

THE ROMA

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE 2013–2014 MISSION STUDY

The Roma *of* Europe

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United
Methodist
Women

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When Greek police searched a Roma camp for weapons and drugs in October 2013, they came across a little blond-haired, green-eyed girl named Maria. The police assumed the girl had been kidnapped, so they arrested the Roma parents and handed the girl over to an orphanage. When DNA testing revealed that the couple was not the girl's biological parents, the couple said Maria had been left with them by a Bulgarian Roma woman who was too poor to care for her daughter, a story that turned out to be basically true. But that didn't stop the Greek media from dubbing Maria "the blond angel" and proclaiming in banner headlines: "Roma snatch babies!" and "Amber Alert: Dangerous Gypsy band steals babies!"¹

The drama around Maria and her family illustrates that racist stereotypes about Europe's largest and most marginalized ethnic group still flow freely despite efforts by governments and civil society groups across Europe to change the way Roma are seen both by others and by themselves. More than six decades after Roma bodies fueled the fires of the Holocaust, Europe is still wrestling with how to stop vilifying and start integrating the Roma into mainstream society.

That's what was at play in Greece, where Panagiotis Dimitras of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, an Athens-based human rights group, told *The Independent*, a British newspaper, that the "disgusting and condemnable" arrest of Maria's adoptive parents was based on "a racist presumption by the Greek authorities . . . just because [the parents] are Roma."²

Maria was picked up during a police sweep of the Roma settlement in Farsala, part of a broader police operation across the country that involved profiling ethnic groups and migrants. In the first nine months of 2013, Greek police conducted 1,131 operations in Roma camps throughout the country, during which 19,067 people were temporarily detained, and 1,305 were subsequently arrested on charges of having committed an offense.³ Ironically, the police dubbed the campaign Operation Xenios Zeus after the ancient Greek god of hospitality.

The racist response wasn't limited to Greece. Centuries-old stereotypes about Roma know no borders, and the story was quickly picked up around the world. Families in the United Kingdom and the United States whose girls had disappeared contacted authorities wanting to know if there was any chance that Maria could be their daughter.

Within days of the news about the Greek girl, a witch hunt was under way. Officials and ordinary people in many countries scoured Roma enclaves for suspiciously light-skinned children. In Ireland, a Dublin woman saw a TV news report about the Greek case and quickly drafted a Facebook message to a local TV reporter about a "little girl living in a Roma house in Tallaght [a Dublin suburb] and she is blond and has blue eyes." She provided the name and address of the family, and the reporter passed it on to the police. Within hours, the seven-year-old girl was taken from her family and handed to Irish welfare officials, after the parents couldn't find her birth certificate and could produce only an outdated passport. When news

of that incident broke, someone else in Dublin told the police about a fair-haired two-year-old boy living in a Roma household in Athlone, west of Dublin. The police immediately pulled him from his home.⁴

Both children were eventually returned to their families after DNA testing confirmed their parentage, but activists point out how the incidents highlighted the power of stereotypes. “The feeling and the reaction is one of shock and disbelief that something like this could happen in a so-called Western, civilized, developed country,” said Martin Collins, co-director at Pavee Point, an organization in Dublin that works with Roma and Irish Travellers, who are distinct from Roma but also have an itinerant lifestyle. “This was clearly a case of racial profiling and it is extremely dangerous,” he said.⁵

For Damian Le Bas, the editor of *Travellers’ Times*, a London magazine, the rush to judgment was troubling. “I’m a blond person from a Gypsy family. My hair and eye color were different from many of my relatives. It’s a ridiculous idea that we all look the same. We look about as similar as all Italians look similar,” he said. “There’s a lack of will to understand the difference.”⁶

The Roma as scapegoats

According to Isabel Fonseca, author of *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey*, these recent incidents illustrate the assumption that Roma are always involved in illegal activity. “There are blonde Gypsies, lots of them,” Fonseca told the radio program *Here & Now*. Yet she said that widespread prejudice ignores that fact in favor of an ancient “stereotype that the Gypsies will come in the night and steal the blonde child.”⁷

The Greek case was particularly alarming, Fonseca said, because of the “sort of glee with which it’s been seized on as proof of a sort of genetic disposition to criminality.” In a country like Greece, with its current economic troubles, she said it’s not surprising that the Roma would serve as “a handy scapegoat for all ills in a given society.”⁸

Persecuting individuals for the alleged crimes of their racial group has a long history, and Zeljko Jovanovic, director of the Open Society Foundations’ Roma Initiatives Office in Hungary, said the rush to judgment in the Greek case provided a “perfect excuse for many to intensify collective blame for Roma.”⁹ What’s ironic, he pointed out, is the media’s failure to cover the story when Roma are the victims of criminal activity, such as the disappearance of 502 out of 661 Albanian Roma children who went missing from 1998 to 2002 from a state-run institution in Athens. Some reports suggest the children were delivered to human traffickers. But while hundreds of Roma children being taken from their families by the state fails to cause a stir, one blond-haired girl supposedly snatched by Gypsies is instant headline news.

Such easy scapegoating is widespread. When French harvesters started finding fewer wild mushrooms in their forests in 2013, they quickly blamed Roma immigrants from Eastern

Europe for stealing their crop and clandestinely hauling it off to Spain in the middle of the night. Some self-appointed mushroom defenders even claimed the Roma were incorrectly harvesting the highly prized fungi, thus damaging next year's crop.¹⁰

"From the mushrooms' perspective, I don't think they care if they are picked by a native or by someone who is not French and takes them to another country," Thomas Kuyper, a professor of fungal ecology and diversity at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, told *The New York Times*. The claim that mushrooms were being picked incorrectly, he said, was more about xenophobia and anger about losing business, noting that there were similar attitudes in the Netherlands toward pickers from Germany and Poland. "Are people worried for the mushrooms or about the foreigners?" he asked.¹¹

Yet the concept of "foreigner" is in flux with the current expansion of the European Union. The admission of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, for example, meant that citizens of those countries were now free to travel within the EU. They weren't immediately free to seek legal employment, however, leaving many of those who ventured west at the mercy of employers who exploited their labor at a fraction of the minimum wage.¹² Thus many European Roma are caught between discrimination at home, where overall economic stagnation harms all who are poor, and violent repression in their new homes, where increasingly virulent xenophobia and racism easily weave their way into public debate and policy. Repressive policies are driven, to a degree, by class competition. "As the poor lose out in the region's economic crisis, they find themselves getting closer to the Roma, who are always one level lower. If neither has work, they begin to see the Roma as competitors, and get angry if they see the Roma getting any sort of assistance," said Thomas Rodemeyer, coordinator for Roma Ministries for The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe.¹³

European Union governments, faced with popular discontent about high unemployment, "are finding it easier to stigmatize and expel Roma than to provide them with the education, housing and employment they seek," opined *The New York Times* in October 2013.¹⁴

Things are getting worse. "What is truly shocking is that their living conditions have actually deteriorated since many of them became EU citizens. At the same time, the majority population's attitude has become more hostile almost everywhere in Europe. The two trends are mutually reinforcing: marginalization breeds contempt, and vice versa," wrote the philanthropist George Soros in November 2013, describing the plight of Europe's Roma. "Let's be honest: there is a Roma problem in Europe, and it is getting worse. But both the problem and its worsening reflect a toxic combination of deep-seated hostility and persistent neglect."¹⁵

"Maybe Hitler didn't kill enough of them"

Anyone who wonders why the Roma would leave their home countries and migrate westward need only read the words of Zsolt Bayer, cofounder of the ruling Fidesz party in Hungary. "A significant part of the Roma are unfit for coexistence. They are not fit to live among people.

These Roma are animals, and they behave like animals. When they meet with resistance, they commit murder. They are incapable of human communication. Inarticulate sounds pour out of their bestial skulls. At the same time, these Gypsies understand how to exploit the ‘achievements’ of the idiotic Western world. But one must retaliate rather than tolerate. These animals shouldn’t be allowed to exist. In no way. That needs to be solved—immediately and regardless of the method,” he wrote in January 2013 in the conservative daily newspaper *Magyar Hirlap*.¹⁶

Bayer has also used the pages of *Magyar Hirlap* to refer to Jews as “stinking excrement.”¹⁷ Such explicit racism is a reminder that the fate of Jews and Roma were inextricably linked together in the Nazi death camps during the twentieth century in Europe. Yet while post-war Europe was relatively quick to acknowledge that the Holocaust was rooted in racial hatred for Jews, excuses for violence against the Roma have lingered unchallenged, with right-wing politicians and law enforcement personnel saying they deserve repression given their alleged predisposition toward illicit behavior.

In July 2013, Gilles Bourdouleix, a member of the National Assembly in France, was recorded during a confrontation with Roma squatters stating, “Maybe Hitler didn’t kill enough of them.” He later argued that he had been misquoted, but a prosecutor began a preliminary investigation into whether Bourdouleix was an “apologist for crimes against humanity,” a crime in France that carries a maximum penalty of up to 45,000 euros and one year in jail.¹⁸

The increasing hostility toward Roma in Western Europe is based on a notion that they are outsiders. The EU can expand its geographical borders, but widening the cultural concept of what is European is something else. “These are dark-skinned people, not Europeans like you and me,” said Riccardo De Corato, the deputy vice mayor of Milan, Italy, defending his administration’s closure of Roma camps in 2010.¹⁹

A World Bank-funded survey in 2005 showed non-Roma citizens in several European countries exhibited no interest in examining their own prejudices as a causal factor in the marginalization of the Roma. “The prevailing perception is that the Roma are responsible for their low social and economic standing. It is no surprise that non-Roma express deep opposition to any government funding targeting only the Roma,” the report stated. “The views of the so-called majority populations exhibit several contradictions. They base their opinions about Roma on day-to-day observations, but many have only had superficial contact with Roma. All groups favor integration, but non-Roma bristled when specific examples of integrated schools and communities were raised. Non-Roma claim that Roma prefer segregation and thus are the ones who must take the initiative to integrate.”²⁰

Underlying both the blatant hate speech of politicians like Bourdouleix and De Corato as well as that of more nuanced commentators is a stubborn belief that the Roma are responsible for their own fate. While that sentiment obviously ignores centuries of European history, it shows up across the political spectrum. In Germany, where many Roma newcom-

ers are looking for housing, a group called Pro Deutschland, an anti-Muslim party with ties to neo-Nazi and other extremist groups, discouraged Berlin landlords from renting to Roma by passing out leaflets claiming the Roma had come to the city only to plunder the social welfare system. Yet those right-wingers weren't the only ones calling for the expulsion of the Roma. The liberal *Der Spiegel* magazine and television program featured an "investigation" of Berlin apartment blocks overrun by Roma who allegedly live on welfare benefits while trashing their housing.²¹

"The people have to go"

In France, former president Nicolas Sarkozy had responded to the influx of Roma from Eastern Europe with mass evictions. His government dismantled their camps and deported the residents back east, hoping they would stay away and become someone else's problem. His actions were sharply criticized by many on the left, including his successor, François Hollande. Yet the new Socialist president, sworn in to office in May 2012, ended up acting much like his right-wing predecessor. In July and August of 2012, twenty-two Roma camps, where about 2,300 people lived, were torn down across France.

In response to criticism from rights activists, Hollande's interior minister, Manuel Valls, said the Roma newcomers have a lifestyle that's so different from the French that integration is impossible and they must be expelled. In response, Viviane Reding, the vice president of the European Commission and the EU justice commissioner, warned France that it could face sanctions if it didn't temper its treatment of the Roma.

Some observers have suggested that Hollande's government has turned on the Roma in order to pander to voters who might otherwise stray into supporting the rising far-right National Front party. While motivation for the government's policies may be unclear, the consequences are not.

"Repeated forced evictions have disastrous consequences on Roma's health, education and ability to secure an adequate standard of living. Forced out of one informal settlement after another they end up in ever poorer housing conditions, forced to sleep on the streets and in tents until they manage to build another makeshift home," said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia program director. "During forced evictions, they often lose their belongings, identity papers and medical records; in many cases schooling is disrupted and medical treatment is interrupted, while ties to local employment and support networks are severed. Yet, under French law they do not receive adequate reparation."²²

Fonseca admits that the French government's response echoes the general frustration of ordinary citizens. "The general feeling in France is that these people have to go," she said in the radio interview. "So it's a popular thing whether you're a right or left government. You're not going to have very much trouble with that."²³

It wasn't supposed to come to this. In 2005, twelve European governments and some United Nations agencies launched the Decade of Roma Inclusion, an initiative that brought together governments, private sector leaders, and civil society groups to improve Roma education, health, and housing, in part by getting governments to seriously address core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender. Yet many Roma have felt excluded from the Decade's planning and execution, and even well-designed plans at a continental level have to be translated into effective national and local plans of action, a development that won't take place when there's lingering animosity among political elites toward the Roma.

"The Decade makes almost no sense for us," said the Rev. Daniel Topalski, superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Bulgaria and Romania. "It was created by people abroad with little understanding of our situation. It was an excuse to have meetings and programs and write reports. If you ask Roma people about the Decade, they don't know about it or they see it as white guys trying to earn money on their behalf."²⁴

The failure of many governments to meet the benchmarks established by the Decade have led to calls to extend it beyond 2015 and even to broaden it to include additional countries like France and Germany. Others propose a more radical solution, creating a European Roma Charter, essentially a non-geographic Roma state that would provide citizenship for Roma individuals. The international community would then relate directly to the Roma without national governments as intermediaries. This would let governments off the hook for the services they are largely not providing now but is premised on Roma political organization achieving a maturity it has yet to demonstrate. It would also sound the death knell for any prospect of integration.

France deports Roma teenager

While the failure of the Decade and the resurgence of racism throughout Europe represent somber prospects for improving life for most of Europe's twelve million Roma, some signs of hope do stand out, most prominently the demonstrations in France that followed the government decision to seize a teenage girl on a field trip and deport her to a country she didn't know and where she didn't speak the language.

Leonarda Dibrani was a fifteen-year-old girl who, with her mother and father and five siblings, had come to France four years ago from Kosovo. Because the breakaway region is not part of the EU, the family applied for asylum. Their application was denied. When their time ran out in October 2013, the French police arrived at their home to repatriate the family. But Leonarda was in school—in fact, on a field trip with her classmates. The police tracked down and stopped the school bus and took the girl away in front of her friends. Leonarda and her family were put on a plane to Kosovo that night. Leonarda's classmates and teachers got the word out about what they witnessed, and thousands of French youth took to the streets in protest.²⁵

An official investigation showed the police carried out the law correctly, but President Hollande admitted, “There was a lack of discernment in the execution of the operation.”²⁶

Although polls showed a majority supported the expulsion, Hollande responded to criticism by saying Leonarda could come back to finish her studies if she wished but without the rest of her family. It was a decision that pleased no one.

Interviewed by a French radio station, Leonarda responded from Kosovo in perfectly accented French: “I felt ashamed because the police were there and my friends were asking what I had done, if I had stolen something.”²⁷

If the drama around Leonarda’s repatriation shows that a level of solidarity does exist, at least when the face on the news doesn’t match the stereotype, other pockets of hope exist throughout Europe. In Germany, new state-level agreements are moving the country from denial of historic discrimination and violence to recognition of the Roma as minorities with rights to promote their culture. Proponents are hoping that older Roma families who immigrated decades ago and successfully integrated into German society will be encouraged to identify themselves as Roma, combating the stereotype that Roma are only the poor newcomers from the east. This helps undercut the rhetoric of right-wing hate groups, which try to claim the Roma are all recently arrived moochers. “Roma have lived in Europe more than 700 years, and we still talk about integration. This is the problem because they’re still treated like foreigners in their own countries,” said Ivan Ivanov, director of the European Roma Information Office in Brussels.²⁸

It’s a common practice in Eastern Europe to transfer Roma children, when they do go to school, into special education classes that only increase stigmatization and hamper learning. That leaves parents angry and Roma activists pushing for alternatives. Church World Service (CWS), with funding from United Methodist Women, is supporting a variety of educational programs for Roma children and adults in Serbia.²⁹ CWS even accompanied several dozen Roma families evicted from Belgrade’s urban center in 2012; when the families were relocated to metal shipping containers at the edge of the city, CWS took over one shipping container to use as a preschool during the day and as a classroom for adult literacy programs at night.³⁰

“Thanks to CWS, we’ve been able to successfully reach out to and include children from Roma families, along with other vulnerable children, in our educational programs. These young children are advancing and learning faster, they are mastering the Serbian language earlier, and they’re integrating themselves more quickly into the community and socializing more successfully,” said Mirjana Cosic, director of the Naša Radost preschool in Smederevo. “At the same time as we work with the children, we work with their parents. Mothers and fathers are coming to our activities, participating in the education process without fear, wanting to be included in our work, and they, mostly the women, are sharing among themselves their different traditions and cultures.”³¹

Roma meet the melting pot

The anti-Roma sentiment that has long infected European discourse is being felt farther afield. In 2012, Ezra Levant, a conservative Canadian political commentator, went on a rant against Roma during his televised talk show, *The Source*. “These are Gypsies, a culture synonymous with swindlers,” Levant said. “The phrase Gypsy and cheater have been so interchangeable historically that the word has entered the English language as a verb: he gyped me. Well the Gypsies have gyped us. Too many have come here as false refugees. And they come here to gyp us again and rob us blind as they have done in Europe for centuries. . . . They’re Gypsies. And one of the central characteristics of that culture is that their chief economy is theft and begging.”³²

U.S. culture warriors seem more preoccupied with Hispanic and Latino immigrants than with Roma, who may number as many as a million in the United States, having arrived in several waves since the early 1800s. Some may have arrived even earlier: three Roma are said to have been aboard ship when Christopher Columbus made his second journey to the New World in 1498. Since then, the largest wave came after the abolishment of Roma slavery in the Balkans in 1864. Most recently, Roma immigration has been steady since the 1989 collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

Although the Roma (more commonly referred to as Gypsies in the United States) are usually associated with exotic culture, University of Texas professor Ian Hancock, who once served as a Roma representative to the United Nations, says it’s been relatively easy in the United States for Roma to hang on to their traditions and still blend into the melting pot.

“Being an immigrant country, you get people of all backgrounds, of all complexions and appearances,” Hancock said in an interview with Voice of America. “And so Roma don’t stand out as in opposition to white, in the same way. Which has helped to foster the idea that Gypsy is a behavior and not an ethnicity.”

Hancock, who directs the Romani Archives and Documentation Center at the University of Texas, says popular media portrayals encourage this distortion. “The media can get away with saying things about Roma that they wouldn’t dare say about other minority populations,” he said.³³ A *New York Times* poll in 1992 reported the social standing of 58 ethnic groups in the United States. Not surprisingly, Gypsies were at the very bottom.³⁴

More recently, what many in the United States learn about Roma in their midst comes from reality television shows like *American Gypsies* and *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*. According to documentary filmmaker Mona Nicoară, these shows use a kind of “exoticising voyeurism” that makes heavy use of “tried and true tropes: broad stereotypes, artificially constructed conflicts, unidimensional characters, set-up scenes and scripted lines.”³⁵

In an article she wrote for *The Guardian*, Nicoară said accuracy isn’t an objective for the shows’ producers. Instead, they “are invested in reproducing a version of what it means to be

a 'Gypsy' that broadcasters believe to be most comfortable for their audience—Esmeralda-like headscarves, belly dancing, innate violence, gaudy parties, psychic healing parlours.”³⁶

Nicoară grew up in Romania, where Roma were enslaved until the 1860s, sent to extermination camps during World War II, subjected to pogroms in the 1990s, and are now the target of skinhead attacks. Even today, she wrote, when Roma children “are shunted into dead-end segregated schools which trap them in the vicious cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement,”³⁷ the Roma continue to be blamed for their own marginalization.

Reality television shows are slowly doing the same in the United States, she wrote, as they “perpetuate this fiction of self-segregation by stressing difference and tradition, by recasting the viewers’ ignorance as secrecy on the part of the Roma and by artificially presenting the preservation of ethnic identity as radically opposed to those elements that make up our common humanity: curiosity and learning, making new friends, falling in love.”

Nicoară claims there’s a double standard at work. In the United Kingdom, for example, the last season of *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* was announced by billboards screaming “Bigger. Fatter. Gypsier.” “Try that out with other minorities,” Nicoară wrote. “Really, see how it feels.”³⁸

Because there are no well-known Roma public figures in the United States, no Roma equivalents of Rosa Parks or Joe Lewis, Nicoară worries that reality TV will “turn ignorance into all-out prejudice.” She said the UK show led to a spike in bullying of Roma and Traveller children, and where syndicated in Eastern Europe, it has encouraged the racist violence of skinheads and nationalists.³⁹

Roma denial, Roma pride

Roma in the United States speak different languages and come from different countries, so they’re far from homogenous. And rather than settling together as Roma, they tend to migrate into geographical pockets based on nationality, language, or some other common identity. They’re thus less likely to identify as Roma, preferring instead to self-brand as Slovaks or Greeks or Romanians. That has served to keep them out of trouble in places like New Jersey, where a law enacted in 1917 and not repealed until 1998 allowed local governments to regulate where Gypsies could rent property, where they could work, and what they could sell. The U.S. Roma, not unlike the Roma in Bulgaria today,⁴⁰ saw concrete advantages in identifying as something other than Roma. “Traditionally, nothing good has come from being identified Roma because the prejudice is so high,” Robert Kushen, executive director of the European Roma Rights Center, told *Time*. “There’s never been any profit.”

That also explains why many U.S. citizens aren’t aware of the Roma that may live in their own communities. “They’re simply not present enough in the U.S. for anyone to hate them very much,” Kushen said.⁴¹

Yet passing themselves off as something other than Gypsies doesn’t mean U.S. Roma are stalwart proponents of assimilation. Indeed, in many places they’ve avoided putting their

children in school. In a 1975 article in *Working Papers in Sociolinguistics*, Hancock quotes Nick Dimas, a Ludari Roma originally from Greece.

“They avoid the school system like the plague. While most other U.S. minorities are boycotting, busing and organizing to obtain better education for their children, the Roma are, by any means at their disposal, keeping their children at home,” Dimas told Hancock.⁴² He argued that the practice maintains the cohesion and solidarity of the group by limiting the influence of non-Roma teachers on Roma children, preventing identification with non-Roma histories or heroes in the literature of the dominant culture. This assures that Romani will remain the individual’s first language (so that he or she will mostly speak with other Roma), limiting movement into the dominant culture via the occupational route, because limited literacy assures only menial, low-paying jobs, and discouraging marriage to non-Roma partners.

“The older generation feels that too much outside education dilutes the identity and can even be polluting in a spiritual sense. Too much involvement in the non-Romani world can debilitate you and can affect you socially,” Hancock told the Voice of America.⁴³

In Hancock’s article, a Roma man identified only as John said, “Somebody told me once that we can be Gypsies, but we [have to] be American Gypsies. You know, we don’t have to stay in the culture. We can be Americans and we can still call ourselves Gypsies. But without the culture, we’re not Gypsies. That’s the only thing that’s holding us together.”⁴⁴

This tension between assimilation and integration, between cultural survival and destruction, will continue to be played out in countless towns and cities across the United States. And young Roma may find different paths through the maze of identity and ethnicity than their forebears.

Cristiana Grigore is a young Roma woman from Romania who today studies on a Fulbright scholarship at a university in Tennessee. She says most people she’s met in the United States don’t know anything about the Roma. “They know about Gypsies, but not as a real ethnic group, real people. They see it more like a Halloween costume, a role that you play once a year,” she told Voice of America.⁴⁵

Grigore said the cultural diversity she found here prompted her to talk publicly and unashamedly about her Roma identity. Coming out as Roma was safer in the United States than in Romania.

“It took me 20 years to talk about my ethnic identity, so imagine how strong the negative stereotypes are,” said Grigore, who reports that her ethnic heritage has been an asset in the United States. “When I talk about me as a Gypsy, people are like, ‘Oh that’s so cool.’ You know, it’s like my life is suddenly more interesting.”⁴⁶

*About the author: The Rev. Paul Jeffrey is a United Methodist missionary and senior correspondent for **response**, the magazine of United Methodist Women. He lived in Latin America for two decades and today lives in the State of Washington. He blogs at kairosphotos.com.*

Notes

¹ Eva Cosse, “Time to drop the Roma myths,” CNN, November 4, 2013, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/11/04/time-to-drop-the-roma-myths>.

Note: The second headline, which is translated from Greek, was changed for clarity.

² Nathalie Savaricas, “Old attitudes resurface in Greece: inside the Roma camp where Maria the ‘blonde angel’ lived,” *The Independent*, October 23, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/old-attitudes-resurface-in-greece-inside-the-roma-camp-where-maria-the-blonde-angel-lived-8897530.html>.

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⁴ Henry McDonald, “Irish police return blonde girl to Roma family,” *The Guardian*, October 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/24/blonde-girl-roma-parents-returned-dna>.

⁵ Paul Waldie, “High-profile stories of children expose Europe’s anti-Roma prejudice,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 31, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/high-profile-stories-of-children-expose-europes-anti-roma-prejudice/article15200641>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Who Are The Roma?” interview by Robin Young, National Public Radio, October 24, 2013, <http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2013/10/24/who-are-roma>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kharunya Paramaguru, “Europe’s Roma Face ‘Witch-Hunt’ After Reports of Child-Snatching,” *Time*, October 23, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/10/23/europes-roma-face-witch-hunt-after-reports-of-child-snatching>.

¹⁰ Alissa J. Rubin, “Mystery of Missing Mushrooms Leaves French Blaming Roma,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/28/world/europe/mystery-of-missing-mushrooms-leaves-french-blaming-roma.html?_r=0.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See “Roma in Berlin,” July-August 2013 **response**, pp. 28–34.

¹³ Thomas Rodemeyer (coordinator for Roma Ministries for The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe and participant in a yearly summit of United Methodist-related Roma ministries, the most recent of which was held in Varna, Bulgaria, in November 2013), interview with author, November 2013.

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¹⁵ George Soros, “Europe needs a Roma working class,” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/nov/26/europe-roma-working-class-george-soros>.

¹⁶ Keno Verseck, “Hungary’s Racism Problem: Orbán Friend Says Roma ‘Shouldn’t Be Allowed to Exist,’” *Spiegel Online*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/hungarian-journalist-says-roma-should-not-be-allowed-to-exist-a-876887.html>.

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¹⁸ “Après ses propos sur Hitler, Bourdouloux démissionne de l’UDI,” *Le Monde*, July 25, 2013, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2013/07/24/apres-ses-propos-sur-hitler-gilles-bourdouloux-demissionne-de-l-udi_3453152_823448.html. See also “Told to Move On: Forced Evictions of Roma in France,” Amnesty International, October 8, 2013, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/told-to-move-on-forced-evictions-of-roma-in-france>.

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²³ “Who Are The Roma?” *Here & Now*.

²⁴ Daniel Topalski (superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Bulgaria and Romania), interview with author, November 2012.

²⁵ Alissa J. Rubin, “France Says Deportation of Roma Girl Was Legal,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/world/europe/france-says-deportation-of-roma-girl-was-legal.html>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “The Roma row,” *The Brunei Times*, October 23, 2013, <http://www.bt.com.bn/opinion/2013/10/23/roma-row>.

²⁸ Katie Harris, “For Europe’s Roma, Racism Gets Worse in Tough Economic Times,” *Time*, August 21, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/08/21/roma-in-europe-age-old-discrimination-worsens-in-tough-economic-times>.

²⁹ In its report on the project to United Methodist Women, Church World Service highlights one participant, Duda Giltena. Her story about how Church World Service helped her is included in Appendix A.

³⁰ For a personal account of a visit to this community, see <http://www.kairosphotos.com/blog/roma-redux>.

³¹ Mirjana Cosic (director of the Naša Radost preschool in Smederevo), interview with author, November 2012. Included in <https://vimeo.com/56844753>.

³² Bernie M. Farber, Nate Leipziger, and Avrum Rosensweig, “Bernie M. Farber, et al.: Hating the Jew, hating the ‘gypsy,’” *National Post*, September 25, 2012, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2012/09/25/bernie-m-farber-et-al-hating-the-jew-hating-the-gypsy>.

³³ “For Roma, Life in US Has Challenges,” Voice of America, April 6, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/content/for-roma-life-in-us-has-challenges-119394819/163156.html>.

³⁴ Ian Hancock, “On Abuses Against Gypsies in Eastern Europe,” Romani Archives and Documentation Center, April 14, 1994, http://www.radoc.net/radoc.php?doc=art_f_bias_mediarresponsibility&lang=en&articles=true.

³⁵ Mona Nicoară, “American Gypsies needs to catch up with the reality of Roma people’s lives,” *The Guardian*, July 28, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/28/american-gypsies-reality-roma-lives>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See “Who is Roma? In Bulgaria rising racism provokes many to change identity,” *response*, May 2013, pp. 20–25.

⁴¹ Kayla Webley, “Hounded in Europe, Roma in the U.S. Keep a Low Profile,” *Time*, October 13, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2025316,00.html>.

⁴² Ian Hancock, "The Schooling of Romani Americans: An Overview," Romani Archives and Documentation Center, http://www.radoc.net/radoc.php?doc=art_g_education&lang=en&articles=true.

⁴³ "For Roma, Life in US Has Challenges," Voice of America.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also Oksana Marafioti, *American Gypsy: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

Appendix A

Duda Giltena is thirty-four years old, has seven children, and came to Belgrade a decade ago from Kosovo. She and her family first lived in a house made of cardboard but in 2008 moved into the Zemun Polje neighborhood. They built a house on land they don't own and pirated electricity from nearby power lines.

"I had to leave school in the second grade because my family moved around a lot, but I always wanted to learn, so I tried again later. Three times I went to first grade, and then I finally gave up. My parents were uneducated and they didn't recognize the importance of schooling their kids so they didn't send us to school. Their excuse was poor living conditions, difficult financial situation. And this was all true, but along with all of these realities my parents were simply not interested in finding ways to educate us, they handed their and our lives to fate without any will or desire to change things around them. Or at least try. But this is not just my story but the usual way children were brought up. So, when the time came for me to get married, I wedded a man whose life path was very similar to mine: we never went to school, we didn't know how to read, write, count. . . . It was a daily struggle because I couldn't read. Even reading street signs to know where I'm going was difficult. And it's hard to find a job if I can't fill out the forms or even read job ads," Giltena said.

In 2011, Giltena enrolled in CWS's literacy program for adults carried out in several Roma settlements in Belgrade. From Monday to Thursday, students study primary-level subjects, and on Friday evening they have a class on life skills. "I was one of the first women to enroll in the program. I couldn't wait to start learning, most of all to learn to read and write. My teachers were praising me, which only encouraged me to gain more knowledge and do better in my studies. When I learned to read and write, I went out and found a modest job, but it was the first job I ever had in my life. I worked in a bakery in the Zemun Polje settlement. For the first time in my life I was working, I was employed, I had an income, and I felt accomplished and proud that I am able to contribute and ease the life of my family," she said.

Giltena stopped attending classes in early 2013. Her family situation worsened. Her husband left her alone with the children, and she was forced to quit her job. She's now struggling to take care of her seven children alone and has no time to attend classes. "I only have two more grades to finish, seventh and eighth. The children are keeping me busy now. My two youngest sons need constant care and attention, I cannot afford to leave my home, and they are too young to go with me. I am still hopeful however that I will be able to finish the primary school. I don't want to quit for the fourth time," she said.

CWS and its local partners are working to additionally help Giltena finish two more years of education and get her diploma. She will be offered continual learning support in the form of individual classes and support at her house and help with assignments, language learning,

and studying. Hopefully, with this kind of tailored support, Giltena will be able to finish her education. Although she is currently going through the toughest and most challenging period of her life, Giltena still wishes to finish her education because, she said, she wants to be the primary teacher of her children. “I want to be able to teach them, read to them, and help them do their homework. I want them to believe that going to school and learning is important.”

*A photo of Giltena appeared on page 28 of the May 2013 issue of **response**.*

