

## ROMANIES, OUR NEIGHBORS

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**Abstract.** *The Romanies of Niš share the common fate of the Serbian Romanies. Niš is - and this is one of its peculiarities - "a Gypsy town" since it has about 30 thousand "dark boys." They have been living for centuries on the banks of the river Nišava, namely in the distant villages, in the suburban settlements, at the city fringes, in their separate city quarters or deeply hidden in the city center; they are ethnically and culturally different, Orthodox or Muslim by confession, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, known and anonymous, excellent musicians or common old paper collectors, employed in industries or hired workers, workers at the conveyor belt or small-scale sellers, quiet citizens or noisy city hoodlums. The people of Niš meet them at every step; they have little or no immediate contacts. Still, the citizen of Niš does not know them; he is ignorant of where they are from and when they settled here, where and how they live, how and what god they are praying to, where they hurry and what they do, why they are like "that" and not like "this"... From ignorance to prejudice - there is only one step. Many citizens of Niš have not made such a step, but, on the other hand, many of them have accepted the stereotypes about the Romanies.*

**Key Words:** *Romanies, Ghettoization of the Romanies, Schooling of the Romanies, Skinheads, Ethnic-religious Distance Towards the Romanies*

### INTRODUCTORY COMMENTARY<sup>1</sup>

The story about the Romanies, these sturdy people that spread across the *Oicumene* has not ended yet and the question is whether it will soon be over.<sup>2</sup> Its echoes - are they only echoes? - can be heard in our multiethnic and multireligious society. It seems that some of its negative echoes became even stronger last year with an increasing tendency to bring the tragedy to its culmination. Just have a look at the Kosovo Romanies. The Albanians were the first to get hurt, then the Serbs, but by far the greatest victims were and still are the Romanies. Instead of "flying to the skies", they "fly to the sea" - let's paraphrase a newspaper article by Olivija Rusovac - and by saving their lives from one

thing they lose them by drawing in the turbulent waves. And no one is held responsible for it! The Serbian public does not get excited about it, let alone the politicians. Some effort is made by humanitarian organizations and not-so-strong non-government ones. And that's all.

The latter ones - knowing they cannot be of great practical help to the Romanies since without sincere efforts on the part of the state and of the global society it does not seem realistic to expect any improvement of the Romanies' position - can at least give some help in providing for their voice to be heard, to describe in an honest and truthful way their situation from the inside and from the vantage point of their surroundings just as they can point to the direction of organizing their lives in a dignified way as befits all people. Still, the non-government organizations cannot perform this function without the help of all sorts of scientific knowledge. This knowledge is lacking in general and especially in our country since, while lagging behind in all possible things, we are also lagging in getting to know the Romanies, those good neighbors of ours that have not been living with us since yesterday or this morning or by pure chance but who have been here for quite a long time in their autochthonous way.

Still, it happened that finally in our country the sociologists promoted the concept of *interculturalism*, that is, they did a lot to launch this "fashionable" world movement in our country. Though interculturalism has already been liable to strict critical scrutiny while its first advocates have become aware of its limited effects especially in the post-communist societies, it still is a kind of the newly-found wisdom without an alternative in the multiethnic and multireligious communities. That is why to the Romanies - for their being in a "transnational" situation" living always among other nations and cultures - "*The Romanies in an Intercultural Environment*" - the theoretical and practical approach is completely suitable.

It is also the best available means to use in order to reply to the poet's desperate cry "Where is the Romanies' truth?" thus helping the nation with "the bitter taste of blood in its mouth" to get rid of its ghetto consciousness, discrimination and segregation while at the same time suppressing xenophobia and racism of its environment.

Interculturalism, as a theoretical and practical model, is something different from *multiculturalism*; more precisely, its application is to provide for a better community in which the minority ethnic groups will be neither fully integrated nor absolutely assimilated. They will preserve any peculiarity of their own and in an equal interaction they will exchange within their own community and with the dominant culture whatever cultural and other goods they possess. As J. Kardos has put in a nutshell: "A *multicultural society* was supposed to have the characteristics of the society in which various ethnic groups live together without any interaction. The minority groups tend to tolerate one another in a passive way but they are not accepted by the majority group. An *intercultural society* should be defined as a society in which different groups live together, exchange their life experiences and respect the mutually different styles of life and values."

Regarding the Romanies, we are indeed a multicultural society not far from an intercultural community. This modest questioning and its results are supposed to confirm it.

## AN ATTEMPT TO INTERPRET THE DATA

## I ROMANIES, OUR NEIGHBORS

The Romanies of Niš share the common fate of the Serbian Romanies. Niš is - and this is one of its peculiarities - "a Gypsy town" having about 30 thousand "dark boys" living in it. They have been living for centuries on the banks of the river Nišava, namely in the distant villages, in the suburban settlements, at the city fringes, in their separate city quarters or deeply hidden in the city center; they are ethnically and culturally different, Orthodox or Muslim by confession, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, known and anonymous, excellent musicians or common old paper collectors, employed in industries or hired workers, workers at the conveyor belt or small-scale sellers, quiet citizens or noisy city hoodlums. The people of Niš meet them at every step, but they have little or no immediate contacts. Still, the citizen of Niš does not know them; he is ignorant of where they are from and when they settled here, where and how they live, how and what god they are praying to, where they hurry and what they do, why they are like "that" and not "this"... From ignorance to prejudice - there is only one step. Many citizens of Niš have not made such a step, but, on the other hand, many of them have accepted the stereotypes about the Romanies.

Table 1. Romanies and mahalas

*"Many people claim that it is better for the Romanies to live in their mahalas such as the Beogradmala, the Stočni trg, the Nišavsko korito, etc., than to mix with others. What do you think about it?"*

MODALITY	N	%
Yes, I completely agree	61	30,7
Yes, I partially agree	33	16,6
I cannot make up my mind about it	31	15,6
No, I do not agree with it partially	13	6,5
No, I do not agree with it at all	57	28,6
I do not know	4	2,0
TOTAL	199	100,00

Answers = 199, No answer = 1

*It is obvious that the Romanies are not tolerated as our fellow citizens, the inhabitants of Niš, but as the citizens living close to us in their own mahalas and shacks - since over 40% or even 50% of the people of Niš (30,7% + 16,6%) agree either completely or partially that they should remain living at those places where they are anyway most often: **in the ghetto**. This is nothing more than an expression of **territorial segregation**.*

***Residential Status and Attitudes.** Though the inhabitants of the most urban part of the town are the leaders in an extreme attitude towards the Romanies' ghettoization (60,7%) comparing to the people living in the suburban settlements (23,0%) and villages (16,4%) this is not their most widely spread feeling, namely, there is slight dominance of the attitude implying complete disagreement with territorial segregation (31,4%) comparing to complete acceptance (26,4%). On the contrary, regarding those from the suburbia, the complete agreement is double (48,3%) comparing to the refusal of the separate residential status of the Romanies (24,1%). Somewhat less sharp is the difference among the people living in the villages (33,3%; 20,0%).*

Truly, the people of Niš are not to blame for everything; the Romanies themselves bear part of the guilt. In the economic sense the Romanies really live in poverty and most of them are on the threshold of existential crisis. Even when they are materially better off, they easily "invalidate" it by living in non-hygienic settlements, that is, by their self-chosen residential ghettoization. For example, in Niš as well as in many other towns, the Romanies *en masse* buy comfortable apartments at reduced prices, namely the apartments given to them by companies or the municipality, but they still go back to live in the shacks in the ghettoized living ambiance. It has been empirically confirmed that they have not been benevolently accepted by their neighbors in the apartment buildings; the latter ones' reaction to the Romanies' moving in was to exchange their flats and move out. In this way even the Romanies themselves, unused to urban behavior, contribute to some drastic actions taken by their neighbors, namely, they sometimes ruin the floors, keep animals in the bathroom, accumulate garbage, etc.

*The hope that the intercultural practice can take roots is provided by those people of Niš (15,6% + 6,5% + 28,6%) who are still in two minds about the mixed residence with the Romanies; they are either irresolute or completely agree with it.*

## II WHITE AND DARK BOYS

In the critical and crime-permeated background of our society there are again the ghosts of the skinheads rising from the dead. In our country they have always been a form of the youth subculture. Those "white street soldiers" are against the Romanies; they openly enter into conflicts with them. This is open racism since they demonstrate animosity towards "the other" and "the different" regarding color, that is, on the anthropological and racial basis. What are the Romanies to do? Are they to form "dark street soldiers"? It does not mean that they have no right to protect themselves from skinheads, on the contrary. But, it is still up to the state and the government authorities to protect not only the Romanies but all of us from the hoodlums. At least, that is what happens in better-ordered societies, in the legal state and the civil society. Unfortunately, we are a pre-civil community and thus, we have no legal state and are still far from the civil society.

**Table 2. Skinheads and the Romanies**

*"Skinheads - in our country a small youth subculture - are rising from the dead like vampires; they are truly against and they are actively fighting against the Romanies (racism). How do you interpret the fact that among the Serbs there are "white street soldiers" that manifest animosity towards the 'other' and the 'different' by color, that is, on the anthropological, racial grounds? What are the Romanies to do? Should they themselves form "dark street soldiers"? What is your attitude towards the behavior of the skinheads who can be found in Niš as well?"*

MODALITY	N	%
Skinheads are right, I support their behavior	9	4,5
The state (government authorities) should protect the Romanies and all of us from those hoodlums	134	67,0
Romanies have the right to defend themselves from skinheads	17	8,5
I have never heard of this youth subgroup and their conflicts with Romanies	40	20,0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Number of answers in Table = 200, No answer = 0

*I am glad that the people of Niš do not support the "progrom" behavior of the skinheads towards the Romanies (4,5%) and that only a small number of them (8,5%) want the Romanies to "deal with it in their own way" by entering into conflicts with the white street soldiers. The majority of the examined (67,0%) take the only acceptable attitude, namely, that the state is responsible, through its respective bodies, to protect both them and us regardless of what is at issue, either violation of public order and peace or robbery and any sort of crime or murders or nationalist and racist attacks. As for skinheads, they should not be stigmatized a priori since they are also "the boys from our neighborhood" though they are ready, in some extreme cases, to maltreat or even kill "dark boys" - Romanies.*

*Age. The youth of Niš (2029), it is quite understandable, are somewhat different from the rest of the population regarding skinheads. They are the only ones who are completely familiar with the skinheads and, for example, even 38,1% of them do not belong to the age group of 50 to 59 years. Though in small nominal values, the young ones in high percentage comparing to the other age categories in which this is statistically negligible think that both the "baldheaded" (44,4%) and the "dark boys" (41,2%) are right. Surely, in the youngest generation, like in the others, there is the most widely spread attitude (72,5%) that the state (government authorities) should deal with the incidents between the skinheads and the Romanies. This attitude is more present only among the oldest people of Niš (60 years of age and more) (75,0%).*

*It is somewhat surprising that the people of Niš in 20,0 % of the cases have never heard of skinheads who are also present in our town and whose attitudes have been discussed in two separate - but the first and the only ones so far in the country - studies written by two people of Niš (Dragoqub B. Đorđević and Radomir Đorđević). That is why it is not such a bad idea to repeat some of the basic issues of their program, namely:*

- 1) They are against all sorts of crime pleading for a much more strict state's intervention in these matters,
- 2) They are against drugs - from the "heavy" to the "easy" ones, from cocaine to marijuana (the skinheads do not take drugs and are directly in conflict with other youth subcultures in which drug-taking is a style. They are openly against hippies, heavy metals, "diesels"(former "cosmetics"). Though many of them identify themselves as punkers the street soldiers in fact cannot stand hem; they have preserved their independence due to strict ideology that pleads for, unlike the anarchy ideology of the punk movement, a consistent system of values, morality and state establishment.)
- 3) They are against sexual "deviations"; they persecute travestites, homosexuals, lesbians and prostitutes (and their "milder" variant, call girls),
- 4) They are against Satanist, destructive cults and all kinds of religious sects; (It is interesting to note that they are familiar with the fact that among the so-called sects there are dominant small Protestant communities, while in the West the skinheads are mainly of Protestant origin, especially in the USA, Canada, Britain, Germany and Scandinavian countries. This illogical fact - that they are opposing Protestant religious groups - they explain by claiming that the sects tend to destroy Serbian Orthodoxy. They equally attack the Roman Catholic Church since it "batters up the Jews").

- 5) They are against free masonry as a half-secret organization and as an informal center of power at the global and the local, that is, at the macro and the micro levels.
- 6) They are against Romanies (racism), Albanians and Muslims (chauvinism); (They combine racism and chauvinism - though Serbian skins reject it and instead they choose a milder word, namely, "nationalism" thus expressing animosity towards the "other" and the "different" by color, that is, on the anthropological, racial basis as well as towards the "other" and the "different" regarding ethnic and religious origin. It is obvious that their motto is only a mask stating that: "Serbian skinheads do not hate anyone; they just love Serbianism"), and,
- 7) They plead for a Serbian national state of centralized type whose background is formed by the monarchy and the Orthodox Church and in which only a limited democracy would be allowed ("democracy with measure").

Let us remember that in a short period of the existence of the FR of Yugoslavia there have been occasional fights between the **white and the dark** boys. The public has never been too much excited about them; many people have not been even aware of them; rare exceptions have been those who have taken them seriously and made a record of them. Since - for God's sake - as the Serbian citizens have commented - thousands of the young people died in the wars, half a million of refugees still suffer, there are everyday fights among the street gangs and there are endless killings of the crime elite (even of such people as the Deputy Minister of Serbian Police Force or the leader of the ruling party or the Minister of Army). Considering all this, some fighting between Serbs and Gypsies is just "a drop in the sea of violence"?!

Still, as the Devil never rests, the sleeping civil consciousness, though quite nursed by nationalism and chauvinism (hence such a great success of the parties with nationalist and chauvinist programs), was considerably disturbed by a horrible crime, namely, the domestic street soldiers, our white boys from the neighborhood, killed *D. Jovanović*, our dark boy from the neighborhood. *For the first time a human life was taken for racist reasons*. This is not possible among us, there must be someone else who is to blame for it, let's say, the skinheads are guilty, let's put all the blame on them - well, isn't it that the Serbs have been living for centuries "in love with Romanies", tolerating them, letting them live as they want to! Aren't Romanies absolutely equal with us - is there another country in which they are received so well?

Well, it is not always like that: the Serbs have a partially deformed picture as well as a false idea about the Romanies' position. Though the social distance towards them is being reduced, though there are some positive stereotypes created (cunning, sturdy, careless and passionate Romanies), though some benevolent attempts have been made to change most radically their status unworthy of man, *the Romanies are still discriminated in the economic, the political and the cultural spheres, they are subdued to ghettoization and segregation, they are exposed to xenophobia and racism*. If it is so - and I am sure it is - then for the treatment of the Romanies in the Yugoslav communities all the *responsibility is on the world of the older ones and not on the young or the skinheads* who are only a tiny point on the top of the iceberg and who have only *brought the wide-spread nationalism and chauvinism to extreme thus turning them into racism*.

Finally, the white boys from our neighborhood should be punished for a concrete crime instead of stigmatizing the whole skinheads' subculture and thus giving rise to a phenomenon

of dark street soldiers. It is necessary to put some sincere efforts into establishing the civil society, into activating at the theoretical and the practical levels the interculturalist ideas so as to make the Yugoslavs finally realize that they are living in a multiethnic (and a multiracial) and a multireligious society. To live near and with the **racially, ethnically and religiously "different" is an advantage as well as wealth - it is not, by any means, the misfortune that should be fought against even by destruction of human lives.**

### III ROMANIES AND AUTOCHTHOUSNESS

Niš is also a "Gypsy" town since there are about thirty thousand Romanies living in it. There are some citizens who object to the Romanies' "invasion of their territory" such as flea and green markets by smuggling and trading, getting rich and "taking our jobs" while they are sinking deeper into poverty. Many people of Niš advocate for the Romanies' living in their own mahalas without mixing with others; more extreme among them agree with the proposals that the Romanies should be moved out somewhere else to some other town or country. What about the citizens of Niš? If they are liable to prejudice, intoxicated with nationalism, xenophobia and racism, they should uproot or at least alleviate their attitude towards Romanies. For the beginning, they should take some time to think and conclude: "Look what we have come to! For so many years we are living in Niš, we are even proud of it, and yet we speak so badly about Romanies - our neighbors."

**Table 3. Romanies' moving out**

*"Niš is also a "Gypsy" town since there are about thirty thousand Romanies living in it. There are some citizens who object to the Romanies' "invasion of their territory" such as flea and green markets by smuggling and trading, getting rich and "taking our jobs" while they are sinking deeper into poverty. Do you agree with the proposals that they should be moved out somewhere else, to some other town or country?"*

MODALITY	N	%
Yes, I agree completely	17	8,5
Yes, I partially agree	22	11,0
I am in two minds about it	25	12,5
No, I partially disagree	13	6,5
No, I do not agree at all	115	57,5
I do not know	8	4,0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Number of answers in Table = 200, No answer = 0

*Every humanist finds it pleasing to hear that almost two-thirds of his fellow citizens (6,5% + 57,5%) partially or completely reject the xenophobic possibility of moving out his Romanies' neighbors to some other town or country. At the same time, it is painful to find out that his fellow citizens are to a certain percentage that cannot be ignored and that amounts to one-fifth of the population (8,5% + 11,0%) willing to accept this inhumane suggestion probably because they think that the "others" and the "different", due to their skin color and ethnic origin, are to blame for all the difficulties in which they actually find themselves. Some efforts should be made in order to make one-tenth (12,5%) of indecisive people of Niš accept the interculturalist standing and practice.*

*Education. The disagreement, complete/partial with the old and yet still even more present racist idea that the Romanies should be moved out to some other town or country is very much spread among the people of Niš it even exceeds half of the population while with the people with academic education it amounts to 80%. The illiterate ones, so little present in our sample, are interesting because in 50% of the cases they support the idea but also because they, together with those with high and university education, represent the only ones who do not accept the extreme view given in the first modality. The majority of the indecisive ones are by no means to be found among the people with secondary education (58,3%).*

For, entirely opposite to the average citizen's opinion, in the economic sense, the Romanies really live in poverty and the majority of them are on the verge of existential collapse. They are rarely having full-time jobs; even if they are, they are allotted highly demanding physical jobs and "dirty" garbage-collecting which is again another form of discrimination. The Romanies are, as members of the poorest social layers, the most numerous among the beggars. The common people have prejudices against the Romanies; they get a bad impression about them since they often meet them as beggars and middlemen: "The Romanies are lazy and they do not want to earn their piece of bread by hard work and sweat; instead they are begging for it." It seems that this cannot be disputed even by the assumption that no one on his own will deliberately chooses begging as a way of living. It does not happen very often that someone refuses a well-paid job that provides for him some sort of safe existence and instead chooses to support himself and his family by humiliating begging. This is most surely confirmed by their low socio-professional structure since the majority of them are uneducated and without any concrete job. Beside the "old poor" who are outside the world of labor there will emerge the "new ones", namely those people who are displaced from the production process due to new technologies and, even worse, with no chance to return to it. The oncoming generations of the Romanies and the new poor will not be prepared for a cruel competition game at the labor market of the open society.

That is why the Romanies are involved in the gray economy and in smuggling thus developing various strategies of survival. People appreciate their ability to cope up with things, there is even a positive stereotype about it (Romanies are *cunning, resistant, not much troubled and cheerful* in the positive sense but still they are *irresponsible, tend to cheat, quarrelsome and dirty* in the negative sense). The intercultural approach should be used to exploit this undoubtedly positive energy and, as suggested by a connoisseur of the problem, "it should be found out whether the new forms of economic activity imply some potentials that can be supported by the measures included in an active employment policy as one of the possible strategies for positive discrimination in an unfavorable market situation, that is, for direct support to the Romanies at the labor market that would help them overcome poverty and their marginal social position." (G. Zajić). The economic emancipation of the Romanies, after all, is coming to the fact that, beside employment by current "normal" channels, some concrete alternative programs for self-education in the traditional crafts and services as well as of cooperative employment and employment in domestic manufacture should be elaborated.



## IV ROMANIES AND EDUCATION

Though well-disguised and hidden, it is beyond any doubt that the most painful aspects of ghettoization and discrimination as well as of xenophobia and racism are to be found in the cultural sphere. The Romanies are most often without any school education, that is, without any opportunity for **lingual education** from pre-school age to University schooling. As an example, we may pick up the primary school "Vuk Karadžić" located in the Romanies' mahala known as Beogradmala at the very fringe of the inner city of Niš which is exclusively attended by Romanies' children in Serbian while there are not any Serbs at all in it. It does not mean that there are no Serbs in the city quarter - quite the opposite, there are quite a few of them - but the parents send them to considerably farther "purely Serbian" schools which is an outstanding example of discrimination and xenophobic practice.

**Table 4. Learning the mother tongue**

*"In some primary schools in Niš ('Vuk Karadžić', 'Radoje Domanović') there are more Romany than Serbian children. Do you think it is justified that the Romanies' children, beside the Serbian, also learn their mother tongue?"*

MODALITY	N	%
Yes, surely	82	41,0
I am in two minds about it	49	24,5
No, by any chance	56	28,0
I do not know	13	6,5
TOTAL	200	100,00

Number of answers in Table = 200, No answer = 0

*It is encouraging that the number of the people of Niš (41,0%) think that the Romany children should learn their mother tongue at least in the primary school, that almost one-fourth of them (24,5%) are in two minds about it, while 28% are not supporting such an option. To those who are indecisive as well as those who are strongly opposing the idea should be patiently explained that the absence of the mother tongue in the primary school is one of the basic obstacles to the overall emancipation of Romanies. It is the civilization standard to provide for literacy of the minority - it is the right of the minority to use the given opportunity or to reject it.*

*Profession. The attitude stating that "Yes, surely, Romanies should learn their mother tongue in the primary school" is prevailing among the following professions: experts (40,0%), clerks (45,0%), craftsmen (62,5%), private entrepreneurs (37,5%), farmers (46,7%), retired (77,8%) and unemployed (57,1%). It is interesting and, at the same time, "unexplainable" that the attitude that the mother tongue education must not be allowed is dominant only among workers (42,9%) while indecisiveness is evident among housewives (42,9%) and students (50,0%).*

It is important to stress that the absence of the minority language in the primary eight-year education speaks about the crisis of the institutional education system. This undignified situation is something that every modern European state should be ashamed of; at the same time, it seems that it could be gradually and painlessly changed by conceiving the *program of intercultural education* that would comprise the following

areas as well: education and upbringing of the culturally-different, bicultural and bilingual education and upbringing, education and upbringing concerning cultural differences or cultural understanding, education and upbringing for cultural pluralism, and education and upbringing for international understanding and cooperation.

However, the intercultural way is not at all simple and easy since it implies, as a global orientation towards equal estimate of all cultural peculiarities present in a given community, among other things, radical changes in the institutional schooling. This, first and above all, means a critical questioning of the existing educational-pedagogical process as well as a possible planning of the future institutional system based on the new Europe-oriented tendencies. Thus it turns out that the study as well as the problem-solving of a minority group - in this case the autochthonous Romanies' community - is coupled not only with the change of the Romanies' position within a wider social context but also with respective changes of the overall educational system.

The analysis of the relationship between the mother and the minority cultures as well as among the minority cultures emphasize insufficient or almost totally absent mutual knowledge of linguistic peculiarities, religion, customs and ways of life, inter-gender relationship, everyday living and spare time occupations and other cultural aspects. That is why the Romanies should be provided with better conditions and institutional facilities for education, learning and expressing their own cultural identity and interaction with the mother and other cultural groups. The emphasis is usually on education of the Romanies themselves as well as on improvement and development of the educational system adopted to their needs (questioning of the national identity, articulation of their own history and cultural achievements, study of the Romany language and dialects on the territory of the FR of Yugoslavia). This makes it indispensable to prepare teaching syllabi for the study of the *Romany language, the language of the mother culture and the language of a minority group* that appears as the majority one in the immediate surroundings (Albanians at Kosovo or Hungarians in Vojvodina) just as it is necessary to educate respective teaching staff.

## V CULTURE OF DEATH

It may sometimes seem that the question about the attitudes taken towards the burial of Romanies is trivial or non-existent or even academicians' "hair-splitting" but, no matter how narrow it is, it is important if we proceed with out intention to have an overall view of the Romanies' fate.

**Death**, beside the act of birth, is an ontological necessity, ultimate reality and a crucial event in human lives. It is an individual "doom" and subjectively colored, it represents the closing-up of the biological circle as well as the act of diving into "the blue skies." However, at the same time, it is a specific social act which represents the culmination of all group and social phenomena taken as a whole, the *true picture* of the given community and culture that reveals to us *a set*, for instance, *of economic and class, layer and status, custom and religious, ethnic and racial relationships*.

All that is related to death, namely the pre-death, death and post-death customs, makes up a specific *culture of death*. It includes, of course, the attitude towards the **cemetery**, in general, and, more precisely, towards the burial place ("eternal house", grave, burial

ground, stone, monument etc.). Then, how does the Romanies' culture of death fit into Serbian Orthodox culture? Does the latter one, as much wider, attract, absorb or rejects and excludes the Romanies' one? These two issues represent the essence of our study. In other words, do the attitudes of the people of Niš regarding the Romanies' burials testify something about the attitude of the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodoxy (Serbian Orthodox Church) towards the Romanies? This can reveal to us the nature of the majority population attitude towards the Romanies as a threatened ethnic group. Are the processes directed towards *integration* as a desired outcome or *assimilation* as an old-fashioned purpose or *segregation* which should be discarded at once.

**Table 5. Romanies' "eternal houses"**

*"In your place (village or town) previously there were no Romanies and there is no special Romanies' cemetery. Will you have anything against the diseased Romany being buried at your local cemetery?"*

MODALITY	N	%
No, he should be buried at local cemetery	85	42,7
Maybe a part of the local cemetery should be reserved for Romanies	62	31,2
There should be the so-called "Gypsy cemetery" completely separate from the local one	45	22,6
I would be against it; Romanies should be buried outside our community	7	3,5
TOTAL	199	100,00

Number of answers in Table = 199, No answer = 1

*Most people of Niš have a positive attitude towards Romanies' burial - either mixed or at separate places (42,7% + 31,2%, respectively) - at the local cemetery, while 22,6% of them plead for a separate "Gypsy" cemetery whereas a negligible 3,5% of them have a racist attitude; the last ones would rather expel the Romanies' eternal houses from their community. They represent an extreme case and demonstrate the lack of any **culture of death**.*

*Residential status. It is usually believed that the place of residence is a strong discriminatory factor having a decisive role in choosing the type of Romanies' burial. Far from it! One half (49,6%) of the "pure" citizens have nothing against the fact that the Romanies are buried at the local cemetery, while among the suburbia citizens there is slight (33,3%) unlike among those living in the villages where it is strong (50,0%) predominance of the desire to establish a separate part for them at the local cemetery. It is important to stress that in the first three residential aspects there is high distribution of acceptable modalities (of the first, the second and the third). The people from the inner city of Niš as well as those from the suburbia in a negligible percentage express a racist attitude insisting upon Romanies' burial outside their place of residence; it is absolutely absent among the village people.*

Let us have a look at Romanies' burials in the region of Niš (the inner city is left out since there is a separate cemetery there; besides, the data for all the village communities in the municipality of Niš are also included). By comparison it is concluded that the attitudes of the people of Niš are based upon the already existing practice of Romanies' burial. In 66,12% of cases they are buried at the cemetery physically connected to the

Serbian one or absolutely mixed. There are also separate Gypsy cemeteries (32,25%), but there is a considerably smaller percentage of active ones while some of them are slowly dying out. An especially striking percentage (1,61%) comprises burials outside the place of residence.

*Dispersion of the Types of Cemeteries*

Types	N	%
<b>A</b> Gypsy cemetery physically separated from the Serbian one	20	32,25
<b>B</b> Gypsy cemetery physically connected to the Serbian one	12	19,35
<b>V</b> Serbian cemetery with mixed burial of Serbs and Romanies	29	46,77
<b>G</b> Gypsy cemetery outside the place of residence	1	1,61
Total	62	100,00

The Romanies have been buried in recent past or for centuries at separate place, distant from their place of residence for at least three reasons, namely, because of *a) strict segregation and stigmatization of the majority environment, b) inner characteristics of their own culture and the culture of death, and, c) turbulent socio-historical events*. If we leave aside the third reason - since it predetermined the movements and fate of the Romanies at the time of their coming to the region and since it exerted its influence regardless of the Romanies' differentiation according to religious and confessional divisions - it is evident that in the last decades the first two underwent some changes, that is, they are not so acute in the cultural space of the Serbian Orthodoxy. Among the Serbs, there is a reduced social distance regarding the Romanies; their stigmatization, at least openly and publicly, has come up to individual and extreme behavior. The Orthodox Romanies' attitude to death has changed for the better regarding the burial act, the place of burial and the cemetery itself. This was considerably supervised by the "sweet" Serbian Orthodoxy always and everywhere expressing tolerance. *That is why it is possible* at least at the narrowed-down area of the villages of Niš *to greet and register positive - interculturalist and integrative - displacements regarding the burials of Romanies and Serbs while at the same time pushing segregation deep into the past*. How else are we to interpret the fact showing us that the Romanies are in 66,12% (B = 19,35% + V = 46,77%) of cases buried together with Serbs or that their cemeteries are actually linked and on the way to do away with the borders for good? Moreover, how are we to interpret the fact that out of the physically separate cemeteries that are considerably present in the total (A = 20 = 32,25%) ten are extinguished, some are about to become extinguished while others were not cemeteries at all but only isolated graves? Can we imagine some moment in the future when the separate cemeteries of Orthodox Romanies will be the past?

First of all, any serious consideration follows the logic stating that - regarding the aspect of integration and interculturalism - apart from burials outside the residence (G), the other types of cemeteries (A, B, V) are entirely legitimate and desirable. Since it is justified on the civilization, cultural, confessional and infrastructural grounds, it will not be wrong to *advocate for mixed burials* unless such integration does not end in complete assimilation. In a word, isn't it natural for these two confessionally identical ethnicities to be buried at one single place while avoiding, at the same time, disappearance of the weak among the stronger, of the less numerous among the more numerous; on the other hand,

isn't' it unnatural for the members of the same religion to separate their ultimate residential places just because of their different skin color that made them tend towards different things in their lifetime, namely, the minority ones towards self-ghettoization and the majority towards segregation.

Then, following the same principle that warns us that it is a matter of *free will* of every ethnic group, its segment or individual to decide how and where "it is going to plant a marble tree above the head." The Romanies in general, the Orthodox ones as well as others, can make a choice among the three friendly variants - that should be provided for - but this implies free choice without any compulsion. In the villages of Niš this happens in four forms. Namely, the Orthodox Romanies a) demand and get a separate and physically isolated burial ground, b) insist on some separate place that is physically a part of the Serbian cemetery, c) are buried together with others, and, d) physically "drop out" from the so-called Gypsy cemeteries and are buried at ethnically pure Serbian ones.

Finally, since it is desirable that the function of separate village Gypsy cemeteries - established mostly by compulsion - is dying out, then it should be stressed that it will *indispensably disappear*. There are three reasons for it, namely a) no more Romanies live in given settlements, b) there are only two or three Romanies or just one family, and c) there is only one or two graves at the burial ground.

At the end of this concluding part of the research and the documentary material collected for other purposes as well, and regardless of some extreme cases presented here, we claim that the Romanies' culture of death - viewed here through Romany-Serb Orthodox village cemeteries - fits into the Serbian Orthodox culture, that is, that the latter one, since much wider, attracts and accepts the former one. In other words, the attitudes of the people of Niš as well as the village Orthodox cemeteries testify about a *positive* attitude taken by Serbian people and Serbian Orthodoxy (Serbian Orthodox Church) towards Romanies, that the ongoing processes tend towards *integration* and that there are chances for promotion and realization of the *intercultural* ideas and practice.

#### VI WHAT GOD DO THE ROMANIES WORSHIP AND CAN IT BE AN OBSTACLE TO MARRIAGE?

It seems that almost all the post-socialist societies are multiethnic and *multireligious*. There can be neither social stability nor progress without harmonizing religious relationships in such complex communities. *There is no overall improvement of the Romanies' position without acquiring equality even in the religious-church aspect.*

The Romanies have been and still are subdued to ghettoization, discrimination and segregation not to mention xenophobia and racism in all the social subsystems, namely, in economics, politics, culture and education. But many romologists (sociologists) while seeking a solution for the "Romanies' fate" most often in economics or often in the world of politics, tend to disregard that the most painful aspects of ghettoization and discrimination, of xenophobia and racism, though well disguised, are those in the cultural sphere. The Romanies are also discriminated in the religious aspect. Once they have lost their homeland religion, they tend to declare themselves regarding the regions they live in as members of *Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Islam, though lately of Protestantism as well.* **The members of the first three religions accept them rather unwillingly.** The Islam community suggests to them not to declare themselves as

Romanies, but as Muslims, Albanians, Turks... Though some Orthodox churches have done a lot for Romanies' faithful just as they helped them express their religious feelings - by serving the liturgy in Romany and by translating the sacred books - in the Orthodox world there are still traces of xenophobia and racism. The Vatican is putting a lot of efforts into the conversion of Romanies; it has even established a special commission to take care of them. Various, both small and large, Protestant communities best accept Romanies; at the moment they are being converted to the third branch of Christianity. All this is not going on without conflicts, often tragic ones, beside open physical ones between the Orthodox and the Protestant Romanies. It does not even have to be mentioned that there is clear animosity between the Christian Romanies and those of Islam. Very few experts observe that this situation does a great damage to the overall "Romanies' issue."

**Table 6. Marriages (Ethnic and Religious Distance)**

*"Would you approve of your daughter, son, sister, brother... getting married to a Romany?  
Would you yourself get married to a Romany?"*

MODALITY	N	%
Only if he or she is of the same religion (Christianity)	4	2,0
Only if he or she is of the same confession (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant)	11	5,5
Regardless of religion and confession	27	13,5
Not at all even if he or she is of the same religion or confession	158	79,0
TOTAL	200	100,00

Number of answers in Table = 200, No answer = 0

*Unfortunately, only one-fifth of the Niš population (21,0% = 2,0% + 5,5% + 13,5%) would get married to a member of Romany ethnicity or would allow it to its closest kin. An overwhelming majority (79,0%) is explicitly against it: the Romanies are undesirable for a spouse or in-laws. Even the religious or confessional affiliation does not help much. No matter if they worship the cross or the half-moon, or if they pray to Christ or Allah, or kiss the hand of the patriarch or reis-ulema or respect the priest or khoja - there is no help. Though it should be!*

*Gender. The ethnic religious distance is almost equally distributed regarding gender. It is undoubtedly present as a majority trend among the people of Niš, namely somewhat more among the women (83,3%) than among the men (74,5%). . The later ones, unlike the women of Niš (33,3%), would in a higher percentage get married to a Romany woman regardless of her religious membership. But, when the same religion is in question, the women of Niš (54,5%) are more tolerant than the men (45,5%). It should be kept in mind that we are speaking about rather a small number of the examined, namely, in the former case there are only 27 while in the latter only 11.*

What is at issue here is a **social distance** towards the Romanies as a synthesis of the "attitudes towards the other", of the ethnic and the religious distance, of nationalism, national stereotypes and prejudice, of discrimination and segregation, xenophobia and racism. Truthfully speaking, it should be underlined that in the last few years there was a tendency clearly determined of further declining of the social distance towards the Romanies. S. Mihailović (1996) has found out that 34% of the citizens have a favorable

opinion about the Romanies, 19% of them unfavorable, 37% of them are neutral so that the Serbs place them at the fourth place on their list of the peoples close to them, namely, just behind the Russians, the Jews and the Macedonians (for comparison, let's just note that in Croatia there is an exceptionally great social distance towards the Romanies). *It means that there is also good intercultural predisposition of the Serbs towards the Romanies and vice versa, that the social distance can be further reduced by a very-well conceived intercultural action thus eliminating any kind of barrier whatsoever.*

### CONCLUDING COMMENTARY

#### THE ROMANIES ARE WARNING US

There is no doubt that the Romanies have become "the talk of the day." In fact, for decades the Romanies have been pushed aside, utterly to the margins, forced to remain at the bottom of the social ladder, forced to reside within the enchanted circle of misery as persecuted and repressed people even to the point of genocide. They have been subdued to discrimination and segregation, xenophobia and racism as an ethnically unrecognized people. They have been neglected regarding their language and their religion. Though a culturally neglected people, they have seemed, more recently, just like their Indian ancestors a millennium ago, brought to the historical surface for the sake of seeking the light again though this time with more self-reliance and resolution. In an essential and truthful way - not in a formal and folklore one - they unmistakably want to tell us the following:

***"Here we are, we have been with you and by your side for centuries; we are here with you today and we will be as long as all of us exist. The fate has brought us together so that even when you leave us alone you do not recognize how tough we are, that we have grown mature and want to be ourselves on our own. This is something that we have an anthropological, natural and historical and social right to. Don't you feel any pang of conscience? Well, it cannot go this way any longer. We will take our fate in our hands since we are capable of it; still, it is better for all of us to help us. You can do that. What is needed is just some good will and patience."***

#### ROMANIES, THE EU AND THE NGO

Many of us have on time and properly understood the Romanies' benevolent message that has been, in fact, sent by their extremists that can be found in any nation and that can sound threatening. This view is most surely advocated, regardless of whether it is to someone's liking or not, primarily by the European Union. It has actually recognized the Romanies' privileged trans-national position, that is, the status of the European minority, while it invests considerable amounts of money into the improvement of their standard and integration in addition to stimulating the scientific research projects that should prepare the overall situation for a civilized solution of the "Romanies' fate." In a word, the Western world has been practicing - which is a paradox - our slogan that it is better to prevent than to cure. It does not, however, mean that there is no stigmatization of the Romanies or that there are no outbursts of racist feelings including violent attacks on the part of skinheads and neonacists like the ones that took place in Bohemia or Germany, but

it must be admitted that some important steps have been taken towards solving of the Romanies' riddle. It seems that the Romanies in the West will surely be, if they have not already been, integrated into the majority of the segments of the multicultural society. The protection is there in all the aspects though any change in the cultural pattern and common people's behavior will take time and this is the most difficult part of the whole thing. We know that time cures all and puts everything in its place. However, without our own engagement as well as the efforts made by the Romanies themselves the chances for success are meager, that is, there would be no possibility to make use of an otherwise quite promising basis of the institutional framework.

Apart from the Union, there are many diverse, both state and private foundations that have properly understood the Romanies' problem on time. Thus, they have put all their efforts to help the unfortunate people. Hence hundreds of programs, so-called Romanies' ones, as well as thousands of financially sponsored projects starting from purely humanitarian and children-oriented to educational and scientific ones involving an impressive army of volunteers and enthusiasts, professionals and experts devoted to the Romanies, namely, those people who realize their humanist intentions through the third sector, that is, in non-profitable humanitarian and non-government organizations. It is exactly this sphere of activity in which it was most strongly felt - unlike in the regime institutions - that the future belongs to the third sector. Namely, this sector involving non-government organizations and citizens' associations, represents something that has appeared in the eastern and Western European countries in dozens of thousands of branches where in the USA in over a million, as expected. It represents a power that covers up a series of unchartered social domains and fields of activity, namely, of those social spheres that the state, its institutions and agencies as well as political parties and unions cannot or even - if they want though are not often willing to - cover up in an adequate way.

#### WHAT ARE THE ROMANIES TO DO?

In view of the fact that the Romanies have been present always and everywhere - only in Europe there are about eight millions of them - the European Union has been giving - for years and in the most systematic way, through a series of its institutions and agencies, politically and legally, economically and financially and scientific-professionally - a considerable attention to the Romanies.

Our Romanies are not that lucky as their compatriots in the Western democracies so that many and diverse observers are focused upon them. The state always has more urgent things to do so that even when it helps them it does that in a non-selective way, by treating them as an exotic and folklore group. The political parties that feed on their political illiteracy and their lack of self-organization use them only on one occasion, namely, when it is necessary to enlarge the political machine. The unions including even independent ones fight for their own position in the public arena and thus they do not care much about the Romanies. The Church (SOC) that generally fails to cope up with the turbulent events fails to understand the Orthodox Romanies let alone others belonging to other religion or some of many other confessions.

What are the Romanies to do? First of all, they must learn to become self-reliant and



self-organize themselves and unite themselves. They should use their own strength that increases every day for stating their more complex demands to their own elite. Then, regardless of whether these are predominantly humanitarian, civil or professional non-government organization, they are obliged to recognize them in their local and much wider environment, to establish cooperation with them, to work on mutual projects and to rely, with no second thought, on their enormous potentials. It should never be forgotten that, as a rule, the NGO are founded as well as led by high-quality representatives of intelligentsia and the intellectual community. Then they should find, among all sorts of scientists especially those dealing with social-humanist domains, their own "friends" and arose their interest in their issue. There are many unknown things in the life and customs of the Romanies that need to be considered from the scientific aspect; without the scientific view it will be impossible to light up the past, to view the present and, especially, to outline the future perspectives. These are three aspects that comprise and strengthen the Romanies' chances for success so long as they are kept visible and resistant to all attempts made "from above" (the state and its authorities) to avoid them.

#### THE PEOPLE OF NIŠ DESCRIBE THE ROMANIES

(PREJUDICES AND EXPERIENCES, IMPRESSIONS AND IGNORANCE)

***The Romanies are our neighbors who live in the same street, city quarter, city or state. Probably you have had some or somewhat closer contacts with them. In short, describe your experience and impressions state good and bad examples, interesting details and general impression:***

(Methodological remark: the above-given direct question was answered by 183 of the 200 examined which is a rather high percentage. It simply means that people felt the need to describe the Romanies in their own way)

"We are the most stupid nation in the world. They smuggle and they are money-dealers and we have let them do that. We have turned ourselves into robots and fools. They are getting rich and they get better while we, the Serbs, are regressing. We should use a stick to expel them from our country."

"My experience is very positive (I collaborated with them in the society "Romany"). I had Romanies' students in each generation. I went to their religious holiday *Vasilitsa* and I know some respected Romanies. When they are organized in interest groups (folklore, orchestra) they are very industrious and active and they carry out the assigned tasks in a very responsible way. They can be very loyal and confident. When they have confidence in someone they show their real values in the sense of loyalty to their job or of carrying out their assignments."

"We should do all we can to have as few of them as possible in order to avoid the same problem we had with the Albanians."

"I meet with the Romanies almost every day due to the kind of job I do. I have never had any unpleasant experience. On the contrary, they always try to be cooperative. However, my personal opinion is that the Romanies, once they find themselves in a larger group, feel some additional power and that's when the problems may arise."

"I have lived and made friends with Romanies. My experience is positive. They share our fate. Our state is mistaken in failing to solve their problems in a much faster way."

"Remark 1. In schools established by the state the Gypsy should learn in Serbian while they should learn in the Romany language only in the schools they themselves have founded. Remark 2. They can be buried at local cemetery together with the Serbs only if they are of Orthodox faith. The Gypsies should have the same rights as the Serbs with one exception: the use of their own language they should completely support with their own financial means. If they want their own school, then they should build it themselves, pay for the teachers and learn whatever they want; if they want to attend a state school, then they should obey "the Serbian rules." The same stands for newspapers and television. We should treat them in the same way as the Americans treat the Mexicans."

"My general impression is that they are people just like us; they can also be lived with, cooperated with and make friends with. Among them as among us, the Serbs, there are individuals who are primitive and vulgar. All in all, I have no bad experience with them. In my class I used to have a Romany colleague who was the best friend of mine; now at work I have a fellow colleague who is a good friend of mine."

"They are cheerful people who live without caring too much about the future. There are all kinds of them. I used to live in Sarajevo. The Romanies there were only beggars and they were all horribly dirty; on the contrary, I am delighted with the Niš Romanies who work, try really hard and want to make something of their life."

"I have good Romany buddies. They are not offended when they are called Gypsies. They can be faithful, correct. They have learnt manners. They grow mature slightly slower than us, but they still do. I have a positive opinion about them. Their main shortcoming is in their not going to school."

"They are better than the "Shiptari" (Albanians). They live better than we do - I have nothing against it."

"I have nothing against civilized Romanies but since all of them are not the same - some being dirty and uncivilized - they should be moved out to the suburbia, to special settlements outside Niš."

"I had no closer contacts with Romanies. I try to have no prejudice against them though I think that they are deeply rooted in ourselves."

"You cannot make friendship with Gypsies. They want to be friends only with people they can have some use of. Those who are somewhat educated tend to behave correctly but those with no education are unfair and violent and they do not keep their promises. If they live in an apartment building otherwise inhabited by the Serbs - and usually in a much smaller number - they behave correctly and are more cultured; however, if they are the majority, they are primitive and behave violently. As for their music and songs, they are worth appraisal, but yet, once a Gypsy, always a Gypsy, they always use an opportunity to cheat on someone. It is in their genes."

"They are people as well and people should be equal regardless of the color of their skin or religion."

"There are all sorts of people one can find among us, the Serbs. We should care about them in order to make them our friends instead of turning them into enemies."

"They are united; one for all. This cannot be found among us, the Serbs. The Serbs only look for opportunities to cheat you or to frame you while they would die for one another.."

"I grew up in the neighborhood of the Gypsy city quarter and I know a great number of them, very decent people, ready to help you. I have positive experiences. I also had close friends that I used to visit on their patron saints' holidays' celebrations."

"If you are a friend with some Romany, he will be more ready to help you than the Serb. I have no bad experience whatsoever."

"The Romanies are very mobile people. They did not have the conditions for becoming civilized people like we are. The state and the society should help them get emancipated at the economic, cultural and political level. In fact, we, the Serbs, behave badly towards them."

"I do not see any reason why I should bother with them. I am disgusted with them."

"In the families with less children the education is better, the children are more cultured and the parents are also ordinary people. These families mostly live in the settlements in which the majority of the citizens are not Romanies. The other ones living in the Romanies' settlements are dirty, they lack manners, they are quarrelsome and swear a lot. In general, the whole atmosphere is primitive and immoral. At the green markets the sellers are kind and the younger ones are kind. In general they do not go to school and do "dirtier" jobs. I still think that there is an unhealthy attitude towards the Romanies on the part of most of my fellow citizens but whether this is a consequence of prejudice or bad personal experience, I do not know."

"There are good and industrious. They are much more compact than us, they are all for one. Regardless of whether they know one another or not, they are united, they support one another and they are ready to stand up to defend one another which is not the case with us, the Serbs. They should live together with other people and not in isolated settlements in order to develop culturally and become even better people than they are now."

"We all know they are specific. They do not like decent jobs but only those that make quick money. More than others, even as children, they tend to steal, rob or smuggle, etc. They have a special way of life; they dress and eat badly and still they are less liable to disease than we are."

"There are all sorts of people but most of them like to steal. It is not accidental that there is a saying 'Once a Gypsy, always a Gypsy.'"

"Until I joined the army I made friends with some Gypsies and I did not mind it at all. I think that in those days I did not pay any attention to some things I was not personally involved in. For instance, I did not care about their liability to steal. After the army I suddenly stopped making friends with them and I do not have a good opinion about them. Man should be always careful with them and should never trust them completely."

"I have not had any bad experience with them though there are many people who would claim the opposite. However, the same thing happens with the Serbian neighbors as well. If more of them get some schooling they will change for the better. While I was full-time employed I knew some Gypsies who were skillful (metal workers, workers at milling machines) and appreciated workers and not so bad people."

"I have no personal negative experience but it is said that a "Gypsy can never be a man." (Many years ago they bought timber from her father; they never paid for it; they even beat him up when he asked them to pay.)

"The state itself should do more for their improvement. If it would make them complete at least the elementary school, prevent them from getting married before

maturity and so some other things, they would become better citizens. It is not only their fault for having more bad than good people among them."

"I think that the Gypsies in the countryside are much better than the urban ones. The reason for this is probably their not being in such great numbers so that they have accepted the local people's ways. Still, they have something 'genetic' about them, something common to all of them so that one should be on the alert with them."

"I have not had any bad personal experience with the Romanies. Some of them are good family men even better than the Serbs. But I do not trust them much since they are cunning. Many of them have been caught stealing in the fields. I have heard that in recent years there have been fights between the groups of the Romanies and the Serbs."

"In the last year's war against the NATO my son got robbed by the Gypsies in the army. It is in their blood and that is why they should always be closely observed. There is something special in them, something that 'singles them out' when viewing them on the whole."

"In our village the Romanies are only a few and they are good people; they do not differ from us, the Serbs. They seem to be bad in the environments in which there are a great many of them because they are liable to bad influence of the corrupted people living there."

"There are great differences in the beliefs, ways of thinking and living. My Romany friend from the elementary school used to make fun of me for going to the University. After the elementary school he 'made a calculation' and refused to go to school any longer; instead he took to the streets, to the flea market, and he bought a house, an apartment and two cars. My acquaintance, the Romany from my neighborhood, is 31 years old and he had already been married for six times (It is now clear why I am so much against mixed marriages)."

"The Romanies want to be friends with the Serbs. The Romanies mutually help each other, and when it is necessary they know how to protect each other. I am against the marriages with the Romanies since they can be really bad. There is an old saying stating that 'what is not of the same faith cannot eat together' or 'two snakes do not sleep at the same pillow.'"

"I can say that the Romanies are basically good people, clean and tidy. My aunt (though by marriage and not to the first kin) is of Romany origin and she is really a good woman. The Romanies should be given a chance. They are also people of the same blood and flesh. My best friend in the secondary school was a Romany, an exceptional person. I could confide any secret to her and be sure that only two of us know it. All in all, my message is 'Give them a chance.'"

"They should be expelled from this region; they are potentially dangerous for us."

"There are no good Romanies."

"There are no good examples of any cooperation between me and the Romanies. In my opinion these are inferior people. I remember the evenings I spent at the Music Club. The Gypsies could not even think about coming there on Fridays and Saturdays knowing they would have a hell of the time. Today I fight with them every time I have a chance. All in all, so far as I am concerned, I would send them away from the country."

"In the elementary school I had three Romany friends. I used to spend time together playing, just like with the Serbs. Later on, two of them finished the school for rubber technicians and the third one completed the electro-technical school. When we grew up,

we remained friends and spent time as all young men do. I was invited to the wedding of one of them, together with five or six other Serbs. Even today when we see each other we treat each other with respect."

"The Romanies are people just like all others in this city. I do not see any reason why I should love or not love them in any special way. I consider them as my fellow citizens who absolutely have the same civil rights as I do."

"The Romanies are victims of xenophobia in our society while the care occasionally expressed for them (including the research) is mainly a manifestation of the ongoing fashion instead of the real interest and wish to help them."

"They are industrious, but nasty people. They should be employed in special firms. I myself would never have them to work for me though they steal less than the Serbs."

"There are two Romany social layers, namely, there are street urchins, beggars and dirty ones, and, on the other hand, there are employed ones, citizens and intellectuals. But, unfortunately, 90% of the Romanies are in the former, lower, dirtier layer. They should devote more attention to their children's education, fight for their prosperity and avoid making the cities dirty. They themselves are to blame for the position in which they are since it is said that each of us 'is a tailor of his own fate.'"

"They live far from me - I would not like to have them closer. I do not like them."

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## ROMI, NAŠE KOMŠIJE

### Dragoljub B. Đorđević

*Niški Romi dele opštu sudbinu srpskih. Niš jeste, što mu je jedna od osobenosti, i "ciganjski grad" jer ima oko 30 hiljada "garavih momaka". Žive ti oni vekovima na obalama Nišave: po udaljenim selima, u prigradskim naseljima, na obodima grada, po izdvojenim malama ili duboko utkani u urbano jezgro; etnički i kulturno raznoliki, veroispovedno pravoslavni i muslimani, imućni i bedni, školovani i nepismeni, poznati i anonimni, vrsni muzikanti i obični sakupljači stare hartije, upošljeni u teškoj industriji i napoličari, radnici za trakom i sitni preprodavci, mirni građani i bučni huligani. Nišlija ih sreće na svakom koraku, imajući ikakve ili nikakve neposredne dodire, ali ih dovoljno ne poznaje: odakle su i kada se ovde nastaniše, gde i kako žive, kako se i kome bogu mole, kuda to žure i šta rade, zašto su "ovakvi" a ne "onakvi"... Od nepoznavanja do predrasuda - samo korak deli. Mnogi Nišlija nije još koraknuo, ali su i brojni sugrađani iskoračili u stereotipe povodom Roma.*

Ključne reči: *Romi, getoizacija Roma, školovanje Roma, skinhedi, etnička-religijska distanca spram Roma*