of personal and group identity, and of intergenerational relations and socialization processes (de Bernart, M., 1998), particularly in post-genocidal situations.

Being myself a second-generation daughter of the *Shoah*, with half of my family perishing there, I devoted large part of my life and studies trying to make some sense of it. While I did not succeed yet, and doubt it might be possible, I still think it is worth trying. I do not intend here to compare *Shoah* and *Porrajmos*, which were in effect different – though simultaneous – destruction processes. I simply look at the consequences of such processes on the concerned persons and groups, and note some considerable similarities (Luzzatto, A., 2008). I personally know how difficult it is to grow up in a post-genocidal situation, even when there is wide and open public and social acknowledgement and recognition of the facts. All the more so, when there is not. I have been researching and teaching in other post-genocidal contexts, from Cambodia to Bosnia, and – in spite of the extreme differences in the facts which had occurred – I always

had to confront this same problem, namely how difficult it is to find a meaning for one's own existence and (personal and group) identity, and to grow up, following such major ruptures. This is one main reason why I assume that growing up Gypsies is different. Different from the already difficult multiple transitions all young people face; different from the further difficulties immigrant youth finds in bridging disparate realities; but perhaps also different from growing up in other post-genocidal situations, given the fact that the history and memory of Gypsies has been and is mostly unacknowledged and not (yet) recognized.

2. Some remote and recent history.

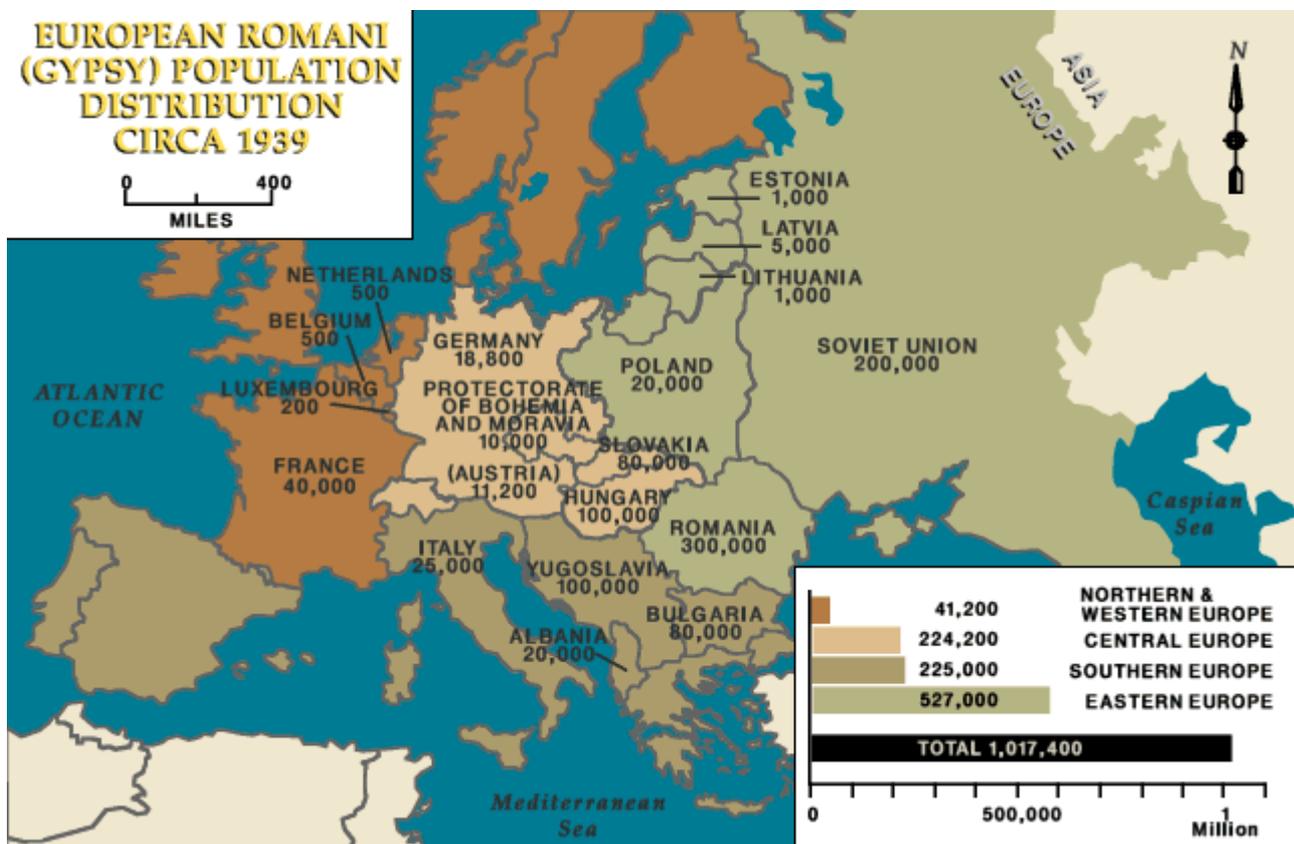
The first written document attesting the presence of Gypsies in Europe dates back to 1322 (De Vaux de Foletier, F., 1978, 46). In 1471 Europe already registered the first known decree intimating their expulsion from the Helvetic Confederation (Lewy, G., 2002, 6). Expulsions and deportations followed all over Europe, and not even during the otherwise more tolerant Enlightenment time was their condition much mitigated. On one side they were accused of being accomplices of deicide, for not welcoming the sacred family when fleeing to Egypt or for forging the nails for the crucifixion of Jesus. On the other side they were deemed to be idlers, asocial, degenerated. In time, this latter criticism coupled with racial stigma. As far as 1878, for instance, the Italian scholar C. Lombroso was stating that they were "anthropological delinquents", committing crimes not on the ground of free and conscious acts but due to their "wicked tendencies, which repeat their origins" (Impagliazzo, M., 2008, 23).

Under Nazism, and Fascism, the situation of Gypsies became much worse. The Weimar Constitution granted them full and equal citizenship, but other laws at the same time discriminated them. Such was the case of the Bavarian law of 1926, which became national law three years later. In a first phase, Nazism simply reinforced these pre-existing measures. Then most Roma and Sinti were put under preventive custody, and finally they too became the target of 1935 racial laws issued against Jews. In reality, for more than a decade, they were the targets of both policies of territorial control and racial discriminations (USHMM, 2008). Moreover, while in the case of Jews there mainly was strict top-down ideation and execution of destruction processes, in the case of Gypsies it often was the reverse, sort of bottom-up impulses which saw large parts of societies involved, along with local and central powers (Margalit, G., 2002). So the relative advantage of being often scattered in wide territories became at the same time their misfortune: they were often spotted out, denounced and persecuted, everywhere. Since 1939, with the occupation of Poland, Nazi intended to deport there all the Gypsies of Germany and Austria, which they partially did. And many were killed in the Soviet lands following Nazi invasion in 1941-42.

In spite of it being commonly assumed that the racial persecution of Gypsies started on January 1943, when Himmler ordered the Reich's Gypsies deported to Auschwitz, we now know that campaigns and actions against them began long before (Lewy, G., 2002). And we also know that specific racial persecution was already active at least since Himmler issued his Circular "*Combating the Gypsy Plague*", on December 8, 1938 (Margalit, G., 2002).

In Italy officially there was no racial persecution of the Gypsies: but, if nomadic and foreigners, they were expelled since 1926. Many of them were sent to internment camps during Fascism, especially from 1940 to 1943. Then Italy fell under Nazi control, and deportations intensified. Some Italian fascist scholars, such as G.Landra, had already openly theorized their racial inferiority (Impagliazzo, M., 2008). It is presumed that some 1.000 Gypsies, on perhaps 25.000 living in Italy at the time, were deported from inside the country to extermination camps (Kenrich, D., Puxon, G., 1975, 203). Many others might have been deported and killed in and from within zones of Italian occupation, but there are no sound data about this.

In occupied Serbia, the German authorities killed male Roma in shooting operations during 1941 and early 1942; then murdered the women and children in gas vans in 1942. The total number of Roma killed in Serbia will never be known. Estimates range between 1,000 and 12,000, on perhaps 100,000 living in whole Yugoslavia at the time (USHMM, 2008). In spite of most killings being carried out through shooting operations, there were also camps. Two of such camps were set up during the late summer of 1941, one in Belgrade, the other in Sabač – exactly the place where the majority of those arriving in Bologna in the early 1990s came from. A few months later, in autumn 1941, the order was given to shoot all Jews and Gypsies – and only them – interned in such camps. The chief of civil administration Turner explained to the commands the necessity for such action: “Basically, one must remember that Jews and Gypsies quite generally are an element of insecurity and thereby a danger to public order and peace. It is the Jewish intellect that has brought on this war and that must be annihilated. The Gypsy cannot, by reason of his inner and outer makeup (Konstruktion) be a useful member of an international society (Volkergemeinschaft)” (Hilberg, R., 2003, 732).



Source: USHMM 2008

Alltogether, some 219.000 to 500.000 European Gypsies died in the *Porrajmos* (Lewy, G., 2000). It has been calculated that some 1.017.400 Gypsies lived in Europe in the late 1930s, more than half of them in Eastern Europe (USHMM, 2008). This means some 20-25% of them – maybe more – were killed. Many more were imprisoned, underwent medical experiments, lost relatives and everything they had. This implies that, notwithstanding many local differences, almost each family in the Gypsy Roma and Sinti European population was somehow directly affected by *Porrajmos*.

Unfortunately, neither the facts as such nor these consequences were acknowledged and recognized by institutions and societies, up to the late 1970s at least, in former Western Europe; much later, if ever, in former Eastern one (Margalit, G., 2002; Barany, Z. D., 2002).

In former West Germany, the Parliament accepted only in 1979, for the first time, that the persecution of Gypsies had been racially motivated, thus also allowing for some compensation (USHMM 2008; Margalit, G., 2002).

In Italy this did not happen.

Still different is the case in former Yugoslavia. Already since 1945, and especially after 1974, Gypsies could enjoy a certain degree of tolerance, within the frame of the Yugoslav policy of nationalities, which preferred integration to assimilation. They even had a number of relatively free cultural and social organizations. But, as far as I know, this did not affect the domain of memory, which was only or mainly official memory until the collapse of the early 1990s. So, if Gypsies were even honored for having been on the side of the partisans, little or no trace was left of what effectively happened to them under Nazi occupation (Barany, Z.D., 2002, 122-125). After that, the 1990s' wars precipitated many, and many Gypsies, in a very bad situation. And, at the end of the war, Gypsies were unaccounted for even in the Dayton Peace agreements (1995).

3. Is there a Gypsy memory?

The facts briefly recalled above affected most if not all Gypsy families in Europe. But we have very few memories and testimonies by Gypsies themselves.

In some cases, such memories have been solicited, namely by scholars who were themselves deeply concerned insofar as Jews coming after *Shoah* (Sonneman, T., 2002). The painful memories of brutality, forced sterilization and death reveal a deep commonality of pain suffered by all the victims of Nazi violence.

In few other cases Gypsies were spontaneously testifying or writing their own memories. Such is the case of Ceija Stojka.

She was the fifth of six children born to Roman Catholic Gypsy parents. The Stojka's family wagon traveled with a caravan that spent winters in the Austrian capital of Vienna and summers in the Austrian countryside. The Stojkas belonged to a tribe of Gypsies called the Lowara Roma, who made their living as itinerant horse traders.

"1933-39: I grew up used to freedom, travel and hard work. Once, my father made me a skirt out of some material from a broken sunshade. I was 5 years old and our wagon was parked for the winter in a Vienna campground, when Germany annexed Austria in March 1938. The Germans ordered us to stay put. My parents had to convert our wagon into a wooden house, and we had to learn how to cook with an oven instead of on an open fire.

1940-44: Gypsies were forced to register as members of another "race." Our campground was fenced off and placed under police guard. I was 8 when the Germans took my father away; a few months later, my mother received his ashes in a box. Next, the Germans took my sister, Kathi. Finally, they deported all of us to a Nazi camp for Gypsies in Birkenau. We lived in the shadows of a smoking crematorium, and we called the path in front of our barracks the "highway to hell" because it led to the gas chambers".

Ceija was subsequently freed in the Bergen-Belsen camp in 1945. After the war, she documented and published Lowara Gypsy songs about the Holocaust (USHMM 2008; also Stojka, C., 2007).

It is commonplace to think and say that Gypsies have an only oral culture, and that this explains their lack of

history and memory.

As far as history is concerned, it should be noted, more correctly, that there is a combined effect of their almost impossible access to scholarly positions, on one side, and of their having been actively discouraged to file complaints and know the files concerning them (Margalit, G., 2002), on the other side.

As far as memory is concerned, the situation is even more complex. Notwithstanding the exceptions I just recalled and some others, it seems that the repository of oral memories widely exceeds what is transmitted from one generation to the following one. The reason for this seems to be partially common to all those who were traumatized by experiencing genocide, partially not. It also seems to depend upon the specific Gypsy sense of educating children so as to allow them, especially in the first years, maximum personal freedom. As Ceija Stojka recalls about her own early experience, "I grew up used to freedom, travel and hard work". All or most Gypsy generations grow up this way.

How to reconcile such a deep sense of freedom with transmitting memory?

I have explored this problem with the oldest Gypsies who arrived from former Yugoslavia, mostly from Sabač (near Belgrade, in Serbia), to Bologna, Italy, in the early 1990s.

Dragoljub, a Christian Orthodox Roma, remembered a lot, in spite of his having been just a child at the time. He did not even know his exact date of birth, given the fact that they were registered only at the local Orthodox church, which had been given to fire. He remembered many relatives disappearing, and a few coming back and telling terrible stories of brutality. They lost everything they had for more than once, and the members of the family had to part from one another to survive. Dragoljub had become grand-grandfather, before dying of cancer in a camp in Bologna. He told me that he avoided telling past stories to the younger ones: because these were sad stories, which would have made the young ones sad too; and also because he realized that they were facing enough problems in their daily lives, without having to cope also with such a terrible past. Once I told him that for me it had been anyhow important to know about the past of my family, even if this was terrible too, because it helped me orientating myself in history and actuality. He asked me: "But knowing did not damage your sense of freedom?", and I really was not sure about any possible answer.

4. Escaping the war in former Yugoslavia, arriving in Italy.

Dragoljub was one of the some thousands Roma Gypsies who escaped from former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and arrived in Italy. On the 130.000-140.000 Roma and Sinti Gypsies who actually live here, more than half being Italians since generations, some 30.000-40.000 are from former Yugoslavia: some were already in Italy since a long time, others arrived during the 1990s war or just after (Impagliazzo, M., 2008).

In 1995, at the time of the end of the war and of the Dayton Peace Agreements, there were in Italy 100.171 citizens from former Yugoslavia. 58.728 of them had been granted a special permit of stay released for humanitarian reasons on the basis of the law 390/1992, a law issued by the Italian State to allow protection for those fleeing from the war (Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Centrale per la Documentazione, 1995). Article 1 of this law stated that the Government was enabled to "face the needs of the evacuees received on the national territory, consisting in acceptance, transportation, dwelling, food, clothes, health and socio-economic care, care for unaccompanied children...without any discrimination, especially on ethnic and religious grounds". In spite of such provisions, some estimation was made of how many evacuees were of Roma origin, officially based on preparing a special program of assistance for them. At mid 1996, they were

quantified in 10.340 persons, 4.400 of whom eligible for assistance, while only 1.060 effectively assisted (Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale dei Servizi Civili, 1996).

At that time, 640 evacuees of Roma origin were estimated in Bologna, 520 of whom under assistance.

In Yugoslavia most Roma were no longer leading a nomadic life since a long time. They lived in houses, often concentrated in villages or neighborhoods, and worked in poor jobs, but could lead an almost decent living. They could even maintain some folklore of their own, though not really a specific cultural identity. I have been told that a significant number of them inscribed themselves in the last Census as "Yugoslavians".

With the collapse of former Yugoslavia, a few of them directly escaped from fighting. Many more found themselves in the impossibility to survive, given an upsurge in anti-Gypsyism for which their houses were put to fire, their jobs lost, and food was always more difficult to find even on the black market.

Upon arrival in Bologna they went to live near the river Reno, in slums, and for three or four years almost no one cared about them.

In the early 1990s Bologna was the theatre of murderous violence on the part of a band of deviated police, the so called "Banda della Uno Bianca" (from the kind of car they were using) (Corsellini, C., 2004). Among others (24 were killed, more than 100 injured), these people killed two Italian Sinti Gypsies, Rodolfo Bellinati e Patrizia Della Santina. After being captured and submitted to trial, the authors of the crimes repeatedly declared that they were shooting on Gypsies because they hated them and because they wanted the Gypsies to be blamed for all the violence they themselves had been committing.

Fear and terror easily spread among all Gypsies at the time.

The encounter between Roma Gypsies from former Yugoslavia and the institutions of the city, in 1994-1995, was thus not an easy one.

Also on the part of society at large there were problems. In some sectors of public opinion a debate became commonplace, if they were evacuees or Gypsies (as if they could not be the two), implying that the latter should not have enjoyed the benefits provided by the law for former Yugoslavians.

But after 1994-1995 there was also some engagement on the part of a number of local administrators and sectors of civil society (ranging from religious ones, Catholic, Jewish and others, to political ones to civic associations and simple individuals), so that Roma from former Yugoslavia could live in more or less regular camps or similar lodgings, often with water and electricity at least, and some even found a real house and a job. Children started being schooled, many started attending health and social services.

The paradoxical situation is that, since that time and up to now, these persons, and all their newborns, have no citizenship and no official recognition as stateless persons. Yugoslavia does not exist anymore, but to be granted any kind of new permit of stay in Italy (the effects of law 390/92 ceased in 1997) they keep being asked documents from their country of origin. On this ground, they could not enjoy any of the regularization campaigns for immigrants in Italy from 1996 to 2002, and they keep being lifelong "irregulars" (Morozzo della Rocca, P., 2008, 60-63).

5. Three generations in Bologna.

Many among those who arrived were very young children. And many other children were born soon after. As a matter of fact, more than 50% of the overall Gypsy population is younger than 14 years of age (Impagliazzo, M., 2008).

In the group of former Yugoslavian Roma who were or arrived in Bologna in the early 1990s, almost all children were schooled, a few attending school even after the first eight obliged years.

Those who were in their very early childhood upon arrival or were born soon after are now mostly between 16 and 20 years of age.

They normally speak Italian, some know Serbo-Croat, very few still know Romanes (the Gypsy language).

As Henri Eckert (2006) has shown for so many second generation immigrants in France, they want to become citizens of the country where they have grown up. But it is very difficult: for the above mentioned legal paradox they are caught in, for the renewed situation of harsh institutional and social anti-Gypsyism in Italy¹, for all the discriminations they still have to face in school, when looking for a job, when simply moving in the city.

Moreover, if it is true that their grandparents experienced remote persecution and the more recent war and also renewed difficulties upon arrival in Italy, it must be noted that their parents experienced both war trauma and a particular “déclassement” (Eckert, H., 2005, 6), passing from their poor stability in former Yugoslavia to slums, camps and often forced unemployment here.

The young Roma Gypsies often help their parents and grandparents with the language and, more at large, in relating to the city life.

“They do not know Romanes any longer – said Jivolin, an old man – are they still Gypsies?”.

His nephew, De., was nine years old when he already clearly stated “I am a Gypsy only at home. Out there, they hate us”. De. spent his first years in a camp outside Bologna, where he lived with his parents and grandparents. At three he already cared for his very ill grandmother. In spite of her illness, she kept the memories and the unity of the family. She told stories and made their difficult reality somehow acceptable. De. used to say he knew their history was filled with bad things, but it was nevertheless a beautiful history. When he was eight, they were given a house in a popular building, with many aged and immigrant families. It was at that time that De. started elaborating his idea of being Gypsy only at home. Even when playing with other children outside home, he carefully avoided all identification. Two years later his grandmother died. I remember her in the hospital. Other women had been shouting against her that they did not want to stay in a bed near a Gypsy. She had been so brave in facing persecutions, her illness and all the problems of the family, but this fact she could not stand: “my world is now disrupted” she told me, a few days before dying. A few months after her death, the unity of the family was lost. De.’s mother left, and went to live with an Italian man. The competent court ruled that De. was to live with her, and that he could meet his father only once per month, in so called “protected encounters”, mediated by social service operators. To monitor such encounters, the operators often wanted father and son to speak only Italian, and De. was in despair for this. “I am no longer a Gypsy now – he kept saying – but I want to speak with my father in my own language (Serbo-Croat), otherwise nothing is left of my real family”.

Another factor of disruption of Roma Gypsy identity of the younger ones occurred in 1999, along with the Kosovo crisis. Up to that time, Gypsies from Serbia and from Kosovo had been living peacefully together in the same camps, somehow helping each other, in any case cohabitating without major problems. Children were mostly already schooled, and went to school and came back together. After, most of them went together on the streets for *menghele* (begging). The girls went in small groups of three or four, they usually reached the main and most trafficked roads and stood near the lights, approaching cars when these had to stop. At the time of the Kosovo crisis, many asked them “Are you from Serbia or from Kosovo?”, and gave some coins, if any, only to those from Kosovo. The girls started discovering in this way that they were either Serbian or Kosovars, and started asking their parents, and having rows with each other. They stopped

¹ It is to be noted that Italy is since some time under observation on the part of the European Commission and European Parliament for its treatment of minorities, Roma and Sinti Gypsies in particular. On January 9, 2009, the European Commission was still soliciting the Italian Government to give information on this topic and to comply with European rules and requests.

playing together and in some cases did not even want to go to school together any longer. These were girls between 8 and 13 of age, undergoing really a major change, because never in the tradition of Yugoslavian Roma Gypsies had such regional differences been so relevant. On the contrary, it should be noted that Gypsies never liked to fight wars, and one reason for this was also that it was hideous for them to have to fight against their own people.

In Bologna, however, many Gypsy girls and boys learned also another main lesson in their encounters with the social environment. Traditionally, they married when 15 or 16, sometimes even earlier. But, as Go. discovered and explained: "We Gypsies marry too early, while you Italians marry too late. We have to find a new equilibrium". In effect, Go. married at 18, after having been schooled and having found a job in a factory. Soon after, he had his first son (now he is father of three). He was proud of maintaining his family and his father, and of being able to help also the grandparents, still in Sabač. "I belong to a new generation of Gypsies – he uses to say – we have not suffered the evils as the old ones and we can live like Italians. I like to honor our Gypsy festivals, here at the camp, and I will teach my children to do the same. But outside there, we must be like all others". I met Go. at the camp on the occasion of a remembrance ceremony for De.'s grandmother, one year after her death. Go. effectively knew all traditions and followed them and really intended to teach them to his children. Showing me proudly his first son, he said "he will be able to follow such traditions freely, knowing only the good, not the bad, of the story we come from". They were still living in a camp some 30 km from Bologna. All his children were born there. They were able to enter a real house only last year.

Pe.'s case is quite different. The older of four brothers and sisters, he was two when he arrived in Bologna with his grandparents. They stayed for years in a camp, and Pe. started attending school in the morning while helping at home, in all jobs, in the afternoon. He was a very serious child, used to listen to old stories. He was seven the first time he asked "why was I born a Gypsy?". Soon after his parents arrived from former Yugoslavia, and wanted the children to stay with them, not with the grandparents. Pe. did not want. He had been growing up with the older ones, and wanted to remain with them. The parents took the children with them and appealed to the court. The children were first put in an institute, then entrusted to grandparents. The grandparents were given a house and cared for by the social services. Pe. finished obligatory school and started to work. After a short time he found a good job as mechanic, and was very proud of earning enough money to help the grandparents and the younger brother and sisters. But an abrupt change had already occurred in his life. When he had been taken by his parents, before entering the institute, and he was eager to go back to the grandparents, he had sought the help of Italian Carabinieri (military Police) to fulfill his aim. He went to them and explained that his parents were ill treating him, and above all his younger sister, and that he wanted to be sent back to the grandparents. The Carabinieri told him they would have helped, but they asked him in exchange to help them tracing some adolescents his age who were trafficking drugs. Pe. was terribly frightened, but he did what he had been asked. For some months after that he was dreaming to become a Carabinieri himself. By the time he was entrusted back to the grandparents, he discovered that this was impossible, because he was not an Italian citizen and moreover –so someone told him – he was a Gypsy. At the same time he started experiencing frequent controls each time he went downtown, and realized the hardship of being a young Gypsy foreign man. He also had to change his job, and in the new one he was not regularly paid. When he went to the owner to ask for his payment he was told "what can you do if I do not pay you, you are just a Gypsy". He also had a girlfriend – he was 17 by that time, she was 15 – and she remained pregnant. They both deeply wanted to have this child, but the girl's parents, along with social services, preferred abortion. This too was a major blow for Pe. He felt doomed, his condition as a Gypsy had revealed inescapable, and he started saying that perhaps the older ones were not living it so bad because they had not studied and did not fully understand what it really was. He has been in prison for a minor theft. But at 20 he already thinks that his life is over, that maybe only his children, when he can still have, will be able to know a somehow better life.

The same kind of personal "déclassement" accompanied by the perception of a condition of great vulnerability (Eckert, H., 2005, 2006) occurred to Mi. Something older than the others, he was ten when arriving here. But he was eager to go to school and even attended two years after the obligatory ones. He

spoke very good Romanes and was very interested in the history of Roma Gypsies. In a sense, he was proud of being one, and he was convinced that most problems were coming from misunderstandings with the surrounding environment. He met some valid interlocutors operating in a social cooperative, and became a cultural mediator. He was used to go around in primary schools of the Region, to control that Gypsy children received vaccinations, to speak with them and their families about schooling and health rules, to help them cope with being Gypsies. He also used to attend scientific and other meetings, at the University and elsewhere. And he normally spoke, whenever this was possible, in very good Italian, explaining his own point of view and the point of view of his people. Moreover, he started being called upon by Courts, to make official translations for the judges and sometimes to help other Gypsies understand their own juridical situation. Unfortunately, the cooperative closed, and Mi. found himself without any job. For a while he thought that all the contacts he had had would be of some help, but this was not the case. In a short time, having lost the job, he lost his permit of stay, and became an “irregular”. An irregular Gypsy as many. He started going around in nearby small cities, begging, but he was repeatedly expelled. His conclusion, last time I spoke with him, was that “for us Gypsies there is no hope here. Probably not even for our children. Maybe for the children of the children...”.

6. Growing up Gypsies: multiple transitions.

In all these and other stories of young Roma Gypsies arriving from former Yugoslavia to Bologna, the remote past is present but remains unspoken and perhaps unspeakable, while the recent one (the war and fleeing away from Serbia) stirs around without precise contours.

Transitions from early childhood to being schooled and from school to job seem to have changed a lot from the previous generation’s ones, but being schooled and even finding a job does not necessarily imply some form of integration within the surrounding society. The major – and more delicate – change has probably occurred in the domain of getting married and having children: they do not marry so early as their parents, and deeply want to be responsible for their families. Unfortunately, this too proves quite difficult: it often happens that in the younger generation, as in the previous one, the children come to be dealt with by courts and social services.

It is however astonishing to observe to which extent, in the variety of personal histories and experiences, on one side they become soon convinced that they are doomed to be and remain Gypsies, almost always in the sense of the worse implications of such a condition; while on the other side they project their hope on the children to come, or on the children of the children. It has to be noted that they are still younger or just a little older than 20, at an age when normally many young people are just finishing their studies and starting to orientate themselves in the world. The hope they project on the children still seems to include both dimensions, being Gypsies and being integrated, being full title citizens of this country and of Europe (Prodi, R., 2004).

Such a rich repository of trust, in spite of all circumstances, is seldom understood properly. As far as I know no research has yet been done about how much young Gypsies have in fact been and are complying with our requisites for their integration (schooling, job training, etc.). And little is known about the huge amount of transitions they have been and are carrying on, including the sense of coping with premature frustration by projecting hope on future generations rather than by violence.

At many levels, it seems on the contrary that we keep criminalizing them without often knowing their history, their personal stories and efforts, up to when we “succeed” in collaborating to their becoming or becoming again deviants.

But there is one problem: their history is in reality our own.

It is the persistent and resurgent history of our own anti-Gypsyism, which reached its peak some decades ago, rendering a number of us murderous criminals, and many more accomplices of the carnage or simply indifferent bystanders.

The fact that no effective judgment was passed on this, that historical research still awaits to be further carried on, that Gypsy memory is so difficult for external and internal reasons, cannot any longer hide such a reality.

We better keep it in mind when it comes to operating for the prevention and punishment of present day crimes. Hate crimes are no less crimes than others (Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008).

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