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Roma as an Indian Diaspora – Unbreakable Ties

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Roma in Croatia from 1945 until present day¹

Abstract

This paper examines the issue of the number of Roma in Croatia after World War II and the tragedy that struck the Roma population between 1941 and 1945. Censuses after 1945 are examined, on the basis of which information is provided on the number of Roma after 1948, when there were just 405 of them on Croatian territory, until 2011, when their number on the same territory amounted to 16,975. The author also examines the reasons for the increase in the number of Roma in censuses. Data shows that Roma in Croatia often declared themselves as Yugoslavian, Croatian, Serbian, and Romanian. Traditionally, there were more Roma in northern Croatia, central Croatia, and Slavonia, and significantly fewer in Dalmatia, Istria, and Kvarner. The author describes how Roma from other parts of Yugoslavia settled in Croatia (especially from Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia), and how particular Roma settlements or parts of settlements in particular zones in Croatia were formed. On the basis of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with Roma across all of Croatia, the author also discusses the position of the Roma population between 2010 and 2020, examines Roma ethnomimicry, segregation, integration, stigmatisation, and prejudices. Researching ethnomimicry, the author also draws conclusions as to how the Roma declared themselves both in the past and currently. Research encompassed Roma settlements near Beli Manastir, in Međimurje, near Đurđevac in Podravina, in Ludbreg, in Koprivnica, in the Drava basin near Varaždin, near Bjelovar, in and around Kutina, in Sisak, Slavonski Brod, and Istria. A list of Roma settlements and parts of settlements in which Roma live is also provided. In addition to a table with the number of Roma living in particular counties, the author also provides graphs showing the growth in the Roma population in particular counties in the past few decades. These tables allow projections on the future growth of Roma settlements in the areas described, allowing us to determine which areas are most densely settled and where the least ethnomimicry is present among the Roma population.

Key words: demographics; ethnomimicry; Roma; socialism; segregation; stigmatisation

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The demographic development of Roma in Croatia between 1945 and 19912

117

After World War II, very few Roma were left on the territory of modern-day Croatia. The 1948 census lists just 405 Roma, while the pre-war census from 1931 records 14,879 Roma living in Croatia. The largest number of Roma were liquidated at Jasenovac internment camp in 1942; the number of Roma killed has never been confirmed due to the small number of survivors and the lack of documentation from the camp.³In 1931, the Slavonian counties of Županja, Slatina, and Đakovo led by number of those who declared themselves Roma; however, after World War II, they were left almost entirely without a Roma population.

The case was the same in other counties that fell under the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. The situation in Međimurje and Baranja, which were occupied by Hungary during World War II, was somewhat better, from which not all Boyash Roma were taken to concentration camps. The only Roma in the Independent State of Croatia who were exempt from persecution were those of the Islamic faith and some in Pitomača, who managed to survive Ustaša persecution due to their having lived in the area for so long. Some Roma also survived by buying their lives and freedom, as was the case with some individuals from the area surrounding Bjelovar; some also survived by joining the partisans (e.g. in the Daruvar area). There were nearly no Roma in Dalmatia even before the war; in Istria, which was first under Italian and later German control during World War II, Roma were deported to distant, isolated locations in Italy.⁴According to the 1948 census, the most Roma lived in Beli Manastir (264 of the total of 405 in Croatia, more than 50%). This is because the Roma in Baranja were subject to Hungarian rule, which was less systematic in its implementation of deportation. The other counties had very low Roma populations. A total of 11 lived in Daruvar County, 21 in Đakovo County, 12 in Koprivnica County, 10 in Vrginmost County, 23 in Garešnica County, 11 in Makarska County, and 9 in Bjelovar County. There were certainly more Roma than this on Croatian territory at the time; however, due to their persecution during World War II, they did not wish to declare themselves as Roma.

It is interesting to note that, in Čakovec County, where Roma certainly lived at the time, the 1948 census lists only one single Roma. Later censuses showed no significant growth in the number of Roma. The 1953 census listed 1,261 Roma, while the 1961 census listed only 313, a decrease of 75.2%. The reason for this decrease lies in the fact that some Roma in Croatia declared themselves as Romanians. The 1961 census shows that Roma lived in Baranja (13 in Suza, 33 in Kneževi Vinogradi, 26 in Branjin Vrh), in Međimurje (45 in Podturen in the Lončarevo settlement, 12 in Miklavec near Mursko Središće), in Gorski Kotar (20 in Zapolje Brodsko west of Brod na Kupi), in Podravina (33 in Đurđevac), and in Slavonia (38 in Vinkovci). The Roma in Podravina, Međimurje, and Baranya were Boyash who lived in these regions since the 19th century.⁵In the ten-year span between 1961 and 1971, many more Roma decided to declare themselves as Roma; there were also large

² This is the introductory chapter, which was written on the basis of these publications and archival materials: HDA, Zavod za statistiku, fond 367, kutija 55, fascikl 70, Prisutno stanovništvo prema vjeroispovjedi i materinjem jeziku, popis 1931; *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31. marta 1931. u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*: (1938).; *Konačni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 15. marta 1948.*, (1954).; *Popis stanovništva i stanova 1953*, (1959).; *Popis stanovništva i stanova 1961.*, (1970).; *Popis stanovništva i stanova 1971*, (1974).; Gelo, Orkvenčić, Klemenčić et al. (1998); www.dzs.hr.

³ Cf. N. Lengel-Krizman (2003) and Tahiri, Papo & Vojak (2015).

⁴ For more on this, see Babić & Škiljan (2019) and Škiljan (2015: 105–113).

⁵ The native language of Boyash Roma is a dialectal variant of Dacoromanian. They are known by other names besides Boyash; aside from Croatia, they are present throughout southeastern Europe, including Romania. In Croatia, at least half of the total Roma population speak Romanian as their native language.

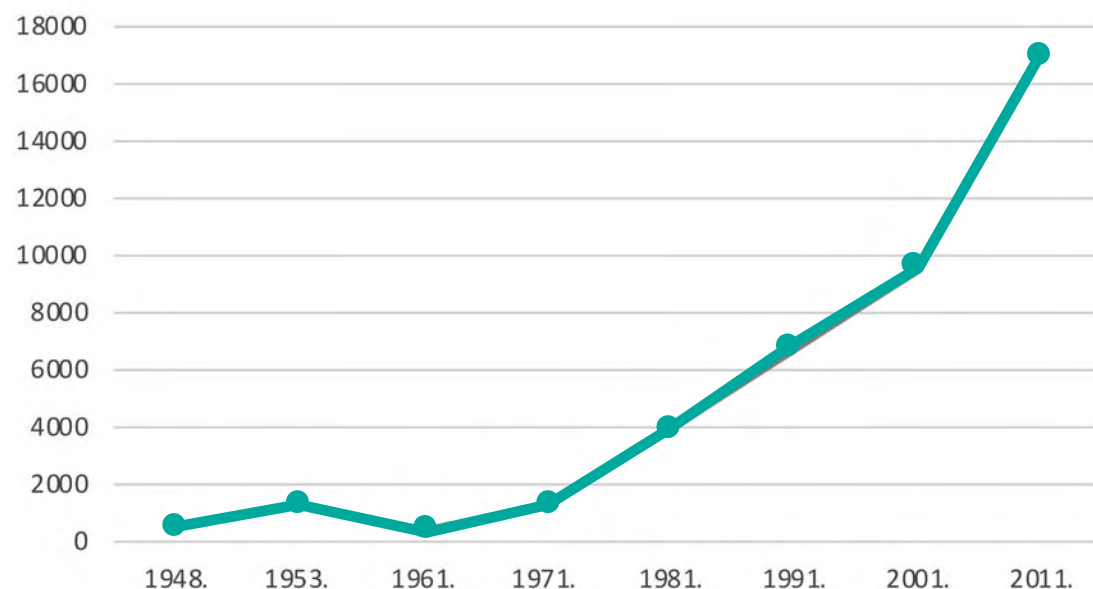
waves of migration from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia. In 1971, 1,257 people in Croatia declared themselves as Roma.

There were 262 Roma in Beli Manastir municipality, most of whom lived in Torjanci on the western edge of Croatian Baranja (127), Beli Manastir (41), and Vardarac (36). Relatively many people in Međimurje declared themselves as Roma (153), of whom 26 lived in Donja Dubrava, 39 in Kotoriba, and 88 in Mursko Središće. In Podravina, 38 people declared themselves as Roma in the Koprivnica area, of whom 31 lived in Koprivnički Bregi; 30 lived in the Ludbreg area, of whom 17 lived in Ludbreg and 13 in Sveti Đurđ. A total of 15 Roma lived in Varaždin at the time (in the Banfica neighbourhood). Eighty Roma lived in the Kutina area, of whom 79 lived in Donja Gračenica. In the Zagreb area, 15 Roma lived in Lukavec near Velika Gorica. In the Osijek municipality, 29 people declared themselves as Roma, of whom nine lived in Čepin and eight in Martinci Čepinski. In the Valpovo area, a total of 90 Roma lived at the time, 42 of whom lived in Bistrinci, 15 in Nard, and 33 in Šag. In the Vinkovci area, Roma lived in the city of Vinkovci and the village of Cerić, as well as in Vukovar (33). Roma also lived in Lika: seven in Lipice, 28 in Otočac, and 13 in Smiljan. The Rijeka area was home to 43 Roma at the time, of whom 35 lived in the city of Rijeka; in Sisak, 23 people declared themselves as Roma. In Slavonski Brod, there were 18 declared Roma at the time. There were also Roma in Zagreb's neighbourhoods of Dubrava (47) and Peščenica (112).

Ten years later, in 1981, the Roma had tripled in number. Although their reasons for not expressing their nationality in the past are quite clear, it seems that a significant influx of Roma from other parts of Yugoslavia to Croatia took place during this decade, and that new Roma settlements were created. The Roma population remained centred around Baranja (especially the village of Torjanci, where 132 people declared themselves as Roma), followed by Čakovec municipality (where 100 Roma lived in Mursko Središće, 178 in Držimurec, 30 in Kotoriba, 106 in Podturen, 199 in Pribislavac, and 307 in Trnovec), where a third of the Roma population in Croatia lived. This was followed by Varaždin municipality, where 124 Roma lived in Donje Vratno, then Podravina (Đurđevac municipality, where Roma lived in Đurđevac (Stiska) and in Kloštar (a total of 52)), Koprivnica municipality, where they lived in Reka, Peteranec, and Drnja (a total of 86), and in Ludbreg municipality, where they lived in Hrženica, Karlovac Ludbreški, Ludbrev, and Selnik (a total of 47). In Moslavina, Roma had already settled in Kutina municipality, most of whom lived in Popovača and Vidrenjak (a total of 129), and in Novska municipality, where most lived in Bročice (a total of 27). In Ogulin municipality, Roma lived in Oštarije (30). Slavonian Roma lived in Osijek municipality, where 71 of the total of 76 lived in the city of Osijek; in Valpovo municipality, there was a total of 91 (mostly in Bistrinci and Nard); 50 Roma lived in Vinkovci municipality, 45 of whom lived in the city of Vinkovci; in Vukovar municipality, most of them lived in the cities of Ilok and Vukovar (53 of a total of 60). In Istria, a total of 132 Roma lived in Pula municipality, of whom 90 lived in Pula and 42 in Vodnjan, while 142 lived in the city of Rijeka. In Zagreb and the surrounding area, Roma lived in Sesvete (62), in Velika Gorica municipality, where most lived in Mičevac, Ruča, and Velika Mlaka (a total of 81), in Zagreb's neighbourhood of Dubrava (155), in Novi Zagreb (73), in Peščenica (487) (in 1981, a total of 825 Roma lived within Zagreb's city limits).

In 1991, the number of Roma had nearly doubled as compared to the 1981 census, with 6,695 living in Croatia. Of this number, 1,920 lived in Čakovec municipality, 381 in Beli Manastir, 245 in Varaždin, 1,105 in Zagreb and the surrounding area, 445 in Rijeka, and 575 in Pula; increases in Roma population were also apparent in Sisak, Slavonski Brod, and in other municipalities of the Socialist Republic of Croatia at the time (Valpovo, Osijek, Vinkovci, and Novska). The number of declared Roma would also grow in the 2001 and 2011 censuses (more on this in coming chapters).

Figure 1. Number of declared Roma in Croatia between 1948 and 2011.



The distribution and type of Roma settlements in Croatia during the socialist period

During the socialist period from 1945 to 1990, Roma lived in a few types of settlement. As is commonly known, Roma have always been known to build structures illegally and in an improvised manner, most often building their settlements outside of villages or as separate units within city neighbourhoods. Prior to World War II, Roma also lived as nomads, setting up tents in areas outside settlements where they would spend part of the year, and then travel to another country in the other part of the year. This was the case with Roma in Croatian Zagorje. However, after World War II, Roma nomads mostly ceased to exist, or their number reduced drastically.

Of autochthonous Roma in Croatia, all that remained in significant numbers were Boyash in Međimurje and Baranja and Roma in Pitomača, who did not declare themselves as Roma. In his work on Roma, Ivan Rogić divides Roma city settlements into a few subgroups (Rogić 2005: 55–89). The first subgroup are small groups of houses or individual houses in city neighbourhoods; the second group are those that were built for other purposes but taken over by the Roma; the third group he calls “Roma fragments” distributed among city neighbourhoods; the following group are self-contained Roma settlements in cities; the final group are conventional city settlements and “black holes”. In villages, Rogić divides Roma settlements into small groups of houses or individual houses, Roma fragments in village settlements, self-contained Roma settlements in village areas, and “black holes”.

Of the city neighbourhoods in which Roma have settled (mostly since the late 1960s), the most important to mention are Rujevica and Mihačeva Draga in Rijeka, where Roma have built a separate Roma settlement; there is also a large Roma settlement called “Josip Rimac” in Slavonski Brod, as well as settlements in Capraške Poljane in Sisak, Radićeva street in Kutina, Banfica in Varaždin, and Kozari Put and Ferenščica in Zagreb. A few

basic elements characterise this type of “urban” Roma settlement. They are chaotic and disorganised, with poor transport connections to the rest of the city, and reduced infrastructure networks (there is no electricity or water, and often no telephone). In some places, there are smaller fragments or individual Roma houses, such as in Karlovac, Grubišno Polje, Pula, Zagreb (Petruševac), Beli Manastir, and Ludbreg. These are most often one street or a small group of a few houses that have been taken over by Roma, who most often illegally build small buildings between 15 and 30 m². These small fragments in which Roma live also exist in villages. Examples of such fragments are the Konjsko Brdo settlement in Perušić municipality in Lika, in Lijevo Sredičko on the river Kupa, in Domankuš near Rovišće, in Lučice near Delnice, in Goričan in Međimurje, etc.

There are also independent Roma settlements in village areas. There are relatively many in Međimurje, some of which are exceptionally large, such as Parag near Trnovec along the Slovenian border, and Kuršanec near Čakovec. Other segregated settlements that deserve mention are Bistrince near Valpovo, Lončarevo near Podturen, Piškorovec near Držimurec, Sitnice near Mursko Središće, Homutno near Omišalj, Puškariće near Ogulin, Donja Dobra between Vrbovsko and Skrad. The type of settlement providing the worst quality of life are so-called “black holes”. Black holes are more common in village areas; they typically have nearly no infrastructure, and the houses the Roma build there are typically out of exceptionally poor materials (metal sheeting, wood, cardboard, nylon, and car trailers. Such settlements are Vučja jama near Brod na Kupi, Roma houses in Sveti Đurđ near Ludbreg, and the Strmec Podravski settlement in Varaždin County. Until recently, the Roma settlement of Donja Dubrava existed as such a “black hole”; due to flooding on the river Drava, all Roma left the settlement, and the state enabled them to buy houses in neighbouring Podravina.⁶

The time at which Roma moved to particular settlements⁷

As noted above, some Romasettlements are more than a century old, while others have existed for only a few decades. The oldest Roma settlements are in Međimurje, Baranja, and Podravina. Some of these are more than a century old. Boyash Roma have lived for more than 300 years in Međimurje and the Drava basin in Varaždin and Koprivnica-Križevci Counties. One of the first documents containing information about Roma in Međimurje dates back to 1688, mentioning the christening of the child of a Gypsy Duke Ivan in Legrad, which was part of Međimurje at the time.

Roma began coming in larger numbers from neighbouring Hungary and Romania only after 1855, when the Romanian authorities granted them freedom of movement. The first Roma from Romania and Hungary settled in the village of Podturen in the mid-19th century. The local registers record the birth of a Roma named Adam Bog-

⁶ For more on this, see: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/arhiva/romsko-naselje-u-opcini-donja-dubrava-bit-ce-prazno/3371855/>.

⁷ The majority of data on the creation of settlements were obtained from Roma interlocutors during field research. Conversations were held with: Đ. H. (1968), Stiska; D. B. (1984), Stiska; Z. H. (1989), Drnje; F. H. (1974), Molve; A. O. (1969), Ludbreg; D. O. (1990), Ludbreg; D. B. (1972), Kotoriba; J. B. (elder) (1949), Lončarevo; J. B. (younger) (1984), Lončarevo; Z. K. (1961), Goričan; M. I. (1976), Orehovica; M. B. (1980), Orehovica; I. O. (J.), (1966), Piškorovec; J. I. (1977), Gornji Kuršanec; Z. Đ (1976), Gornji Kuršanec; J. P. (1965), Kuršanec; Z. O. (1980), Strmec; V. O. (1957), Trnovec; S. L. (1964), Pribislavec; Z. O. (1968), Pribislavec; Ž. B. (1962), Pribislavec; R. H. (1958), Sitnice; M. M. (1982), Sitnice; H. V., Kosovska Mitrovica (now Pula); R. H. (1963), Kosovska Mitrovica (now Vodnjan); D. A. (1980), Kosovska Mitrovica (now Vodnjan); S. N. (1973), Sisak; Ž. N. (1985), Sisak (now Kutina); G. Đ., (1971), Bjelovar; S. Đ. (1947), Lipov Vrh (Bjelovar); F. I. (1934), Skoplje (now Rijeka); M. R. (1959), Priština (now Rijeka); J. S. (1960), Kosovska Mitrovica (now Rijeka); I. M. (1963), Zagreb (now Rijeka); E. B. (1960), Kosovska Mitrovica (now Crikvenica); R. R., Slavonski Brod; I. G. (1970.), Slavonski Brod.

dan in 1866, whose nationality is listed as "zingarus" (Iz života Roma, 2008: 18). Roma settlements came about throughout the entire 19th and 20th centuries. According to the testimony of Roma themselves, the settlement in Gornji Kuršanec was founded in 1968. The oldest house in the Roma settlement of Kuršanec was built 90 years ago (1930), but the settlement is certainly older. The Roma settlement in Kotoriba was built in 1982, when Roma were evicted from the old part of a settlement on Josipa Slavenskog street. The first Roma houses in Pribislavec were built around 1920. The Sitnice settlement, which takes up a single street 1,200 metres from Mursko Središće, was founded during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first Roma houses in Goričan were built in 1951 or 1952; Roma settled there in one street separated from the rest of the settlement by a canal.

Although Roma arrived in Orehovica in the 19th century, local Roma claim the settlement moved from its original location along the river Drava near the village of Orehovica. The Roma settlement in Piškorovec is roughly 100 years old, but the oldest house still standing was built in 1942. The settlement of Parag was founded in the late 19th century; due to its size, the 2011 census lists it as an independent settlement, like the settlement of Piškorovec. Strmec in Varaždin County, on the border of Cestica and Petrijanec municipalities, was founded 60 or 70 years ago. Stiska in Đurđevac was founded in the mid-19th century; its current residents moved there from Hungary and Međimurje after 1945 (Hrvačić 1984: 159). The Roma settlement in Ludbreg was once located closer to the centre, near the chapel, but the Roma were relocated to the site of the former slaughterhouse around 1981. Roma have lived in Pitomača for over 150 years, as witnessed by the birth, marriage, and death registers. They mostly live in the western part of Pitomača in sturdily built two- and three-storey houses. Roma in Baranja are part of the Munčeni Boyash group, who like the Arğeleni Boyash, came to Baranja from Romania during the 19th century. Munčeni Boyash are mainly of the Orthodox faith; at around the turn of the millennium, there were roughly 3,000 of them in Baranja.

The exception is the village of Torjanci, where 120 Arğeleni Boyash Roma live; like the Roma of Međimurje, they are of the Roman Catholic faith. Typical Boyash family names in Baranja are Petrović, Mišković, Mihaljlović, Đurđević, Todorović, and Bugarinović, while Boyash family names in Međimurje are Oršuš, Balog, Ignac, Kalanjoš, and Bogdan (Martinović Klarić 2009: 61). Roma who survived World War II are a rarity in the Bjelovar area. This fact is witnessed by Goran Đurđević from the Roma tribe of Lovari, who says that his family managed to survive the Roma genocide in the Independent State of Croatia, and that his ancestors settled in Lipovo Brdo near Kapela in the early 19th century. Today's Roma settlements in Slavonia, Lika, Gorski Kotar, Banija, Posavina, Turopolje, Istria, and Rijeka came about significantly later. Interviews show that certain settlements came about after the 1950s.

Stanoje Nikolić from Sisak says that his father, who was an Orthodox Roma, moved to Sisak from Bosnia in 1953. His grandfather, his father, and all his uncles moved to Capraške Poljane at the time. The Roma settlement in Kutina was founded at some time in the 1970s; according to Željko Nikolić, Roma settled there from Bosnia. Roma from Macedonia and Kosovo began to settle in the Rijeka area in the 1960s; Roma from Kosovo again came to Vodnjan and Pula in Istria on a larger scale from Kosovo in the 1980s. Roma in Zagreb are also from Bosnia, southern Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia; they resettled there in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Roma settled in the Josip Rimac settlement in Slavonski Brod from Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia; some of them declare themselves as *Ludari*, Roma from Romania. They have been living in the settlement for a few generations; the first to resettle there likely came in the 1970s. The situation is the same in the majority of Roma settlements in Croatia. Roma came first in small groups, and then in larger groups.

Roma defended Croatia much like other national minorities in all parts of the country. A recently published monograph by Borna Marinić on Roma participation in the Croatian War of Independence bears witness to the Roma's contribution to Croatian independence (Marinić 2019).⁸ One defender of Vukovar of Roma origin was Zdravko Vladislavljević, who joined the defence of the city in August 1991. Zdravko defended the neighbourhood of Lužac. After Vukovar fell on 18 November 1991, Zdravko was imprisoned along with his brother in the hospital in Vukovar. That afternoon, Zdravko Edi Vladislavljević showed a great act of love for his brother. When one of the Četniks called for his brother, Edi stood up and claimed to be him, thus protecting him. A Serbian journalist photographed Edi in the courtyard of the *Velepromet* complex. Later, a local Četnik named Stevan Curnić took Edi to *Stolarija*—the complex's carpentry building, which was used as an improvised execution chamber—after which he was never seen again.

Miroslav Štargl was commander of the Croatian Army's 107th Brigade, which covered the region of Valpovo, where Roma lived in the large Bistrinci settlement; he notes that there were at least 19 Roma in the brigade. One of them was Duško Mitrović, a Roma from Bistrinci, who recalls how he joined the Croatian Army in September 1991, where he served as a tank driver. Štargl notes that the brigade command insisted on including Roma from Bistrinci in the Croatian Army because refugees from Baranja felt a certain animosity towards Roma due to their involvement in enemy units in Baranja and robbery of abandoned Croatian and Hungarian homes. Some Roma refugees from the village of Torjanci in Baranja joined Croatia's defence. One of them was Dušan Ignac. Ignac joined the National Guard, then the 107th Croatian Army Brigade, then the 9th Home Defence Regiment of Beli Manastir.

Josip Bartolić was the commander of the Baranja-Međimurje Battalion, later the 2nd Battalion of the 135th Brigade. He notes that around 30 Roma from Međimurje joined Croatia's defence, but that most of them deserted shortly after they joined the battlefield, leaving only five. Some Roma from Baranja also joined the Serbs. This was the case with Roma from Vardarac, Bilje, and Beli Manastir. According to evidence provided by Pavo Naletilić, president of the Association of the 108th Croatian National Guard Brigade from Slavonski Brod, the brigade had 43 Roma. Naletilić also emphasises the fact that Roma from the Josip Rimac settlement in Slavonski Brod were especially important in Croatia's defence, as a suspension bridge led from their settlement towards the refinery in Bosanski Brod; most of them thus remained in the settlement and were organised into the National Guard. One of them was Đorđe Mitrović. Stanislavko Mitrović was the only Roma in the first company of the 4th Battalion of the 108th Croatian Army Brigade, commanded by Karlo Pačić, which fought in the area surrounding Nova Gradiška. Asan Redžepi, a boxing legend from Slavonski Brod who was a martial arts instructor with the Special Police, also participated in the defence of Slavonski Brod. Ivica Amić, a Roma from Nova Gradiška, participated in the defence of the city and surroundings; he notes that, in 1991, 12 Roma from his street and the immediate surroundings alone joined the defence; according to Fuad Muratović, the total number of Roma in the Nova Gradiška area involved in defending Croatia was twenty, while the rest were in the National Guard. Amić says that his compatriots treated him and the other Roma well due to the accepted belief that Roma bring luck in war, and that any unit that has them suffers fewer casualties. One Roma casualty in Nova Gradiška was Dragan Amić, a relative of Ivica Amić; another was Salko Čavalić, a Roma who lost his life in Operation Flash on

2 May 1995.

According to Šandor Toth from Grubišno Polje, five Roma from Grubišno Polje were in the police force. He also says that all Roma in Stolovica, a street in Grubišno Polje, were armed and stood in Croatia's defence. Ivan Balog, who joined the police at the age of 18, emphasises that at least thirty Roma from Grubišno Polje were certainly in the Croatian Army and police force. According to Goran Đurđević, roughly thirty Roma from the Bjelovar area may have participated in the war. Đuro Bogdan claims that 28 Roma from the Kutina and Sisak area took part in Operation Storm. He also interestingly testifies that Roma in the Croatian Army often said they were "smoked Croatians" (a reference to their skin colour) and that they couldn't run away because they would get a bullet in the head. In Sisak, an Independent Roma Platoon was also part of the 57th Sisak Battalion. Led by Žarko Todorović, and it fought in the Komarevo area. The platoon consisted of 23 Orthodox Roma. Some of the Roma fighters from Sisak were underage, such as Stanoje Nikolić, who joined the war at 17. According to Mile Hudorović, 17 Roma from Orlovac, a suburb of Karlovac, participated in the War of Independence. According to data from the Memorial Documentation Centre of the Homeland War, 22 Roma from Karlovac County were mobilised, of whom two were from the city of Karlovac and 20 from the Ogulin area (Direct demographic losses, 2008, 52).

The most Roma from Zagreb joined the Croatian War of Independence in the 99th and 144th brigades. One of the best-known Roma volunteer soldiers is Ismet Muratović. Borna Marinić lists a few other Roma volunteers from Zagreb and the surrounding area, including Idriz "Munja" Zahirović, Ismet Seferović, Predrag "Kombi" Dedić, Emil King, Hasan Delić, Sead "Braco" Hasanović, and Zarić "Bici" Ahmetović. According to Nusret Seferović, there were 36 Roma in the 99th Brigade. Suljo Seferović estimates—likely realistically—that around 200 Roma took part in the Croatian War of Independence, while Ivan Rumbak, also a Croatian veteran of Roma nationality, cites numbers ranging from 2,500 to 2,700.⁹

Roma from Baranja are especially interesting in terms of the topic of the War of Independence; in 1991, there were 381 Roma in Beli Manastir municipality, the majority of whom were Orthodox. However, in areas predominantly populated by Croats, such as Torjanci, the Roma also declared themselves Roman Catholic. Before the war, Roma in Baranja mostly declared themselves as Yugoslavian (in Beli Manastir municipality, there were as many as 4,265 declared Yugoslavs, and 1,498 undeclared under Article 170 of the Yugoslav constitution).¹⁰

During the War of Independence, according to Roma representative Branko Petrović from Beli Manastir, Roma in Baranja remained in their homes in 99% of cases. Petrović also states: "Where could we have gone when the war began? You can't go to your grave, and wherever you go, you'll miss Baranja and your home. But I have to be honest with you—the Roma here felt like Yugoslavs, and honestly, in 1991, we were afraid of the Croatian authorities, which we saw as the continuation of the Ustaša regime that slaughtered thousands and thousands of Roma from this area. Then we decided it would be better to stay in Yugoslavia." It is a fact that some Roma remained in the Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Syrmia, and that some individuals robbed Croatian and Hungarian villages such as Vardarac and Bilja and terrorised the remaining local Hungarian and Croatian residents after the fall of Baranja.¹¹ After the war, a Roma settlement in

⁹ All of this data taken from Marinić (2019).

¹⁰ *Popis stanovništva 1991. Narodnosni sastav stanovništva Hrvatske po naseljima*, Zagreb 1992.

¹¹ Residents of Vardarac of Hungarian nationality stated this to the authors in 2017.

the Hungarian village of Vardarac was bombed, and demobilised soldiers shot at the houses of Roma from Vardarac. After these events, many Roma left Baranja for Serbia or Western countries.¹² Interviews with Roma in Feral Tribune in 1999 describe the position of Roma in Baranja in the late 1990s. Zoran Mitrović from Torjanci says:

“Whoever is in power, they come down on us Gypsies. It was best for us while Tito still walked the Earth, but whoever came after that has fucked us. The war started, Serb authorities came, and they mobilised us all straight away. The Serbs didn't ask if we wanted to go to war or not; if you didn't, off with your head. If you couldn't shoot, you could dig, so you dug as they held a gun to your back. So you be a hero and stop digging. That's the kind of Četniks we were.”

The fact that Roma in Torjanci were Catholics created additional problems. Vlado Palko from Torjanci stated the following to Feral Tribune:

“So now, we were supposed to be Četniks, but the real Četniks considered us Ustašas because we Roma from Torjanci were Catholic. Roma in Baranja joined whichever church was stronger in the village, so we here took the Catholic faith. Since the Croats came back to the village, the parish priest has refused to christen our children, so we have to go to a priest in Osijek. They only can't prevent us from coming to church, but even there they belittle us, saying to us at mass, 'Come closer, my Gypsies'. Even our relatives who went to Yugoslavia consider us Ustašas.”

Branko Petrović says that neither Croats nor Serbs understand that a Roma cannot be a Četnik or Ustaša.¹³

The position of Roma in Croatia today: Interviews with Roma in Croatia

Regardless of the horrors they suffered in World War II, Roma experienced and still experience stereotypes, stigmatisation, social distance, and segregation, finally succumbing to ethnomimicry¹⁴ due to the way the majority nationality relates to them. Conversation with Roma in Baranja, Istria, Podravina, Međimurje, Slavonski Brod, and Bjelovar-Bilogora, Virovitice-Podravina, and Sisak-Moslavina counties shows that they have experienced a degree of prejudice from the majority nationality, regardless of whether they declared themselves as Croats or Roma. This is especially apparent in areas where there are many Roma or where their settlements are large, potentially even larger than that of the majority Croat population.

The most common problems appear in finding employment, as the majority nation has a stereotype of Roma as people who steal, who smell bad, who lie, who fight and cause problems. Prejudices also relate to the Roma's working abilities; some individuals even change their first and last names out of the desire to find employment (especially in Međimurje where there are many Roma). The prejudices of the majority Croatian population are especially great in settlements such as Trnovec, Parag, Kuršanec, Držimurec, Piškorovec, Kutina,

¹² Statement given to the author on 6 May 2011 by Branko Petrović, born 1961, Bolman, Beli Manastir. It is interesting to note that some Roma do not declare themselves as Roma. For example, in Pitomača near Đurđevac, there are officially no Roma, although it is known there were more than 900 in 2001. The case is similar in Kloštar Podravsk, Homutno near Omišalj on the island of Krk, Otok Oštarijski, and Donja Dobra and Puškarići near Ogulin, where the Roma population declare themselves as Croatian (Pokos 2005: 37–38). The number of Roma is certainly higher; estimates range from 30,000 to 40,000 Roma in Croatia (Hrvatić 2005: 181).

¹³ Feral Tribune, 31 August 1999: 4.

¹⁴ Ethnomimicry is hiding one's national identity.

Capraške Poljane, Sisak, or Josip Rimac in Slavonski Brod. The locals feel unsafe to a certain degree, which in many cases leads to stigmatisation against Roma.

Graffiti that occasionally appears in certain cities—especially Čakovec, which has the highest Roma population—both offend and frighten the Roma living in the surrounding area. Stigmatisation has gone so far that some from the majority nationality mention the Independent State of Croatia and the slaughter of Roma; a few years ago, a graffiti appeared in Čakovec reading “Enough Gypsy business; Gypsies—Jasenovac, a one way train...”. If Roma want to move out of their houses in segregated settlements, they have extreme difficulty finding houses in Croatian areas. Even if someone were to sell or rent them a house, they would encounter occasional problems with the local population. Stigmatisation and segregation are certainly most apparent in Međimurje, where the twelve Roma settlements are separated from the majority population by road, embankment, railway line, or streams; some of them are even a kilometre or two from the majority population (Piškorovec-Držimurec).

In Pribislavec, the Roma settlement is separated from the Croatian part by a large concrete wall. The way of life and habits of some Roma are certainly not contributing to improving relations or reducing the majority population's prejudices. Stigmatization is more apparent in areas with a larger Roma population, especially those where a large number of Roma children attend school. Social distance is apparent among a large number of residents. Through their ethnic uniqueness, Roma have maintained their identity and opposed assimilation processes. However, by doing so, they make the process of integration into Croatian society slower and more difficult, if not outright impossible. According to the statements of some Roma interviewed, the local government's attitude towards them depends mostly on the size of their population. The more Roma there are in a given area, the more prepared the local government is to cooperate with them. The fact is that Roma do strive to integrate into Croatian society. The majority of respondents say they would be happy to move from a Roma settlement into a majority-populated area.

In 2010, there were issues with segregated classrooms in Međimurje; some Croatian parents did not want to enrol their children in schools attended by Roma children.¹⁵ In the 2008/2009 school year, the number of segregated classrooms in Međimurje, Varaždin, and Sisak-Moslavina counties amounted to 67.¹⁶ However, some schools have since dealt with the issue of Roma segregation. Snježana Coha, principal of Vladimir Vidrić Elementary School in Kutina, stated the following in an interview in 2016:

“Six years ago, we were faced with the possibility of completely segregating Roma children who enrolled in primary school. All Roma children from the city of Kutina enrolled in our elementary school, which caused a revolt among other parents, and resulted in a stronger tendency to enrol non-Roma children in other schools. This resulted in an increase in the percentage of Roma pupils at our school, and teaching issues became ever greater. Faced with this situation, four years ago, in cooperation with the Kutina city government and Roma organisations, we initiated a desegregation project. We agreed that Roma pupils be enrolled equally amongst all schools in Kutina, and that they have the same rights as in our school (free transport and food). Our goal was

15 For more on this, see the judgment in *Oršuš v. Croatia* before the European Court for Human Rights see Baričić 2011: 151–158.

16 In areas in which Roma live, their children are most often the majority in classrooms. Due to their poor knowledge of Croatian, certain primary schools in Međimurje formed segregated Roma classes. In the 2001/2002 school year, 511 of a total of 865 Roma pupils in Međimurje attended Roma-only classes. The most segregated pupils were in Macinec Primary School (83.33%) and Kuršanec Primary School (88.49%) (Horvat 2009: 455).

for around 30% of Roma children to enrol here and begin attending school.”¹⁷

Ethnomimicry is still strongly present amongst all Roma in Croatia. Roma declare themselves as Croats in a large number of settlements in Croatia, hoping to repair their relationship with the majority population by doing so. The most drastic example of this is Pitomača, where there were only 6 declared Roma in 2011, although in reality around 1,300 of them lived there. In some Roma settlements in Međimurje, the number of those who declare themselves as Roma corresponds with the actual number of Roma; the case is quite different in Lika and Gorski Kotar, where Roma mostly do not declare themselves as such. The reasons for ethnomimicry mainly lie in fear of Croatian nationalism (which has been present since the early 1990s and is gradually reducing), in prejudices and stereotypes of the majority population towards the Roma national minority, and in problems such as finding employment, etc.¹⁸

According to the most recent census in 2011, there were 16,975 Roma in Croatia.¹⁹

Croatia	Number of Roma	Percentage of Roma in the total county population
Zagreb County	258	0.08
Krapina-Zagorje County	3	0.00
Sisak-Moslavina County	1,463	0.85
Karlovac County	26	0.02
Varaždin County	711	0.40
Koprivnica-Križevci County	925	0.80
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	391	0.33
Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	1,072	0.36
Lika-Senj County	21	0.04
Virovitice-Podravina County	14	0.02
Požega-Slavonia County	13	0.02
Brod-Posavina County	1,178	0.74
Zadar County	12	0.01
Osijek-Baranja County	1,874	0.61
Šibenik-Knin County	22	0.02
Vukovar-Srijem County	253	0.14
Split-Dalmatia County	8	0.00

¹⁷ Interview taken from <http://romi.hr/fokus/hrvatska/desegregacijom-do-integracije>.
¹⁸ In all 12 Roma settlements in Međimurje in 2002, there were only 38 people with full-time employment contracts; an additional 26 had part-time contracts, while 362 worked seasonal jobs.
¹⁹ www.dzs.hr.

Istria County	858	0.41
Dubrovnik-Neretva County	11	0.01
Međimurje County	5,107	4.49
City of Zagreb	2,755	0.35
Total	16,975	0.40

According to data from Kunac, Klasnić & Lalić,²⁰ significantly more Roma live in some counties than the number listed in the 2011 census. Researchers mapped certain localities and estimated that many more Roma live in Croatia than are listed in the census.

County	Number of mapped localities	Total number of Roma	Number of Roma over 16
Bjelovar-Bilogora	10	1,465	592
Brod-Posavina	6	1,919	800
City of Zagreb	31	3,299	1,911
Istria	6	933	282
Karlovac	2	272	132
Koprivnica-Križevci	11	1,555	640
Lika-Senj	2	86	53
Međimurje	14	6,368	2,808
Osijek-Baranja	17	1,973	967
Primorje-Gorski Kotar	9	1,389	587
Sisak-Moslavina	11	2,190	936
Varaždin	7	1,270	766
Virovitice-Podravina	1	1,315	875
Vukovar-Srijem	2	250	116
Zagreb	5	240	139
Total	134	24,524	11,604

The authors also listed current locations where Roma live in which they did research. This has enabled the creation of an atlas of Roma settlements in Croatia (Kunac, Klasnić & Lalić 2018: 69–70.).

20 Kunac, Klasnić & Lalić 2018: 67–68.

County	Settlements
Bjelovar-Bilogora	Bjelovar, Lasovac (Šandrovac), Narta (Štefanje), Stalovica (Grubišno Polje), Veliki Grđevac, Končanica, Gomja Kovačica (Veliki Grđevac), Veliki Pašijan (Garešnica), (and Gudovac (Bjelovar
Brod-Posavina County	Naselje J. Rimac (Slavonski Brod), Jelas/Krajiška (Slavonski Brod), Klis, Gomja Vrba i Livada (Slavonski Brod), Vrpolje, Bedem (Nova Gradiška), Gaj (Nova Gradiška)
Istria County	Barake naselje (Pula), Pula, Umag, Ližnjan Jadreški, Vinkuran (Medulin) i Vodnjan
Koprivnica-Križevci County	Botovo (Dmje), Peteranec, Hlebine, Stiska (Đurđevac), Gabajeva Greda (Hlebine), Novigrad Podarvski, Vlaislav, Virje, Sigetec (Peteranec), Žlebice (Koprivnica), Koprivnička Reka and Herešin (Koprivnica), Kloštar Podravski
Međimurje County	Pribislavec, Gomji Kuršanec (Nedelišće), Orehovica 2, Dravska ulica (Orehovica), Kotoriba, Kotoriba (vrtno naselje), Domašinec (Kvrtovec), Tmavec (Nedelišće), Goričan, Sitnice (Mursko Središće), Kuršanec (Čakovec), Orehovica, Lončarevo ((Podturen), Parag (Nedelišće), Parag II (Nedelišće), Piškorovec (Mala Subotica
Osijek-Baranja County	Belišće, Kneževi Vinogradi, Rupa (Beli Manastir), Palača (Beli Manastir), Beli Manastir, Bolman (Jagodnjak), Torjanci – settlement, Torjanci – village, Bistrinci (Belišće), Donji Miholjac, Valpovo, Podgorač, Darda, Bilje, Vardarac, Osijek, Jagodnjak, Popovac
Sisak-Moslavina County	Petrinja, Popovača. Gračenica (Popovača), Glina, Capraške Poljane (Sisak), Palanjek (Sisak), Vidrenjak (Velika Ludina), Novska, Kutina
Vukovar-Srijem County	Vukovar, Vinkovci
Varaždin County	Cestica, Petrijanec, Štosov trg (Varaždin), Ivana Gundulića 44 (Ludbreg), Ludbreški Vinogradi (Ludbreg), Karlovec Ludbreški, Županec
City of Zagreb	Staro Brestje, Novo Brestje, Sesevetska Sopnica, Dumovec, Novi Jelkovec (Sesvete), Dubec, Poljanice Donja Dubrava, 7. Retkovec, Vukomerec (Dubrava), Ferensčica, Donje Svetice, Livadarski put, Livadice, Borongaj, Savica Šanci, Folnegovićevo naselje, Resnik, Kozari Put, Petruševac, Žitnjak, Tmava (Pešćenica), Savica Šanci, Struge, Vrtni put, Trešnjevka Sjever, Trnje, Heinzlova, Plinarsko naselje, Botinec, Sveta Klara (Novi Zagreb), Podsused, Vrapče-Vučak
Zagreb County	Rugvica, Orle, Velika Mlaka, Dugo Selo - centre, Ivanić Grad – Jalševac
Virovitice-Podravina County	Pitomača
Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	Rijeka, Pehlin/Rujevica (Rijeka), Plasi, Vinodolska 22 (Crikvenica), Ulica Krase (Novi Vinodolski), Tršće (Čabar), Škurinje-Mihačeva Draga (Rijeka), Drenova (Rijeka), Brod na Kupi, Delnice, Dedin, Omišalj
Karlovac County	(Orlovac (Karlovac), Popović Brdo (Karlovac
Lika-Senj County	Doljani (Otočac), Vrhovine

Conclusion

Are Roma in Croatia included in Croatian society, or are they still at the social margins, discriminated, segregated, and stigmatised? Prejudices are still great, and their suffering in World War II has mostly faded in the collective memory of the majority nationality, as there are no more living witnesses to remember the disappearance of the Roma population. In Međimurje, there are problems involving segregation, especially in schools. Interlocutors emphasise that Roma are more stigmatised in places where they are more numerous.

Social distance towards Roma is certainly present; nearly nothing has changed in terms of prejudice, stigmatisation, and social distance. One example of social distance towards members of the Roma ethnic group is the removal of non-Roma children from schools attended by Roma. It may seem that the Roma have “chosen” this distance through their subcultural way of life. On the contrary—Roma want to integrate into Croatian society and they are bothered by segregation and a lack of acceptance. The issue of expressing ethnic belonging is often traumatic for Roma. Members of this community are mostly aware of how they are perceived by the non-Roma population, and also of suffering and trauma in the past.

Ethnomimicry or the hiding of ethnic identity is present among the Roma more than in most other similar groups. In Croatia, they most often declare themselves as Croatian; to support their inclusion, they note their participation in Croatia's defence during the war in the 1990s. The estimated large difference between census results and the true number of Roma indicates the extent to which ethnomimicry is present amongst the Roma population in Croatia. Communicational memory within this ethnic group is strong, and the difficult, traumatic events of the time of the Independent State of Croatia are still fresh in this memory.

The following circumstances have influenced the Roma's frequent hiding of their identity: the lack of their own state, frequent persecution in the past, the migratory nature of this ethnic community, and their unique way of life. The Roma interviewed have also experienced discrimination. Discrimination is present in employment. Hoping to improve their chances at employment, some individuals have even changed their first and last names, but this was only of assistance to those who did not look like Roma. In the political field, the issue of citizenship was a current problem for Roma during the 1990s. The election of Roma to Croatian Parliament was an important symbolic and practical-political act for the Roma community and for Croatia as a whole. In addition to other positive changes and affirmative action (Decade of Roma Inclusion, etc.), we may assume that these changes in the political and cultural spheres will contribute to improving the inclusion and position of the Roma population in all segments of Croatian society.

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Sažetak

Romi u Hrvatskoj od 1945. do današnjih dana

Autor u tekstu obrađuje pitanje broja Roma u Hrvatskoj nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata i tragedije koja je pogodila romsko stanovništvo u periodu između 1941. i 1945. Promatra u tekstu popise stanovništva nakon 1945. godine i na temelju tih popisa donosi informacije o broju Roma od 1948., kada ih je na području čitave Hrvatske bilo tek 405 do 2011. kada ih je na istom prostoru bilo 16 975. Autor se bavi i razlozima zbog kojih se broj Roma u popisima stanovništva povećavao. Prema podacima vidljivo je da su se Romi u Hrvatskoj vrlo često izjašnjavali kao Jugoslaveni, Hrvati, Srbi i kao Rumunji. Tradicionalno su Romi bili više nastanjeni na području sjevera Hrvatske, odnosno u središnjoj Hrvatskoj i u Slavoniji, a znatno manje u Dalmaciji i istarsko-kvnerskom području. Autor se posebno bavi doseljavanjem Roma iz drugih dijelova Jugoslavije u Hrvatsku (osobito s područja Bosne, iz Srbije, s Kosova i iz Makedonije) te oblikovanjem pojedinih romskih naselja ili dijelova naselja u određenim zonama u Hrvatskoj. Na temelju polustrukturiranih dubinskih intervjua koje je autor provodio s Romima na području čitave Hrvatske progovara i o položaju romskog stanovništva u vremenu između 2010. i 2020., propituje etnomimikriju kod Roma, segregaciju kod Roma, integraciju, stigmatizaciju i predrasude prema Romima. Istražujući etnomimikriju donosi i zaključke o tome kako se Romi izjašnjavaju, odnosno kako su se izjašnjavali u prošlosti i o tome na koji način izjašnjavaju danas. Istraživanje je provedeno na području Belog Manastira, međimurskih romskih naselja, podravskih naselja kod Đurđevca, Ludbrega i Koprivnice, na prostoru Varaždinske Podravine, u okolici Bjelovara, u Kutini i okolici, u Sisku, u Slavonskom Brodu i na području Istre. Donosi i popis romskih naselja, odnosno dijelova naselja u kojima su nastanjeni Romi. Uz tablice s brojem romskog stanovništva u pojedinim županijama autor donosi i graf iz kojega je vidljiv rast broja romskog stanovništva na području pojedinih županija u posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća. Na temelju tih tablica može se zaključiti i o budućem razvoju romskih naselja u nabrojenim zonama, odnosno moguće je donijeti zaključke o tome u kojim zonama su naselja najgušće rasprostranjena i gdje je najmanje prisutna etnomimikrija kod romskog stanovništva.

Ključne riječi: demografija; etnomimikrija; Romi; socijalizam; segregacija; stigmatizacija