Roma in Vojvodina: Expressions of Cultural Identity through Performance

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Abstract

This paper begins to cover some of the ways Roma cultural identity is expressed through performance in Vojvodina. The way Roma music and dance is seen in Vojvodina is highly influenced by the “circus” image and very little scholarly writing on Roma folklore exists to challenge this image. Roma musicians in rap/hip-hop groups incorporate elements of Roma traditional music and Roma language into rap/hip-hop to confront this stereotype and in performance these influences can interact, challenging stereotypes and revealing current values and traditions.
Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the intellectual support and logistical organization of Veronika Mitro. I would also like to thank the following people for allowing their experiences to be considered here: Radmilla Zećirović, Milan Marković, Nenad and Bogdan Vladišavljić, Ramiz Selimi, and the members of Gradište Ghetto and Wild School. Thanks also to Jelena Jovanović and Professor Aleksandra Mitrović.
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Preface

As an artist and activist I am interested in expressions of cultural identity for young people from marginalized groups in multicultural societies. I am interested in how artistic expression might open up a space for integration. As an example of a marginalized group in a multicultural society I am looking at Roma groups in Vojvodina.

Introduction

Vojvodina is an autonomous province of Serbia bordering Croatia, Hungary and Romania. The capital of Vojvodina and seat of the provincial government is Novi Sad. According to the last census (2002) the population of Vojvodina is 2,013,889 citizens, 49% male and 51% female. The citizens come from around thirty different national, religious, ethnic and regional groups including Roma.

Most research agrees that Roma groups’ background is from India, however researchers disagree about when migrations began. Some research maintains it began as early as the 5th century and lasted until the 12th century (S. Berberski, 1975 according to G Svilanović and D. Radovanović, 1998 10), while others suggest that heavy migration waves occurred from the 10-14th centuries. Over a periods of long-term migration through different regions Roma people encountered many different influences resulting in the development of many different groups inside of the larger Roma population. The arrival of Roma groups in the Balkans coincided with the Turkish invasion between the 14th and 15th centuries. It is noted that as “opposed to other peaceful invasions, which culminated in the creation of new states, peoples and nations, the Gypsy (Roma) invasion managed to preserve it’s ethnos, sneaking into the ethnic pluralism of the Balkans, but
never achieving statehood.” (Clebert, 1967 according to G. Svilanović and D. Radovanović, 1998). Roma people have been living in all the Balkan countries including Serbia from this time. In 2002 Roma were given the status of national minority in Serbia.

The number of people who declare themselves Roma in Vojvodina is 29,057, as of 2002 census, constituting 1.43% of the overall population (Mitro at al, 2004). Most of this population (62%) are under 25 years of age. It is noted, however that many Roma do not identify as such but rather claim the ethnicity of the language they speak such as Hungarian, Serbian or Romanian. Others simply are not registered. There is also a considerably large group of internally displaced Roma persons from Kosovo living in Vojvodina who lack the necessary papers to be considered citizens. Social and institutional discrimination shaped by a history of ignorance and prejudice has found current Roma groups in Vojvodina lacking basic human rights. The main characteristics of Roma socioeconomic position are:

“a great number of Romani people have no income, the economic activity among them is very low, the rate of unemployment is high, they have a high rates of illiteracy, many leave school before completing their studies, poverty and very bad living conditions can be found in isolated settlements, early marriages, many of them do not have any personal identity documents, long-term refugee status and a great number of cases of imperiled basic human rights,” (Mitro, at al 2004).

According to the Federal Ministry for Human and Minority Rights Roma people are the least educated. Illiteracy is as high as 80% and University degrees are held by only 02%. The percentage of Roma children who attend state kindergartens is very low although there are some nursery schools run by NGOs targeting Roma children. Many
children at schools for specials needs are Roma children who, due to lack of knowledge of Serbian language, do not score well on the elementary school entrance exam. Others do not attend elementary school at all or drop out around 3rd or 4th grade. Girls often do not complete their studies or enroll in school in the first place for a variety of reasons including a tradition of early marriage and family duties.

Lack of education as well as social prejudices results in high levels of unemployment among Roma populations. Roma people also often face obstacles accessing health-care, which including fees, lack of insurance, prejudices within the healthcare system and a lack of awareness about their rights to health-care.

Mainstream media does not always present a positive picture of Roma groups (Mitro, at al 2004, Masović, 2000) however Roma media exists in Vojvodina in the form of television and radio shows in Roma language as well as a biweekly newspaper, Them and a magazine, Romology. There is a general absence of Roma influence in the government and on the level of decision-making processes. One Roma woman is employed in the provincial government, two on the local administrative level, and 2 work for the city government. Vojvodina has two active Roma political parties with parliamentary representation.

Linguists generally agree that Romani language derives from the Sanskrit branch of Indoiranski languages. The first serious study of this origin took place in 1782 (Halwachs, 2006). Seventy percent of the basic Romany vocabulary is related to other Indic (Indo-European) languages, and there are a number of common grammatical and derivative formats. The dialects of Romani spoken today in Vojvodina include Gurbet and Arli but there are also other dialects including Kalderash, Lovar, Hungarian Romani
dialects and others. (Romlex, Halwachs, 2006) The fact of multiple dialects makes the task of standardization of language very difficult.

Roma Cultural Identity/Romanipe(n)

A conference of experts in 2002 defined the term Romanipe(n) as “The cultural identity of Roma, gypsies, travelers and related groups in Europe,” (Davis, 2005), however when used colloquially among Roma people the term often has a different meaning:

“Yes of course Romanipe. We are using it as intellectual, scientists. But when you say to an ordinary Roma, Romanipe he means “ciganka posla” (Gypsy’s job-expression referring to activity that requires constant movement from place to place), (Vladisavljević interview).

Osman Balić has defined the term Romanipe as a Roma cultural identity, constituted by the following elements:

a) Language
b) Interpersonal Communication- dualism in speech, communication.
c) Music, Dance
d) Customs and belief systems
e) Traditional occupations
f) Traditional dress
g) Marriage
h) Gender roles
i) Marriage- gender roles (translate or understand this paragraph)

j) Children’s relationships, relationships across generations within the frame of family.

Balić has not written a great deal about how these element fit into his definition of Romanipe(n) and other intellectuals have disputed his delineation of elements.

While scholars have begun to write about many aspects of Roma life, very little has been written about cultural identity. A conference titled Romanipe(n):o kulturnum identitetu Roma took place in 2005. While some literature exists on of Roma music, extremely little can be found relating to dance.

Goal

The goal of this research is to find out:

1. More about Roma in Vojvodina through interviews with representatives of Ngos and Roma institutions.

2. More about Roma music and dance in Vojvodina through interviews with leaders and members of a folklore group and dance groups

3. If cultural identity enters into artistic expression by considering two rap and hip-hop groups.
Methodology

In order to find out the answers to the above questions I have interviewed 9 people. I met with one representative of an Ngo, one representative from the office of Roma inclusion, one folklore artist, a representative of a student group, and 5 members of a hip-hop/rap group as well as their leaders. I met with them individually and also asked them questions as a group. Interviews lasted from 6 min. to an hour, averaging around 25 min per person. People I interviewed ranged from 15 years of age to over 30. Most interviewees were male, only one was female. This information is visible in Table 1. The environments where interviews took place varied greatly as one took place in a home, another in an office, another in a park, and two in a café, at most interviews there were other people in the room engaged in other activities and this might have influenced interviewees level of openness. Interviews with the members of the rap/hip hop group Wild School took place at a rehearsal when all other band members were present and could look to each other for affirmation.
Table 1 – Information about interviewed persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (If under 18)</th>
<th>Institution/Ngo</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radmilla Zečirović</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Amarilis-Ngo</td>
<td>April 13th</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan Marković</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Office for Roma Inclusion</td>
<td>April 18</td>
<td>50 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nenad Vladisavljević</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roma Students Society</td>
<td>April 20</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramiz Selimi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Folklore Dance Group</td>
<td>April 23</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogdan Vladisavljević</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>25 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iske</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>8 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mića</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>10 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kića</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>6 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denis</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>6 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riki</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Wild School</td>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>7 min.</td>
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Questions- Some interview questions included: What does Romanipe(n) mean to you? How is folklore an important part of Romanipe(n)? Do you think it is important to rap in
Roma language? Do you think it is important to have an all Roma rap group? Do you think stereotypes exist about Roma music and dance? How do you think media/activism/music can challenge stereotypes?

Observations:

I observed rehearsals of the groups Wild School and Gradište Ghetto. I spent 2.5 hours observing a group rehearsal of both groups together as well as 2 hours observing an individual rehearsal of Wild School and 3 hours with Gradište Ghetto. Wild School and Gradište Ghetto are rap/hip-hop groups organized through the Association of Roma Students (Udruženje romskih studenata) and financed by the English NGO Our Point. The leaders of the two groups are members of the Association of Roma Students, Nenad and Bogdan Vladisavljević. The group Wild School is composed entirely of Roma teenage boys however Gradište Ghetto has one girl involved. Members of both groups are Serbian Roma, Albanian Roma, and Hungarian Roma and non-Roma teenagers. The members of Wild School practice every day and members of Gradište Ghetto a few times a week.

I observed:

-How elements of traditional music are incorporated into rap.
-How Roma language is incorporated.
-Choreography in the style of hip-hop and break-dance
-How the members of the groups write songs and choreograph dances.
-What the songs are written about.
-How songs are practiced and recorded.
-How choreography is taught and manipulated.
My Role

In terms of considering my role as researcher it is important to note that in relation to all subjects I was clearly a non-Roma person, an American and a woman. I think I was young enough to be viewed as somewhat of a peer by members of Wild School and Gradište Ghetto, however by other aspects of I was clearly marked as outsider.

Language

Most interviews took place in English, however interviews with members of Gradište Ghetto and Wild School as well as the interview with Ramiz Selimi took place in Serbian. It is important to consider the language barriers here, and the extent to which information might be lost in translation.
Results/Discussion

Part 1.

Results of the interviews with representatives of institutions and NGOs.

Through interviews with representatives of NGOs I gathered additional information about aspects of Roma life. From a representative of the office for the Inclusion of Roma, I learned about the decade for Roma inclusion, an initiative instituted from 2005-2015 in eight different countries. The office for the Inclusion of Roma is involved in four different action plans as a part of this initiative concerning education, employment, healthcare and habitation. I learned from a representative of the office about the current situation for Roma education and the work that has been done improve the situation as a means by which to improve other aspects of Roma life. I learned from a representative of the Association of Roma Students about projects this group has been involved with to improve levels of education and employment, as well as the importance of Roma language to Roma culture and the necessity of promoting Roma language through media.

Education- The office of Roma Inclusion has been involved in facilitating research projects on the current situation for Roma education in order provide a basis for an action plan. The representative from the office confirmed what is stated in literature with regards to reasons for low education among Roma groups. These reasons include: poverty, lack of education in Roma language, difficult social situation among teachers and peers, Roma tradition of marriage at a young age and lack of awareness about the importance of education due to uneducated older generations. Lack of education makes it
difficult for Roma adults to find work, perpetuating high levels of unemployment. The government is required to provide education in the language of all national minorities including Roma groups who became a national minority in 2002. Efforts to provide education in Roma language have encountered difficulties due to lack of standardized language and lack of people qualified to teach in Roma language.

Activism and Political Participation- Ngo’s and government organizations aided by actors from the international community have made progress in taking apart the cycle of poverty for Roma groups. Some initiatives that are in progress regarding education include efforts provide education in the Roma language, programs for students who have dropped out of school as well as tutoring programs. The Association for Roma Students has been involved in a lot of projects helping Roma students to find employment upon finishing school as well as organizing tutoring programs for high school and elementary school students and students who have dropped out of school.

The Association for Roma Students is one of two Roma student organizations at the University of Novi Sad. The Association for Roma Students preceded the other organization, the Roma Student Union. There are a total of 60 Roma students at the University of Novi Sad spread across different departments.

The Association for Roma Students provides a successful model of Roma organizing inside Roma communities on a grassroots level. A representative from the office of Roma Inclusion confirmed what is stated in the literature, that on a high decision-making level, there is often a lack of influence and perspective from Roma people:
“There’s an obvious absence of Roma nationality on any sort of decision making levels. Not only in politics but as well there’s an absence in the bodies that should be making decisions regarding Romas themselves,” (Marković Interview)

Language- The process of standardization of language is inextricably connected to processes of inclusion and integration in education, media, and public dialogue. Lack of standardized language for Roma groups has come to mean exclusion on all of the above fronts. A standardized language for Roma groups would serve an emerging group of educated Roma elite. While a standardized orthography exists for Roma language it is not widely in use and scholars dispute whether or not a single orthography should exist for all Roma dialects. A representative of the Association for Roma Students emphasized that Roma language was essential to Roma culture and promoting the language regardless of standardization was necessary for preserving Roma cultural identity. As stated above, many difficulties are associated with providing education in Roma language however engaging in media in Roma language provides a means for Roma communities to promote the use of their dialects.

Media- The newspaper Them, a bi-weekly publication, is considered the biggest Roma language publication in Serbia. It is written in the Gurbetski/ Džambaski dialects and uses Serbian written letters, mostly the Latin alphabet with some Cyrillic. It is one of a small number of publications written solely in Roma language because of the many difficulties involved with doing so:
“Lots of difficulties. Lots of dialects even here in Vojvodina ... I speak Gurbet. The deal is that every journalist should write in his own dialect. Television and radio (are more popular). Our culture is a voice culture. It’s not a written culture. With this Them we are trying to make people read because it’s the best way to keep language. If we lose language, what is Roma culture? We can say this is the thing that we are different from others. When we lose language what are we?”

(Vladisavljević interview)

The interviews I conducted corroborated what I found suggested in literature: that education is a key avenue to improving Roma socioeconomic position. I learned about a large number of initiatives involving both research and community organizing on this front. From talking to people I learned that education was identified as important not only for purposes of integration and breaking down a cycle of poverty but for preserving cultural identity in terms of preserving language and developing emerging class of educated Roma people. I also learned the importance of language to cultural identity and the place that written media occupies with regard to promoting Roma language.
Part 2.
Results of interviews with members and leaders of folklore and dance groups.

The Gypsy Circus

Many agree that stereotypes towards Roma populations create and reinforce complex networks of prejudice and discrimination. I am concerned specifically with stereotypes about Roma people as musicians and dancers. Common consciousness paints Roma musicians as general entertainment for the majority groups: “For centuries, Serbs have recruited their musicians na kraju sela, as the expression has it: ‘at the far end of the village’ (i.e. where the Gypsies live)” (Van de Port, 1999). General opinion as a result of this stereotype is that

“gypsies don’t need school. They dance and play… they have a talent. And for singing and for dancing. That is their talent.”(Anonymous interview)

The emphasis placed on musical talent results in general view of Roma people as otherwise incapable:

“There are stereotypes. People think we are only capable to sing and to play, that’s not true of course but that’s how the majority people see us. As entertainments.” (Zećirović interview)
“I have non-Roma friends from when I was very young. And my father was a musician, my grandfather was a musician, and everyone was a musician and they know my father because they’re from the same village and so on. So I went to their friend’s- my non-Roma friend’s- house, that was the year when I went to university for the first year, and his father told me, why you are going to the university? Just take your tambura like your father! You don’t need that. So it’s that kind of image, you know, we are from the low folk music that’s what we are for, for the cleaning and these services. Garbage mining, they call that. So this is that circus image. You know, like we are the people for amusement for low paid amusement. But we are happy people even if we are poor and that’s it. And women are there to fortune-teller and that’s all that they can see…which is the only picture of Roma women just fortune tellers or stole your kids or something like that,” (Vladisavljević interview).

The circus image, the pervasive stereotype of Roma as innately talented musicians who are suited for low-level entertainment is complex and cuts deep. The stereotype is firmly rooted in history and embedded in the language of scholarly discourse. Petrović (1981) asserts that “for them, music was a swift and easy way to make themselves indispensable in our society”, while Vukanović (1962) writes that “the prospects offered to a good musician were the most brilliant career a Gypsy mind could imagine for himself: he would spend his life in a round of constant delight, eating and drinking to his heart’s content” (both quoted in Van de Port, 1999). Here academic language reinforces the image of the Gypsy as other and unintelligent, only suitable for entertainment with a
tendency toward indulgence. This image contributes to a general collection of prejudices about Roma groups as incapable, unintelligent and uneducated. The “circus” stereotype, however, is especially complex. It enables both the denial of education (“they don’t need school they just dance and sing”) and condemnation for lack of education (“the prospects offered to a good musician were the most brilliant career a Gypsy mind could imagine for himself”). It establishes the figure of the Gypsy musician as “indispensable” to majority society, thereby establishing Roma groups on the margins of mainstream society and establishing a finite extent to which this group can be useful for the majority group. It is not difficult to see how this ensemble of prejudices could enable a wide vocabulary of behaviors toward Roma groups from ignorance to violence.

In addition to being problematic by itself, the circus stereotype facilitates the cohesion of other stereotypes. Van de Port found that surveys studying prejudice against “gypsies” (Krkeljić 1977, Vukajlović 1986, and Kuzmanović 1992) show that knowledge of “knowledge of music” is the characteristic most often attributed to this group, followed by “dirty” and then “merry”.

The question of how to subvert this stereotype is of course also complex, but a lot of work has already been done. In 2001 students from the Association of Roma Students at the University of Novi Sad organized a week of Roma cultural events including classical music and academic painting in an effort to challenge the circus image.

The groups I studied were concerned with rearticulating the circus image and unraveling this stereotype by mixing forms, subverting expectations and engaging in scholarly study of art-forms. The teenagers involved with rap and hip-hop integrated elements of traditional music and emphasized Roma language as a way of confronting
this stereotype about what a Roma musician can be. These groups were also concerned with presenting an alternative image of gender roles. The folklore artist I spoke with emphasized developing a body of written literature as a way to legitimize and retain tradition.

Folklore

Types of folklore dance vary greatly and are specific to different groups and regions within both Serbia and Vojvodina. The extent to which different forms exist and differ from each other is un-knowable due to a marked absence of scholarly writing on any of these types of folklore.

In order to learn about expressions of cultural identity in folklore I interviewed Ramiz Selimi who runs a Srem folklore group. Srem folklore is often danced in pairs. Each dance consists of a slow section and a fast section, increasing in speed towards the end. Dances are narrative and accompanied by song. The Srem folklore group rehearsing for two hours on Sundays when preparing for a concert, paying to rent a space. Musicians come to practice with them from Macedonia. The group is made up of teenagers from 15 years old to early 20’s including both Roma and non-Roma members. Around 6 years ago the group became an NGO and since then has had around 200 youth members. On the 7th of April, World Roma Day, the group always holds a participatory dance event.

Although types of folklore vary greatly depending on group and location each dance-forms contains wide-ranging influences from other dance-forms. Over long term periods of migration different groups and dance-forms interacted, borrowing and
absorbing elements from each other. Due to the complete absence of scholarly writing there has been no effort to trace these influences and mark the differences between dances:

“As it concerns Roma, we dance what we know. Any kind of thing. What I know is that there is not a lot of knowledge about folklore, because I haven’t found anything. There’s a very little bit, one or two or three dances that have been written about. I haven’t heard of anything else. There’s Romano, which is danced in southern Serbia. There’s Cigančica which is here, that’s danced here in Srem(part of Vojvodina). That’s all I know that we have written. It’s most important that there be something written. That’s why no one knows what’s going on with Roma folklore, I don’t know, there’s nothing about Roma folklore written anywhere,” (Selimi interview)

Engaging in scholarly research about Roma folklore is an important endeavor for those involved. Written material about a dance-form is understood as a legitimization of tradition. Undertaking the process of organizing and compiling research gives meaning and significance to a dance-form. The existence of written material means that someone, or a group of people, feels that a tradition is sufficiently valuable that it is merits the funding and organization of research it in order for it to be documented and more widely known. Recording a dance also is important for fixing it in a time and place and associating it with a certain group. Individual choreographies are always recorded in order that they can be repeated:
“For every choreography that we make, the person who makes it writes it down, that has to exist, every choreography has its written part, what it’s called, how it’s danced, who the choreographer is. There has to be something written and that stays,” (Selimi interview)

The act of writing down a dance for the folklore artist I spoke with meant claiming ownership and fixing it in time and space so it could be repeated. Although traditionally Roma groups have focused on oral tradition, the process of preserving cultural identity in contemporary times, like preserving language, depends on fixing and transmitting aspects of tradition through written media. In the same way that standardization of language could mean the legitimization of that form of expression, the act of writing about dance could legitimize it as a tradition. This legitimization of tradition is important for challenging the circus image of Roma people and traditions.

Hip-hop and Rap

By speaking with the leaders of rap/hip-hop groups Wild School and Gradište Ghetto I learned about the goals of their project. The leaders recognized an opportunity to support young people’s expressions of cultural identity and break down social distance by forming these groups:

“the idea is to influence the other young people through this music. This is the common thing for the Roma and non-Roma…young people, teenagers. The thing
is that it’s easier to influence young people than older so if they are together in this and Roma with their special identity because they are singing in Roma language, not all the time…” (Vladisavljević interview)

A main purpose of the groups, according to the leaders, is to confront aspects of the circus image. Rap in Roma language and elements of traditional music evoke this stereotype for a new purpose.

“The matrix, the musical matrix, the people from the association had this Roma influenced music but it’s hip hop and it’s interesting. So that it should take actually this low circus image to use for this purpose and to show that something good can be out of this,” (Vladisavljević interview)

Leaders of the group and the people funding the project recognize the importance of involving girls in order disrupt stereotypes both about Roma women and women in hip-hop culture:

“usually in hip hop music girls are you know only for dancing and we are trying to push them also that they sing and actually, one girl, one band she’s the sister of one of the players, actually she’s been doing the text so it’s a pity that she’s not inside so we decided you know that she needs to be involved that she should to sing so that’s very important to us…if you show the image of a girl who is
educated in this hip hop music and not just gangster….show to others who are young that’s very good picture,” (Vladisavljević interview)

Despite this intention there has, so far, been only one girl involved in either group. The absence of girls reflects a current reality for Roma teenagers in Vojvodina. Teenage girls encounter complicated pressures to get married early and/or avoid excessive socializing in an effort to prepare for marriage. (Mitro, Aleksandrović, 2003, Mitro, Jovanović, Šajin, 2004) The fact that the group is ready to confront this stereotype does not mean that it is not necessary to negotiate the reality of that stereotype.

To the leaders of Wild School and Gradište Ghetto Roma language and elements of Roma traditional music constituted stereotypical markers of cultural identity. By incorporating these markers into the mainstream popular culture of rap and hip-hop they seek to present an alternative to the circus image and in this way open space for integration into this mainstream culture.
Part 3.

Results of observation of the two hip-hop dance groups

Elements of traditional music in rap

At rehearsals groups spoke openly about the importance of incorporating Roma influence into the music in order that audiences be able to hear as well as see that they were Roma. Wild School utilized a format involving rap in Serbian and a refrain in Roma. One boy spoke the rap section and three sang the refrain in Roma language with a traditional instrumental background. The matrix has elements of traditional Roma music mixed in, such as the granulo, vocal music characterized by a rise and fall.

Incorporation of Roma Language

Serbian language is generally privileged over Roma particularly for rap sections. Wild School rehearsed a song with a refrain in Roma and members of Gradište Ghetto were in the process of translating the chorus of a song they had already written from Serbian to Roma. Many members of the group and one of the leaders do not speak Roma at all. Some can understand it but not speak it. The members of the group who knew Roma transcribed the sections in Roma language for other members to read using Serbian alphabets, sometimes Latin and sometimes Cyrillic. Leaders strongly emphasized the importance of translating sections of songs into Roma in order that audiences be able to hear a Roma influence.
Choreography

The dances for Wild School are mostly choreographed by two boys who prefer dancing over singing. The footwork privileges a quick, repetitive rhythm with some side-to-side movement but very little locomotion. A unison beginning usually breaks off into individual solos in the break-dancing tradition involving handstands and shoulder-stands, and walking on hands with elbows pressed to stomach. Dancers made heavy use of west-side hand symbols and shoulders movement with the head mostly stable.

Gradište Ghetto has four dancers who seemed to prefer dancing individually to group choreography, although they were urged by the leader to create a unison piece. Their style was very different from Wild School’s break-dancing influenced dancing and instead emphasized a more jazz-influenced version of hip-hop. Movement involved extreme articulation of torso, circular movement of rib-cage, shoulders and hips, bending knees, vertical movement as well as locomotion. Elbows and knees were emphasized with less attention placed on footwork. Many movements were initiated by shoulders or head.

Process of writing songs and choreographing dances

The singer/writer members of Wild School can write a song in half an hour, and one member’s mother often helps. Singer/songwriters generally come to rehearsal prepared with something written and then perform it for the group. Leaders gave assignments for members of Gradište Ghetto to finish or develop different songs or translate sections of a song from Serbian into Roma. The members of Wild School who dance spend at most 3 days choreographing a dance and then they spend a few more days learning and
practicing. They do this mostly outside of rehearsal and come to rehearsal prepared to show the work they have done, teach it to other members and rehearse with music.

What songs are written about.

The most important song for Wild School is Droga, or drugs. It tells the story of a friend of theirs who died of a drug overdose and emphasizes the message that you don’t need drugs to be happy. Members of the Wild School get inspiration from this story, from love, from Tupac, 50 cent, and Wu-Tang clan among other groups.

Practicing and recording songs

Members of the groups who write songs come to rehearsal prepared to share what they have written with the group. They teach refrain sections to others and practice together before recording. While often songs are written down at the beginning, the written manuscript is not important as members of the group know the words and don’t need to keep looking at the paper. At the end of rehearsal it is decided who will write or develop songs for the next rehearsal.

Teaching and Manipulating Choreography

Choreography is taught and manipulated before rehearsal and dancers are asked to show the work they have during the rehearsal.
Interviews with members of Wild School:

Members of Wild School were interviewed individually although other members were present during the interviews and often looked to each other for affirmation. All members expressed that rap and hip-hop were very important to them. They agreed that it was a widespread movement, engaging members of many different nationalities. Two members of Wild School expressed that it was not important to them to sing in Roma language, while three others agreed that yes, it was important. One member mentioned he felt it was nicest when Serbian and Roma mixed. Most of the boys in the group said it didn’t really matter to them whether or not the group was all Roma. What mattered to them was that the group was composed of “good boys” who could rap and dance well. Some specifically expressed that nationality did not matter. None felt it would be difficult to incorporate girls into the group.

By observing rehearsals of Wild School and Gradište Ghetto and interviewing members I was able to consider the extent to which Roma cultural identity is expressed in their rap/hip-hop performance. I was able to observe that, for these groups, expressing cultural identity means actively imposing stereotypical markers of cultural identity (language and elements of traditional music) into their performance that would not otherwise surface. Members of the group expressed that creating choreography and writing songs about their lives were also very important to them but did not explicitly consider these activities to be expressions of Roma cultural identity. Instead they saw these activities as part of a greater youth movement and a means by which to connect with other groups.
I think it is interesting that while other interviewees felt that in order to preserve language and folklore it was necessary to engage in written media, Wild School and Gradište Ghetto were in engaged in preserving cultural identity through rap which is an oral media. In terms of preserving language through oral means, rap presents an excellent opportunity. Rap in any language depends upon slang and words and constructions specific to group and location, as well as encourages the evolution of this kind of language for the sake of conforming to rhyme and meter. In this way rap presents a means by which individual dialects can find expression as well as interact with dominant slang. In this format Roma dialects can be promoted individually through oral means without entering into debate about standardization of written language across dialects.
Conclusion

Goal: To find out more about Roma in Vojvodina through interviews with representatives of Ngos and Roma institutions, to find out more about Roma music and dance in Vojvodina through interviews with leaders and members of a folklore group and dance groups and to find out if cultural identity enters into artistic expression by considering two rap and hip-hop groups.

As noted in literature, the main problems for Roma populations in Vojvodina are lack of education, unemployment, lack of standardized language and lack of Roma influence in decision-making processes. Representatives of institutions and Ngo’s agree that these are some of the main problems and also identify education as a means by which to improve Roma quality of life and preserve cultural identity. Language is also seen as an important means for preserving cultural identity.

The way Roma music and dance is seen in Vojvodina is highly influenced by the “circus” image and very little scholarly writing on Roma folklore exists to challenge this image. Leaders of rap/hip-hop groups incorporate elements of Roma traditional music and Roma language into rap/hip-hop to confront this stereotype and in performance these influences can interact, challenging stereotypes and revealing current values and traditions.

For the artists I considered in this work, countering the circus image required multiple levels of legitimization by a non-Roma audience. The groups I was concerned
with paid considerable attention to how their expressions of cultural identity would be perceived by this audience, as from their perspective a non-Roma audience would accept the authenticity of certain markers of cultural identity more readily than others, such as language and elements of traditional music before break-dancing and lyrics about drugs. In addition, expressions of cultural identity carried more weight when legitimized by a wider audience through a body of scholarly writing. The attention paid to this legitimization reveals more difficult questions. An intricate challenge would be discovering how expressions of cultural identity might be able to counter stereotypes and provide space for integration but find legitimacy independent of majority audiences’ perceptions.

Future researchers could begin to build a body of written material about different kinds of folklore in Vojvodina. A project of this kind would need to begin by recording the basic characteristics of different folklore groups: visual aspects of choreography and technique, who dances and who performs, how dances are learned and taught, when and which dances are repeated and how new choreography is created. Once this kind of documentation is completed research could be conducted on how different forms of folklore have influenced each other and been influenced by other dance forms. Future Researchers might also consider engaging in linguistic study of the rap lyrics of Wild School and Gradište Ghetto, studying translations from Serbian to Roma language and how language is influenced by demands of rhyming and fitting rhythm for rap.
Reflections

This paper begins to cover some of the ways Roma cultural identity is expressed through performance in Vojvodina. I feel that the paper is missing considerable information and analysis of folklore tradition and the way cultural identity might be expressed in different kinds of folklore. The time allowed for the completion of this project did not allow for consideration of more than one kind of folklore, and even this kind was not sufficiently investigated. I do feel that this paper was able to draw attention to a lack of writing about folklore and consider the effect of this reality on expressions of cultural identity.

I think that I might have been able to incorporate a wider range of perspectives into my paper if I had more actively sought out female sources. Only one of my interviewees was female. I spoke with the leaders of Wild School and Gradište ghetto as well as all the members about incorporating female members into the group, however I did not include a female perspective on this issue.
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Appendix

Song Lyrics:
Droga- Drugs
Ovo nije priča samo o meni-   This is not a story just about me
Ovo je priča o drogi o tebi   This is a story about drugs and about you
O svakom ko voli da živi   About everyone who loves to live
Ko drogu nikako uzeo nebi   Who would never take drugs

Hej živi život hej (2 x)   Hey live life, hey

Na ulicama ludnica i muka   On the streets madness and illness
U glavama im haos i buka   Noise and chaos in their heads
haustor im tamnica i put   Alley is a dungeon and way
bez granica (opet)   Without boundaries (again)
A crni grob je zadnja stanica   Black grave is the last stop
I zato ti pričam priču o   And that’s why I tell you a story about
Prijatelju svom kojeg je   A friend of mine
Droga odnела na dno   Drugs brought him down
Izgubio sam ga, a voleo   I lost him, who I loved
Ko brata … ti ne znaš šta je bol   As a brother…and you know it hurts
Hej živi život, hej   Hey, live life, hey.

Hej druže, hej probudi se   Hey, comrade, wake up
Osvrni se   Look back
Jer život je lep i u Boga   Because life is beautiful and in god
Uzdaj se   Have faith.

Hej, živi život   Hey, live life
Nada zadnja umire   The last hope is dead
Mojeg druga uzela je droga   My friend was taken by drugs
A molio sam Boga da   And I pleaded with god for
Ostavi se toga   Him to give it up.
Bog je dao izbor   God gave him a choice
Spas ili jad   Salvation or distress
A on je izabrao umesto   And he chose in place
Leta, pad.   Flight, fall.
Loše društvo svoje čini   Bad company bad influence
Rekao je druže idem   He said to his group, I’m going.
Ne brini   Don’t worry
Sada gledam u zemlju crnu   Now I look at a black earth
Šta sad to vredi   What is it worth now
Veruj mi droga nikog ne štedi   Believe me, drugs don’t spare anyone

Hej, živi život hej   Hey, live life, hey
Hej druže hej probudi se   Hey, comrade, wake yourself up
Appendix 2
Interview with Radmilla Zečirović
Amarilis-Ngo
April 13 2007

“At the beginning Amarilis was an organization of Roma women who were IDPs, domicile Roma, different Ashkeli, Romanian orthodox- young girls. After that they become married. And when the girls become married they stop with their activism. Eventually the girl who was the initiator with me, IDP form Kosovo, now she got married, she has three kids, she is really out of this. Because when the girls get married they cannot, that is the tradition, in order to be a good housewife…

What is Amarilis doing now? Starting a new phase because all of the previous activists got married so trying to activate youth and also men to human rights, inform youth about how they can live in the future, a better way to continue…I’m out of Amarilis now, I’m not out, I’m still the president but we are working on …but we have problems in our state but we cannot do it very quickly. We will try to choose another president who will replace me. I want to stimulate others to continue, some younger people.

There are stereotypes. People think we are only capable to sing and to play, that’s not true of course but that’s how the majority people see us as entertainments. We are working to change this and to integrate it. We are just doing what we are doing, working in 6 municipalities in Vojvodina. Stimulate order community, to change awareness of Roma people in majority world, esp. who don’t really understand what are Roma people. Sometimes Roma people tell me you are not Roma, you are not singing you are not dancing they have these stereotypes you are Roma but you are not. So they don’t see me as Roma. It happens also to my mother my mother is white skin so people tell her you are not Roma you are not dark.

I’m totally you know out of the tradition. Well I’m identifying myself as Roma, I’m trying to represent the good of the Roma, for instance this woman is rich. That’s not true, not all Roma are poor.

Other people don’t like to say that they are Roma because when you say that you are Roma something very bad comes from majority. In the past when I was younger when I was in school I never didn’t say that I was Roma I was ashamed to say that.”
Appendix 3
Interview with
Milan Marković
April 18 2007

“Office of Roma inclusion of Roma minority is relatively new and newly formed. So the amount of work and projects is not that big. So the office was formed in regard to this decade on Roma which is a project which gathers 8 of SE different countries including Serbia and Montenegro and it’s a project that has this objective to improve the process of Roma inclusion in these countries from 2005-15. Basically the forming of this office has been a project of that project of the decade and basically the activities of the office include suggesting different activities on the basis of the inclusion of Roma. Cooperate with decision makers on national regional and international level, to make projects to include Roma position and to make sure that 30 percent of those projects are about Roma women and are dedicated to improving the position of Roma women and also organize seminars conferences and events, meetings on the rights- improve position of Roma life in Vojvodina, fight stereotypes and prejudices about this group, which are significant not only in Serbia.

So far efforts have been modest- I would say because its new it’s a new entity and we have done the first thing we did research on Roma Ngos in Vojvodina. We gathered them all in this address book with this printing we have done a number of research on their conditions in Roma entities across Vojvodina. So we are in a phase of implementation of that. The results of research, on the status of Roma women in Vojvodina which is very interesting and we made report on how Roma women who live in Vojvodina. In terms of family life, possibility of employment, human rights, ect. and so on that topic is very important in Vojvodina.

Roma women subject to double discrimination as Roma women and as well as women in their own communities, we also organized a number of seminars and conferences.

Firstly we did this public presentation of action plans for the information of Roma. The conference called Roma women can do it, some technical seminars regarding software programs, translated into Roma language and so on, and some sort of actions- such as this exit from the violence, 60 days of activism fighting the violence over women and so on, regarding the education program and so on and so on. So basically our activity is strongly connected to this national strategy of the integration of Roma, which is also a project of the decade of Roma and there were four action plans that were adopted by the city government, and so far for the four basic areas: education health, employment and housing or habitation. And there’s a lot of other segments of this to be yet made and adopted by the government.

Well regarding the fact that problems with Roma are so, so large and so, so unique you don’t know where to start with them. Do you start with the education do you start with the humanitarian help or with any sort of aid, do you start with the employment and helping them get a job so its the kind of a circular process where you can get lost and realize that you didn’t find the right start and I don’t think that’s a project hat is easy to solve so and soon as people who are in charge who have the power to start dealing with the problem and I consider this office to be. I suppose we are getting more and more involved in these problems.
As soon as we realize how to start and which start is the best for us only then can we say we need this time, this period, now it’s possible to say. We can’t say we need ten years to solve unemployment in Serbia I don’t think that’s possible. I don’t think that’s possible to say now, to be said at this point. Only when we get started with the process and tackle the problem properly only then can we say we need. I don’t think that’s possible to say at this point.

I think Romas are becoming more and more you know the object of planning and actions and action plans. I think they’re being more and more involved in the current politics. With two of their parties the parliament maybe gets easier, maybe not. There’s an obvious absence of Roma nationality on any sort of decision making levels. Not only in politics but as well there’s an absence in the bodies that should be making decisions regarding Romas themselves. It’s hard to gather the commissions and the bodies that are working on the action plans now we have problems to gather and to target not only people who are educated enough but also that people who are willing enough to get involved to get active so influence of Romas is definitely weaker than it should be.

I don’t remember how it was a decade ago but this is the first time in a recent period of time that a Roma party is a member of a national parliament. So currently we have two Roma parties with only representative in the parliament for two parties which is also interesting. So with the changes of the election system in Serbia it was made possible very possible for them to enter the body of the decision making party so that’s it. There are some possibilities and chances for them to become part of this minority block in the democratic government.

We can talk or we can question the quality of the people who are representing the Roma but that’s not my thing to question and the people who wont vote for them that’s best but definitely its good for them to have any sort of representation on that level. Oh there are more than two parties for Romas but ah they just you know they…there’s no unity and this sort of there’s no joint action among them as well not only among the people who are working for the sake of human rights in general for Roma human rights or whatever its hard even for them to achieve this sort of unity this uh I lost the word.

Nothing so far (for education) but a lot of research on that so we did, first we have to do a lot of research to see where we stand and what are the current statistics on that, how many people attend schools, how many people graduate, to what different levels, what is the percent of Roma women who attend school, so in terms of information on where we stand know I can give you some information if you like but the projects yet to be made and organized especially when the…fund only a few days ago approved and allocated to us.

Definitely a must, the schools and education systems is obliged to organize education in the language of the nationalities… so um its very hard to organize that sort of education first you don’t have standardized Roma language firstly, that’s the first problem second problem you don’t have the teachers who can teach in the problem because it is a language that does not exist and after that then you have lack of educated Roma who know the language and could are able to teach and after that …and then you have segregation in terms of language when different parts of Vojvodina different entities and
towns villages etc speak different kinds different forms types of Roma language. So it’s almost impossible to manage, to achieve. As far as I know there are attempts to do so but as far as I know they are dealing with a lot of problems and majority of Roma who attend school do that in Serbian.

There are a lot of plans regarding improvement of Roma life and living and every aspect of their life but that’s the thing. At this point you should go and see the other Ngos. Maybe they have done something similar to that. Maybe it’s interesting for you to know there are several schools in Novi Sad they are dealing with children in a very early age that dropped school in the normal school system they are dealing with them in separate classes mostly sponsored by the EU separate funds program. They basically they collect those children off the street and just take them into school maybe a couple days a week as much as you can. That was interesting for me because I realized that this was happening because I’m new at this I’ve only after a couple of months. I did the research on the status or Roma with disabilities here in Vojvodina and I had the opportunity to meet a number of teachers who are dealing with Roma help with homework, etc…. Or dealing with children who are at the edge of…ok so in they’re in the hardest possible social conditions and they just I had this chance to go to the Veliki Rit it’s a habitation for Roma just outside Novi Sad. I was there and this woman that was accompanying me it was a teacher at one of the school she was just grabbing them saying what are you doing, oh I’m just playing, oh come on let’s go you’re going to school… she was just recruiting them in their slippers and whatever in pajamas it was really just across the street. And they were having these classes of language, maths, drawing whatever. so just as much as possible you know. Better something than nothing.

Campaigning has an important place in understanding… Ngos have most of the job for that section I’m not sure how in what to what extent I can help you or what sort of information I can give you because the funds are just coming to the office and everything that should be made or should have be made by now is yet to be happening in the future.

I think we should work on two fronts work with Roma and non-Roma

Not enough to campaign among non-Roma people and say Roma are people Roma are they same as we are they have rights…at the same time we should go to Roma and say you know what you have these rights you have these obligations you don’t have to live the way you have so far and we are willing to help you, you should be aware of all those aspects the obligations of citizens of this country obligation of children to attend schools, to work and at the same time to help them educate, find jobs just include them into all the levels of the social life.

So it’s such a general, such a big task at this moment, I cannot give you the specific answer

But the idea I have about that is that we should tackle both groups, you know, Roma and not Roma at the same time. With the same seriousness and the same dedication.

I’m not sure it’s a one-way thing, you know, I’m sure that there’s more to that. Definitely I think there’s a part of Roma that are happy with the way they live. And even if they were offered a different type of life they would definitely refuse it, they would definitely pass on it, so you cannot speak in general terms in general manner about Romas. Because there’s always Roma this sort of Roma who live normally who have
normal job, certain amount of even social integration…then there’s this part of Roma who live their life trying to get, trying to make their life better and who would like to change and who are willing to change who can change and who would like to make their life better. You have to help yourself you have to be willing to work to educate and you have to willing to change the orientation the…sort of reeducation, you know if you’re equipped to do a certain job maybe you should do some more education and more learning to be able to do the things that are needed on the labor market. So the wishing and the will to educate to work to work hard and a big number of Romas are not ready for that and the biggest problem is to change their mentality as well. How to make them realize that they could be equal member of society? With same rights with the same benefits with the same obligations. There’s a generation of habit to live a certain way. Its very hard to change now because when you do something next generation comes and comes into basically same environment as last one. So it will take a lot of time a lot a lot of time, much more than ten years.

It’s a two way thing. It is influenced by the mentality of non Romas but it is also strongly influenced by the way generations before them lived their lives but to is influenced by their mentality as well you can ask any number of experts on Roma people and they will tell you that they are not willing to change and I believe that’s the biggest problem. Because that group which is bigger and smaller in different areas will make difficulties for the others to change, to improve. For the others it will be very difficult to change to improve their lives. If they see that there’s a big number of Romas that until yesterday were the same as they were. Lets get things straight. They are not highly motivated to change so their not going to be when they are changing in that sort of environment.”
Appendix 4
Interview with Nenad Vladisavljević
Association for Roma Students
April 20th 2007.

Yes of course Romanipe. We are using it in an intellectual, scientists…but when you say to an ordinary Roma Romanipe he means our ciganska posla ah Romanipe I’m not anymore student this Bologna declaration was introduced here and I took a degree, I will not go to masters I will take a degree to be honest I don’t have any more strength. I studied sociology and also philosophy but to have a degree in philosophy I will have 6 more exams so I will not have philosophy…
Even I was a good student you know. But really I’m tired of being too busy.
I worked also for council of Europe for two years as consultant of stability pack. Now I’m working with association and I’m having problems with students I’m coordinating one program donated by care international and Europe commission and it’s about employment and education, middle education, like high school yeah but that’s you know now I would like to speak about other things right now not me.
Them is the newspaper every two weeks on Roma language and it’s financed by the executive council of Romas. Majorso is the official language of the Hungarian minority here is financed by government and Them is the Roma newspaper we share the space we have also space in Veliki Rit.
So the Them is the newspaper do you want to know something about the association. I think that’s interesting for your perspective of cultural identity this student story we are established in 2002. It was a group of students who established this had idea and actually the first project that we had was about the cultural identity. I was not there at that time first I’m younger not so younger but younger than the first generation project was to raise value of high Roma culture to make affirmation of this and to make some kind of gap between this circus image of Roma you know like dancing folklore, this rude they speak and this kind of image so the university of Novi Sad we organized one week manifestation black and white world we have a concert of Roma octet…violins 8 Roma students from university of Novi Sad music academy had concert there we also had Roma painters academic painters and I don’t remember any more but it was one week of events of different kinds of Roma culture, so-called high Roma culture so to make the future elite of this country, students, to make a different.. to offer alternatives to them, alternative picture of Roma. That’s one of our wishes one of the aims of our organization to offer to them different image of Roma but also what we do we offer different image to Roma themselves about themselves so we are working on that. To raise the value of education in our system because it’s not valued in our system, the education value is down. It’s not important in our culture, so we use different kind of tricks for that but this is another story.
Circus image it’s like I can give you my one example from my private life. I have non Roma friends from when I was very young and my father was musician my grandfather was a musician and everyone was musician and they know my father because their from the same village and so on so the I went to their friends my non-Roma friends house that was the year when I went to university. For the first year and his father told me why you are going to the university just take your tambura like your father, you don’t need that.
So it’s that kind of image you know we are from the low folk music that’s what we are for, for the cleaning and this services garbage mining they call that so this is that circus image you know like we are the people for amusement for low paid amusement. But we are happy people even we are poor and that’s it. And women are there to fortune-teller and that’s all that they can see…which is the only picture of Roma women just fortune tellers or stole your kids or something like that.

You know it had visible effect because our organization got visibility in the university and after that we can ask for whatever we want from the university but I’m not sure on the students if they got the message of course attendance was very high but we didn’t measure that its hard to measure that kind of things actually impossible. I think the good is that if we organized that kind of concert now it would not be shock so this is or exhibition so its not shock. Today it’s not shock. We had lots of that kind of programs and projects.

Now we are doing the rap music. The hip-hop music. On Saturday we will have three groups that we join here in Them all of three groups will be here. Yeah you can come. at 12:00. Actually the kids you know they are very from the settlements here and Novi Sad and this area they are very much in this music you know so they are dancing, break dance and they have also songs, some songs and we decided to support this scene we have one thing one England Ngo called our point and they are helping us…management finding the place where we’ll bring them the can so the idea is to influence the other young people through this music find a way to influence other young people through this music this is the common thing for the Roma and non-Roma not others…young people teenagers the thing is that its easier to influence young people than older so if they are together in this and Roma with their special identity because they are singing in Roma language not all the time the matrix the musical matrix the people form the association had this Roma influenced music but its hip hop and its interesting the people from association had this Roma influenced music but its hip hop its interesting so that it should take actually this low circus image to use for this purpose and to show that something good can be out of this so this is what we are doing and it’s also in Belgrade someone else is doing that and in Nis. We are doing here this in Novi Sad. It’s not project but it’s idea the same idea.

They are two other people doing its not project but the same idea.

Yes we have songs, you know I am DJ for the two groups I’m making matrix, I’m very involved now because when I was young I was listening to this music and you know so I played more than 12 years in one rock hard core so its very common philosophy this.

We have also girls. You will see. That’s very important because usually in hip hop music girls are you know only for dancing and we are trying to push them also that they sing and actually, one girl, one band she’s the sister of one of the players, actually she’s been doing the text so it’s a pity that she’s not inside so we decided you know that she needs to be involved that she should to sing so that’s very important to us…if you show the image of a girl who is educated in this hip hop music and not just gangster….show to others who are young that’s very good picture.

I really don’t know because its 60 students officially at university of Novi Sad. We have from that maybe 30, and now employed in our organization, employed or have some kind of project at school we have 8 and in this project we have three and these kids there is
one more so about 15 have some kinds of contract but we have now finished one project
lots of people …
We have finished one project with lots of people,
not everyone has this conscious that they should do something. They are just using
opportunity, that’s one of the problems that we have faced now. Because now the third
generation and lets say that I am this generation, we had a role to break this because we
went to university without any benefits, you know like our father and mother they send
us. And with time we achieved, with some other people, all the Roma community,
achieved to get some affirmative action for them to get to university….to get a
scholarship, student hostel, even if they didn’t pass the next year, that’s unusual. So the
new generation they are a bit spoiled and they are not to be here, they should not be here
in a usual situation. They are not so high profile like the older generation…..actually we
are thinking of how to deal with this problem and we don’t know what to do. But the
profile is lower and lower.
so they have finished 3 years so actually we are thinking how to deal with these
programs how to do…but the profile is lower and lower…..
I don’t know you cannot trying to wake something in someone who doesn’t have that’s
inside of himself I don’t know that’s a very big problem the younger students are
too….we are talking about historical responsibility of students you know we are coming
from the 90’s this uh legacy student legacy because when you have the people working
and the students when they protest then the countries over every government goes down
so we are form this legacy the students should be critical of the society….to say we are in
crisis this is not good…so we have this high aim this…we should influence Roma
community and also non-Roma community we are the brain of everything
And they don’t realize this story they don’t.
I don’t have any more time to deal with this I am almost 30 I am not anymore young and
for this I don’t know that we are discussing about that but we don’t have a solution.
There is one more organization actually student organization that’s a big
misunderstanding. I wasn’t here when that everything happened. Each year the new
students came and the old generation of students, many of them, they didn’t have
scholarship and these benefits. So when the new students they got scholarship, came
they came free to university and they got the hostel they came for free to the hostel so the
young students were not interested in dealing with these things in doing for scholarship
and they were not interested in doing anything in the association and they came and
asked whether we can do the association for us so the old students they didn’t do
anything for actually for the…lets say me but I was not here, we didn’t do anything ….I
was not here when the started….didn’t do anything to listen what they need we thought
hey got everything what do they need more because they should work something of
Roma they should do something, they are not preparing when we are organizing
something so once they just call us group of this students, five students, and they told us
they will organize new organizations they will organize a new student organization that
will deal only with student questions so we said ok that’s your right to organize
yourself….but uh and in the beginning it was like a little bit of confrontations but now we
are working together because ok we are not doing this student questions only when
people are coming to university in first year we are not doing this law this simple student
questions student organizations should do something more like student parliament….not
just private questions of whether or not I will get the scholarships…they don’t want to do any projects because they are afraid they will not finish studies like me because I studied so long
But this is the problem with students from the population
And what’s the problem now these students, these young students many of them, very big number not getting in next year. So they are not doing projects and they are not finishing studies, they are not profiled to finish. They came from the low background, low middle school background. So we have a big problem, they are not doing anything in Roma community and they are also not finishing studies. Other side they are not they don’t want to do any projects any activities but in the Roma students organization they have advertisements for job offers they employ these young students. So we have uh 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 for who it’s the first or second years third employed because they applied. so the situations very and I’m tired of dealing with this issue and its not appropriate for me anymore to dealing with students I can be in the association for two three years because I have employment now…I can offer some basic trainings to raise their intellectual capacity there is one very good thing its at Univ. of Novi Sad school of Romology this is very good for students they can get more intellectual there’s lots of good lesions that they can get but even there their not Roma many of them are not going there and that’s not good it’s very good education…
Of course it is you know he has already mentioned it’s good for them to know more about their own culture. Take their books and they feel better because they know all about history they see that they are here also recommendation of every other and this is also good initiative.
All of these problems that we face now at the moment and it’s very important for the Roma communities because this is the elite. In all societies you have intellectuals and you have intelligentsia. It’s not the same intelligentsia are the people who are employed and working with this education…intellectuals are the ones saying people we are in crisis what is far from human values…so these generation I see that these generations should be intelligentsia they cannot be intellectuals…it’s important that they finish studies that we have people who can go in institutions who can work and so on…we cannot change situation of Roma….like in other countries student movements are very strong.

School is our project. It’s implementing since 3 years ago. I think we have 8 people employed there, 8 educators we call them. We have 3 groups there of kids total 120 kids coming there. And there is a preschool group, group for kids from elementary school who face the problems in some of the like math, Serbian language, there’s a group of kids who drop out who are illiterate who are 10 or 11 years. .our students who studied this faculty for pre-school teaching, they are the coordinators and they are educators there. So we also have other older educators who are working there. Roma you know the Roma from Kosovo IDPs they don’t speak Roma they speak Albanian its in Serbian you know because they need to…
So what are we doing we are also doing one project its Roma education project…it’s a very big Ngo maybe biggest in Novi Sad. So it’s some kind of research or equality needs of education of Roma in Vojvodina and we are using this new popular method of research called the participative method…. 
Focus groups and um you know that kind of. We finished the research and now the processes when we brought the results and we built the municipalities local action plans. You know for the decade of Roma inclusion and each decade you have 4 action plans… These are poor are already adopted by the nah but you know that on the local level so we are trying to make some local action plans so we are trying to make its own document and be in charge of its implementation. I applied as a researcher to see what this is about so I am not involved actually what I got each municipality where we made the research different stakeholders like Roma leaders Roma parents and um people from local institutions they think that it should be changed there….concrete local problems and how to deal with them…on basis of this results there is technique for bringing this results together with local institutions….I know in Belgium because I went there.

What else we are doing? We just started this big project, its very big because the budget is very high. Three years project care international European commission, employment and education and also community development. Education is to work on this Roma elite, students, to build their capacities and to motivate in the middle school, Roma who are finishing this year and next year high school to go to university. It’s a really big campaign. regarding employment we will organize the job fairs and trying to already existing opportunities to make closer to Roma and we will work on trade union with Roma and helping assistant Roma establishing guilds different kinds of guilds. But there’s a different kinds of activities there in school. Now they have exhibition with kids and so on. That’s I think at the moment everything that we are doing. We are negotiating with Roma education fund for this- Macedonians implemented this project. and the Roma education fund applying the project to another country only apply project middle school scholarships for Roma…kids who are going to the middle school they don’t have any support….

(Osman Balic) just brought what we are feeling inside for me its Romanipe. I am not sure I didn’t talk about that. I don’t know whether it can be its father son and holy spirit. They don’t use that term you know its not very common to use that term. But I don’t I really don’t know what could be said for them they say everything about that in their text in their music its hard for me to verbalize.

Our students are journalists- usual newspapers it has everything…everything in the Roma language
They are not like something critical it’s a bit dangerous they are trying t be usual just informative for common Roma in the settlements t be able to read it it is just to foster our language just that….there are no columns investigated….neutral and just to foster language.

Lots of difficulties lots of dialects even here is Vojvodina. We have those Roma they speak one dialect and there are many I speak Gurbet….the deal is that every journalist should write in his own dialect. There are some journalists in Paris there is one university called uh its for far east languages and there is a group for Roma language…he actually he made this codification of Roma writing so when they made us some…it’s from Paris so I will read this and ch and someone from the other dialect would read this as k so its from the same but different pronunciation so there is the same writing but its not used I think only one journalist used and its not very good because only I know how to read this. Television and radio our culture is a voice culture its not a written culture with this them we are trying to make people to read because it’s the best way to keep language if we lose
language what is Roma culture we can say this is the thing that we are different from others when we lose language what are you
No. usual Roma like my grandfather when you give him this for the first time he is laughing what is this so they are not against but they are…
Them unfortunately…they do not have very good pr it’s a small office they have only 2 or 3 people who are temporarily employed also the…its slow its very expensive to print the newspaper they are not very young.
They if you call them they will come, Subotica wherever you are and they will ask about it what it is about and they will publish this but they are not you know very self reliable too.

Because Roma have tradition of listening to radio it’s the best way and also television but you know the newspaper and also the voice you know posters in Roma settlements we are…Roma Ngos and leaders in settlements to spread ideas this is the way.
Do you think the local media is a good way to challenge stereotypes about Roma people…
Now I think that the media in Serbia they are on quite high level so that its very professional they are not any more this kind of events when media made something about bad about Roma usually the media are aware of this thing with Roma so they are trying to trying to if not to change the picture of Roma but not creating bad picture me personally I’m satisfied with how the Roma are presented in media…in 90s some “Rom killed someone” but if it’s Hungarian they will not say. But not that’s not the case I think we have a good media actually they are one of the machines of killing Milosevic I respect them.

We are here since 2000 somehow we are keeping one to each other together we don’t face these kinds of problems of assimilation with students there are students we just heard about…give recommendation for scholarship they got it and they don’t they never answer our calls and they finish the studies and the employ outside of the issue so there are issues and people are ashamed that they are Roma. Its still in this country its ashamed to be Roma
We never face these kinds of problems in university in middle school and elementary school yes but not in university we are quite visible
In the high school um there we face these assimilation problems because Roma are very low number its not so low but according to our estimation each you you have…
You have young Roma you can see in Novi Sad who are working with secondary school but they don’t declare themselves as Roma.
When there is a census Romanian Roma they say they are Romanian so called Serbian Roma they say they are Serbian still existing but not so much among students and in university we don’t offer them the opportunity.
Appendix 5
Interview with Ramiz Selimi
Folklore Dance Group
April 23 2007.

“There exist more kinds of cultural, artistic societies who are engaged with folklore. I work as an artist who leads an art and culture organization that is not only for Roma children but also non-Roma children. I work with another organization who are mostly Roma. So girls and boys. The children are between 15 and 20 something years old…until they get married…

This Roma organization has existed for 6 years and up to now has had around 200 kids. We existed for 80 years before becoming an NGO…Now we have people who are married, we have men, we have work that I have done with this dance. We’re working on a research project on folklore, we’re working on with an Arlijski Roma cultural group….We work with another arts and culture group, a Serbian group, there was a seminar and I got a certificate. Because of the seminar I have the right to work and to make choreography. So the group is still going on and later we’ll present something, I have the certificate, I passed the test.

Everything depends on what region it (the folklore) comes from. You have, for research work on Vojvodina, every part of every region has it’s dances. You have special Srem dances, special Backe dances, special dances from Banata, many kinds of dance can be found. Not just one but many. Serbia has it’s own part, it has a different mentality. Everything depends on where you live, how you live, for how long, and in what country you live. Jelena knows, which kind of dance does Jelena know? Sremska, Ciganica….Jelena said Ciganica, that’s what the dance and song, its really nice. All every dance has its beginning and it’s end, it’s literal finish, the state in which it lives, that is that tradition which one choreography renders about the life of a people. They write how people live…every Srem dance…a people write their life in their dance.

The Roma from Kosovo, we’re talking about, they’re different…they have some… it’s said that India, the oriental idea that they brought everything…everyone took something from someone. I’m talking about taking beliefs, if beliefs from there are Islam and they hold on to that here.

Here they hold on to things. If we say that we are Roma, we say that we are from India, and they say that from India, Malaya, it’s said that there was a war, Persia, they came, they left the Muslims and they brought their culture and they hold onto their language. I can’t say that it is the same dialect but the same we say that they brought their previous one. We didn’t have an organized group, and now that next is Roma, I can’t say that I have done research work, that I can’t say, some can be found out. Someone could go from place to place and found out about what is tradition and what isn’t. I can say that my own…that what I do is one version and there are more versions, Kovacke for instance has a dance in which only women dance…now there are different ones also have been here for 500 years, some things they held onto some things they absorbed, and things were brought also, Turks…You have dances from the orient…in India there is complete fact, special choreography. That’s why there is enough to base for example ….a lot on
something to lead to dance which is called ??? and that dance is from Bulgaria, from Macedonia although I haven’t heard for example that that dance is in Kosovo, never. Now there’s domestic ones, we are dance that is known, you can see how every group finds their own. Bulgaria has a school for folklore for them in their country but here we don’t have that. Here, 5, 6 years, a school for folklore…As it concerns Roma, we dance what we know. Any kind of thing. What I know is that there is not a lot of knowledge about folklore, because I haven’t found anything. Literature, this dance from here, this dance from there, that dance, twice to the left twice to the right and once in place. There’s no kind of literature which can say that this is that. Nothing. There’s a very little bit, one or two or three dances that have been written about. I haven’t heard of anything else.

Last year we had one community concert in Beocin and around 1000 people came. We had a concert together with some others, with Slovaks we had a concert, our society also worked with a Serbian organization. We organized a community concert that lasted two hours in a stadium. It was in a big stadium. It was in July. It was a phenomenon. We had only one concert. Only one community concert with them. It’s participatory every year on the 7th of April, on World Roma Day. It depends on if it’s raining, on a Saturday or Sunday…the 8th of April, for World Roma Day they always organize Samostavi concert. Only Roma participate. Someone could be invited as a guest. And we speak in Roma and in Serbian. The press comes…

There are three kinds of dance that are written about. There’s Romano, Rom which is danced in southern Serbia. Romano it’s usually called. There’s Cigancica which is here, that’s danced here. Sremi Vojvodina. That’s all I know about that we have written, you understand? I’ve found some books, I found a seminar on how it’s danced. And other writing, about the steps I don’t know, but it could be researched. I don’t know which provinces that we could say we have in southern Serbia, so specifically for Serbia for western Serbia, specific research is necessary, research which is engaged, which exists, maybe someone who doesn’t know across the board, here there’s a specific book but it’s necessary to find written material if there is any. I don’t know.

I’ve tried. There’s an NGO in Bulgaria, one written project which has to do with some research work on something that I could say would be a written book about Roma dance. There’s nothing like that, there’s some NGOS who could finance it and prepare it. I mean, completely, that’s why I say that every dance from every place has a step that comes from somewhere and this is how it’s danced. It has a step that is danced, left, right…it’s not danced like this, he wants it danced like this, it’s uncovered territory…Everyone has their own. But I say we really talk, Jelena, about the women from the Embassy of Bulgaria that they work it out so that some NGO which really could make some research work happen that they could write a book, something written about folklore in culture. About folklore there’s really no kind of book. None, Here there isn’t even one person, one group who compile…people should write everything and then put it in one book. That can’t happen in a day, it would take a year to make a written book like that.
For all of folklore, one choreography is made and then your choreography can be performed...and each choreography with song and dance. A choreography is made in the tradition of one people (nationality) making one choreography.

There is a seminar for people who want to take a seminar specifically for working in the community as an NGO as a social organization for anyone who is engaged with folklore. Now there are people who know a lot of folklore. They want to teach someone else, and so we have this seminar for everyone who is interested.

So I finished a seminar on Sremski dance, I got a diploma, I got a cassette, I got music and later with that certificate of that diploma it’s possible to make dances here, I have the right to do that, I got a diploma to do so.

I can say that I can make here and here that’s why I can sign my name that I performed this dance for someone somewhere...I can’t say now that I am a choreographer, I’m not an important choreographer that I can impose that for the kids I worked with...I am an artistic leader, and the choreography is put there and with the first name and last name...I write my name to say that that is mine and that no one can take it. That’s why there exists this certificate diploma, I went to the seminar, the school. For every choreography that we make, the person who makes it writes it down, that has to exist, every choreography has its written part, what it’s called, how it’s danced, who the choreographer is, there has to be something written and that stays. ...I have written documentation, that I made this and that it can’t be taken from me, that if someone would take it, it would say that they could...every choreography has a written document.

Thanks to god (it can be repeated). Dances are not forgotten. If they’re good, they’re not. If they’re not good, they’re forgotten...

Every choreography has a song and a dance, it has a story and its fast. Every time it has a story and every time it’s fast. A choreography always has a slow and fast part. At the end it is the fastest. When it finishes. Not all the dances are the same.

One man sings. It’s a song and it’s danced. The songs are about love. The most beautiful songs are about love. We have ones that are about couples and then songs for when someone’s sad...he left me, he won’t return, they say he’s found another, it’s over...there’s a lot about that. We practice three times on Sundays when there’s some big concert...three times on Sunday for two hours...Wednesday, Friday, we have a space or now in the upstina we have a space or we pay...We pay for two times, we practice with the music and the dance. Ten pairs, ten girls ten boys.

This is one way that we can keep children and teach them something and then when they learn it they can tell someone else. We can’t (escape?) We are Roma and that’s that. We are unique...we live our own culture, some people like it some people don’t, we are what we are and we’re not nameless people, we’re world people, we’re all around the world.

For the culture of folklore in terms of how much I know about it it’s now or never. It happened before that a Roma organization organized something but that was one time only that’s not representative of all...that’s only because there’s nothing written, nothing that can organize it, so that I can say there is this folklore seminar for example somewhere, we can go there and I can learn something that I don’t know. There’s no one to finance and nothing. It’s most important that there be something written.

That’s why no one knows what’s going on with Roma folklore, I don’t know, there’s nothing about Roma folklore written anywhere.