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ROMA (AND SERBS), CULTURE OF DEATH AND TOLERANCE: THREE EXAMPLES FROM SOUTH SERBIA*

Summary

While working on the constitution of the sociology of religion of the Roma religious life, we have opened up a new field in the literature of the sociology of religion and Romology; we have also taken up the socioempirical research of the phenomenon of death, ways of burial (funeral rites), the grave cult and types of grave in Serbia. All things related to death – predeath, death and postdeath rites – make up a peculiar culture of death. It, naturally, includes the attitude towards the grave in general and, especially, the burial place (“eternal house” grave, mound, stone, monument, etc.).

For us, the answers to the questions related to the Roma burial place represent the key issue since all talks about interculturalism and multiculturalism, communal spirit and tolerance in the multiethnic and multireligious society lose or preserve their meaning depending on the decision whether we “allow” to an ethnic, racial and religious Other to bury his dead at “our” cemetery. At least in death people are equal; yet many people cannot even grasp the idea that there are still separate “Gypsy” cemeteries or even prohibitions to bury the Roma in their place of living. The place of the Roma burial is a specific test of ethnic and religious tolerance.

Our research started with a typology of Roma cemeteries according to which Romas are buried, namely, a) in their own cemetery or the so-called “Gypsy cemetery” which is physically separated from the majority population cemetery; b) in their own cemetery or the so-called “Gypsy cemetery” which is physically connected with the majority population cemetery, c) in the majority population cemetery, and d) some other cemetery outside their place of living.

The test also includes an empirical report on examples of Roma cemeteries in the region of Niš (Doljevac – Belotinac), in the County of Toplica (Prokuplje – Mala Plana) and the County of Jablanica (Lebane – Krivača).

Key Words: Roma, Roma Cemeteries, Typology of Burial, South Serbia, Serbs, Tolerance

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РОМИ (И СРБИ), КУЛТУРА СМРТИ И ТОЛЕРАНЦИЈА: ТРИ ПРИМЕРА ИЗ ЈУЖНЕ СРБИЈЕ

Резиме

У раду се представља део резултата обимног, трогодишњег истраживања за време којег је обрађено 29 примера ромског сахрањивања у шест округа југоисточне Србије. За потребе овог рада, приказујемо по један такав пример из Нишког (Дољевац – Белогинац), Топличког (Прокупље – Мала Плана) и Јабланичког округа (Лебане – Кривача).

Кључне речи: Роми, ромска гробља, типологија сахрањивања, јужна Србија, Срби, толеранција

Introduction

Developing the sociology of religion focused on the religious life of the Roma, we opened up a new field in the literature of sociology of religion and Romology, and commenced a socio-empirical research of *the phenomenon of death, ways of burial (funeral rites), the grave cult and types of graveyards of the Roma*. All which is related to death – predeath, death, and postdeath rites¹ – create a specific culture of death.² It, naturally, inheres the attitude to the *cemetery* in general, and the *burial site* (“the eternal home”, grave, mound, tombstone, monument...), in particular.

For us, answers to the question of *the location of Roma burial* are the key issue, for the entire dispute on interculturalism and multiculturalism, living together in tolerance and multiethnic and multiconfessional society, fails or holds around the decision whether to “allow” the ethnically, racially, and religiously different to be buried in “our” cemetery. At least in death are men equal, so that many individuals cannot really fathom that there still are separated “Gypsy” graveyards, and even instances of prohibition of Roma burial in their place of residence.³ *The location of burial of the Roma is a true test of ethnic and religious tolerance.*⁴

¹ Interviews with elderly Roma men and women on Romani predeath, death, and postdeath customs have been published in Dragan Todorović (ed.), *Romani Narratives about Pre-death, Death and After-death Customs/Romano Vakeriba kotar Anglunomeribasere, Meribasere thay Palomeribasere Adetya*, YSSSR/Sven, Niš 2005.

² Positions of historians, anthropologists, and ethnologists on the culture of death are in more detail presented in Dragan Todorović and Dragoljub B. Đorđević, *Romani Culture of Death*, in: *Roma at the Crossroads*, PUNTA/Society of Good Action/Komren Sociological Encounters/Bahtalo drom, Niš 2002, 143 – 156.

³ On an attempt of such a prohibition, see Dragoljub B. Đorđević and Dragan Todorović, *Maple over Head (Classical Faith and Roma-Orthodox Village Graveyards)*, Komren Sociological Encounters, Niš, 1999.

⁴ This assumption is resolutely justified in Dragoljub B. Đorđević, *Burying of Roma: A Test of Ethnic and Religious Tolerance*, in: *Cultural and Ethnic Identities in the Process of Globalization and Regionalization in the Balkans*, JUNIR Yearly IX, Niš 2002, 209 – 217; The overall ethnic and religious distance from the Roma in Serbian society is discussed in Dragoljub B. Đorđević, Dragan Todorović and Lela Milošević, *Romas and Others – Others and Romas: Social Distance*, Institute for Social Values and Structures “Ivan Hadjysky”, Sofia 2004.

Our study commenced with a typology of Romani cemeteries according to which Roma are buried:

- 1) On their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery, physically separated from the cemetery of the majority nation (A);
- 2) On their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery, physically attached to the cemetery of the majority nation (B);
- 3) On the cemetery of the majority nation (C) and
- 4) On another cemetery, outside the place of residence (D).

In principle, the explanation should follow a logic according to which, from the standpoint of integration and intercultural living, apart from the burial outside the place of residence (D), all other cemetery types (A, B, C) are fully legitimate and desirable. As this is justifiable in terms of civilization, confession, and infrastructure, *favouring mixed burials* is not really a mistake, unless such an integration ends in total assimilation. For really, is it not natural that these two confessionally equal ethos should be buried in one cemetery, where attention should be paid that this does not end in the assimilation of the weak into the strong, the outnumbered into the numerous, minority into majority; on the other hand, is it not unnatural that people of the same faith separate their final resting places, as they are different only by skin colour, where they strive, the minority for self-ghettoisation, and the majority for segregation⁵

Three Examples

Findings from experience, presented in further text, are a result of the comprehensive three-year research (2002-2005) “*Romani Places of Cult and Culture of Death*”, published for Open Society Institute from Budapest (Program *Roma Culture in Central&Eastern Europe*). Twenty-nine examples of Roma funerals in six districts of southeast Serbia were covered.⁶ For the purposes of this paper, we present one instance from Niški (Doljevac – Belotinac), Toplički (Prokuplje – Mala Plana), and Jablanički Districts (Lebane – Krivača), respectively.

Nišavski District Municipality Doljevac Cemetery in Belotinac

General data. Belotinac is the last one in the series of villages around Doljevac, located 8km from the seat of the municipality. In the village there is no church or mosque. According to the last census, it has 1,321 inhabitants, out of whom about 40 are Roma. The Roma are Orthodox and their

⁵ Sociological standards for experiential research of Romani cemeteries are given in Dragan Todorović and Dragoljub B. Đorđević, The Gypsy Cemetery in Donji Komren, *Facta Universitatis: series Philosophy and Sociology*, 2 (8), 2001, 445 – 455.

⁶ A detailed empirical report is found in Dragoljub B. Đorđević (ed.), *Romani Cult Places and Culture of Death/Romane Kultna Thana thay I Kultura Meribasiri*, YSSSR/Sven, Niš 2005.

share in the total population is growing. They celebrate Đurđevdan, Vasilica⁷ and have their *slava*⁸ (mostly St. Nicolas), but also participate in yearly religious procession, *litija*⁹, in the village. As believers they practice three or four rites (baptism, marriage, *slava*, funeral service). They are buried in the so-called Serbian cemetery, together with other locals.

Cemetery description. Not far away from the centre of the village, sitting on a bench in front of the local store, we found resting a vital sixty-eight-year-old village dweller, Miodrag Mamutović, one of the oldest Roma in the village, peculiarly white-skinned, yet not concealing his Roma origins. Between two jobs he was supposed to carry out, he agreed to give us some information from his rich life experience. In Belotinac today we find eight Romani houses, out of which three most numerous families are the Mustafić, whose distant ancestor Arif Mustafić built a house here before World War Two, and spread his family lineage. Older Roma spent their working life in local companies, after which they were allowed modest pensions. However, younger ones today cannot find permanent jobs. They mostly works as day labourers in Serbian households, but they are fine workers and have no problems with the majority population.

Having heard our conversation, and respecting the years of the ageing uncle Mile, Ivanović Vinko, a younger Serb, volunteered to escort us to the village cemetery. One reaches the fenceless grass-covered cemetery by a village road, with no asphalt, barely one kilometre away from the village centre, which further leads through cornfields to the next village. As Romani houses are mostly situated just by this road, we stopped by to find Vinko's good friend Dejan Mustafović, and asked him to keep us company and explain anything that might remain unclear.

Through a winding path, among tombstones, we set out for the western part of the cemetery. This is where local Roma have been given the approval of village authorities to bury their dead. Towards the very end, leaning on the last Serbian tombs, we found two Romani graves (Ph. 1 and Ph. 2). One is made of cut stone, with the following text in Cyrillic script:

MUSTAFIĆ MILE (1926-1992)
MEMORIAL BUILT BY MILE FOR HIMSELF
MUSTAFIĆ LEPOSAVA (1922-1991)
MEMORIAL BUILT BY HER HUSBAND MILE
AND THE FAMILY

The stonecutter put in a lot of effort to craftily ornament the final resting place, as much as his skills and external circumstances allowed him to: ceramic photographs are additionally ornamented with small wreaths, under the cross there are rhomboid ornamental lines, coloured brown, while

⁷ Also known as Romany New Year (translator's remark).

⁸ Yearly family Orthodox celebration, typical of Serbian Orthodoxy, whose closest equivalent is Name Day. (translator's remark).

⁹ This would be similar to Patron Saint Day. (translator's remark).

the edges of the tombstone are rimmed with an unbroken line of brown and black dots.

The second lot also occupies two grave spaces, but, for now, there is just one, black marble tombstone, with the Cyrillic inscription:

MUSTAFIĆ DARINKA
1913-1996
MEMORIAL BUILT BY
DAUGHTER ZORA
AND SONS
DRAGAN AND PREDRAG

The tomb is surrounded by metal fence, as is the case with most Serbian ones. However, what unequivocally distinguishes these two graves from nearby ones is the fact that all data are written on the external side of the tombstone, a situation we have not seen before in this area, typical of Islam. Neither Dejan nor Vinko were able to explain why this was so. There is the third Romani grave space – the grave of Miša Mustafić, whose remains were moved, and there was buried Nikola, once a police officer of Serbian nationality. Our informants were not able to show us his exact location now, but they admitted there was enmity between the two families, because of the inhumane behaviour of the Serbian family.

Upon return, it seemed a bit strange to us that in the cemetery there were only two Romani tombstones, given the long period of Roma presence in the village. This is how we found out of the closed-down Romani cemetery, of which no one had told us a word, thinking, probably, that we would not be interested. A very sad story then emerged, apparently with no epilogue in sight. Our loud conversation at the cemetery was overheard by the local villager Radoslav Stanković (better known as “Rade Milankin” or by his nick “Rade Skobalj”), who, together with his family, was at the time leaving funeral feast on the grave mound. He joined us and gave a detailed account on once separate Roma funerals.

By World War II, the Roma in Belotinac had been buried in a special location, independent of Serbs, on the estate, ploughland of Marković Dragoslav. No one knew how, in the sixties of the last century, Dragoslav’s son in law Stojanović Aleksandar started ploughing this field. He simply ploughed the shallow land and evened the surface of the cemetery. Then he began cultivating different crops. Finally, this piece of land, which was once low ground, was bought by Dimitrijević Nebojša, who now became the new owner of the field-cemetery. He filled up the small valley with ground to the top, preparing the site for possible civil construction (Ph. 3).

After the conversation, we immediately set out for this location. Once we saw the field, we right away understood the reasons of current owner’s such behaviour. The lot is located at the very entrance to the village, on a detour from the motorway that we already mentioned. The plan to build an exclusive facility here – a road café or restaurant, for instance – is well grounded, as it would provide the owner with significant income. However,

how the prospective guests will feel when they find out they are sitting on what was once a cemetery, is probably not something the owner has ever considered, nor does he want to waste his thoughts on it. We had no time to discuss this matter with Nebojša – we would have perhaps heard additional arguments in favour of his decision. Be it as it may, the Roma have long been without their own graveyard, on which they had once buried their ancestors for decades.

*Toplički District
Municipality Prokuplje
Cemetery in Mala Plana*

General data. Mala Plana is one of the bigger villages around Prokuplje, 8km away from the seat of the municipality. The village has a church. According to the last census, the population is 608, among whom there are around 40 Romanies. Most of them are Orthodox, and their share in the total population is dropping. They celebrate the slava of their family and of the village. Usually they do not marry in the church, but they regularly baptize their children, invite the priest for funeral services and the slava. They are buried on the so-called Serbian cemetery, together with other locals.

Cemetery description. In the very centre of Mala Plana, next to the bus stop on the regional road Blace – Niš, opposite the now-dilapidated House of Culture, eight Romani houses are situated, one next to the other. Along with another one, a bit more far-away, towards the train station, they gather all the Roma of Mala Plana, about forty persons. Six houses belong to the Vasić family, and one houses the Ilić and Đorđević families respectively.

We found ourselves in the home of Jovan Ilić, who lives there with his son (whose eyesight on the left eye is impaired, and who has no appropriate medical treatment), daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. Over there we ran into Vasić Milica – Lena, one of the oldest Romani women from Plana, who makes ends meet by petty trade. Jovan and his uncle work in the local brickplant. All the rest of the Roma are unemployed and have no regular income. They mostly work as day labourers ploughing land, doing seasonal work, and they also mention “summer stays” on rich estates in Vojvodina. Jovan and Lena (she came to Plana in 1952) agree that the first Romani family made their home here about 1940, just before World War Two. They most probably arrived from the nearby village of Donja Konjuša, although their origins were from Trstenik. That one house of the time, and nine other Roma houses today, are all Orthodox, with no exception. They resolutely reported that they could not remember any disorder – rifts, fights – between themselves and Serbs. In terms of religious conduct, they practice whatever their neighbours do, although they point out a few religious peculiarities of the region of Toplica. For instance, mass for the dead is given after 20 days also, while every evening up to 40 days from the burial, a candle is lit in the house. For their marginalized social position these people blame both the state and the Roma of Prokuplje area, their more numerous and better

organized fellow citizens, who, in spite of having a number of Roma organizations, do not care much for the fate of Mala Plana dwellers.

Together with Jovan, we move on to the joint cemetery along the gravel-covered village road leading to the neighbouring village of Resinac, one and a half kilometres from the village centre (Ph. 4). There is no person hired to take care of the cemetery's looks and hygiene. It therefore resembles dozens of others: unfenced, without lot boundaries, weedy...

This area has always been the final resting place for the Roma, too. However, material evidence of earlier burials is lacking. From the more recent period, one finds about twenty graves, located among Serbian tombs, towards the very end of the cemetery. We are surprised by their orientation: they are installed in all directions, as if someone had forcefully arranged them one next to the other. We are given the explanation that there was actually no room for additional graves, but that the Roma had "stolen" some land from the dense dogwood forest around the edges, burying their dearest the way the configuration of the terrain prompted them to. Tombstones are made mostly of black granite or marble, with Cyrillic inscriptions and photographs on ceramic, while only three graves have simple metal fence on concrete stand. One of the better maintained graves is that of Slobodanka Đorđević (1945-1990) (Ph. 5).

A meter or two away from this spot, where a series of Serbian monuments starts, there protrudes moss-covered stone foundation without the vertical part of the tomb, of which Jovan says it is the mark of a Romani grave. This is the resting place of Mića Vasić, who was killed by chetniks¹⁰. There he was buried by his father Mladen Vasić (1905-1976), who was later severely beaten by Bulgarian occupiers, so he should give them the names of local supporters of partisan movement (Mladen did not confess, but he barely remained alive after the beating).

Two tombstones attract special attention. One belongs to Vasić Rade (1935-1981), husband to the lively elderly woman mentioned above – Milica-Lena, and the other is the tomb of the respected musician whose virtuoso play on the violin is still remembered by older villagers. On the outer side of the stone there is a long epitaph engraved, with some minor spelling mistakes (Ph. 6):

TODAY IT IS A SOMBRE AND SAD
DAY IN OUR HOUSE
A YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE
THE ALL-TOO-EARLY DEPARTURE
OF OUR DEAREST
A NOBLE BEING HAS LEFT US
HE WHO WAS READY
TO HELP EVERYONE
IN GOOD AND EVIL

¹⁰ Serbian nationalist and royalist army of World War Two, opposed to the communist movement of partisans. (translator's remark).

WITH HIM WE WERE HAPPY
AND JOYOUS AND WITH
HIS DEPARTURE ALL THE JOY
FROM OUR FACES HAS VANISHED
WHAT REMAINS FOR US IS TO GO
ALONG THE ROAD WHICH
WE ONCE TOOK TOGETHER
TO BE DILLIGENT AND GOOD
AS HE ONCE WAS

The series of Romani graves ends with a small tomb, closed with iron rims, aluminum plaques and window glasses, inside which one finds two tombstones with basic data on the deceased, marble boards over the graves and bronze busts on the marble stand (Ph. 7 and Ph. 8):

MILE PAVLOVIĆ (1926-2004)
SMILJA VASIĆ-PAVLOVIĆ (1946-1995)
MEMORIAL BUILT
DURING LIFETIME TO HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE
WITH DAUGHTERS MIRJANA
OLIVERA AND ZAGA

We notice the grammatical slip in the text, regarding the issue who built the tombstone, but also a short remark above the entrance door, just below the big metal cross:

“ETERNALLY IN THE HEAVENS
SMILJA AND MILE”

For truth's sake we also report a Serbian view of the origins of the location for Roma grave spaces. Towards the end of our stay in Mala Plana, we were invited to the home of Rajko Radovanović, resident of the village since his birth. Some decades ago, the territory of today's Romani graves was covered by the village road. It was crossed on foot, by carts, and tractors (the entire location was once known as “Dogwood”). Back then, the cemetery got too close to the edge of the road and its capacity became a problem. For that reason – but also for Serbian traditional wariness of a burial place shared with the Roma (along with the unbaptized, committers of suicide, drowned persons...) – when the local Roma required they be given a lot for burying they were given a permission to use for this purpose the little space remaining on the other side of the road, ending in the thick dogwood. The drastic step was taken by Mile Pavlović in 1995 when, after the death of his wife, he built the spacious tomb, and fully blocked the old road. Wishing to keep good relations with the neighbour, none of the Serbs protested. Thus, the suddenly created cemeterial space began to be filled up with irregularly oriented, new Romani graves.

*Jablanički District
Municipality Lebane
Cemetery in Krivača*

General data. Krivača is a suburb of Lebane, only two kilometres away from the town centrum. There is no church or mosque. According to the last census, there are 414 residents, out of whom 130 are Roma. Most of the local Roma are Muslim by confession and their share in the total population is growing; among them, there are still some Orthodox Christians.

Roma Muslims celebrate Đurđevdan and Vasilica, and some of them have their slava, most often St. Nicolas. They do not usually practice traditional rites of Islamic faith (circumcision of children, adherence to Ramadan fast, celebration of Kurban Bairam). They bury people on the separate Romani cemetery, formed on the ruins of the old Turkish graveyard. Within the same cemetery there are a few graves of Orthodox Roma, but as of recently in the town Orthodox cemetery there have been located a few graves of Muslim Roma.

The few Orthodox Romanies celebrate Đurđevdan, Vasilica, and their slava, usually St. Nicolas. Weddings or baptisms of children in the church are not common, because there is no church in the village, so they need to go to the centrum of Lebane, a thing which not all of them are willing to do. They are mostly buried together with other locals in the village cemetery.

Cemetery description. We talked to Božidar Mladenović, a vital septagenarian, one of the oldest dwellers of the settlement. His great-grandfather Petar, serving a Turkish landowner of the time, was given as a present all the land of his former master after the retreat of the Turks before Serbian liberators in late 19th century. Božidar was happy to give his account on his Roma neighbours.

In Krivača, most Roma are Muslims, or at least they proclaim themselves as such. While the small Orthodox Roma community has completely melted with the majority Serbian population (they celebrate village festivals together, have their slava, invite the local priest for funeral services), Roma Muslims openly combine the customs of both religions. For instance, when burying their dead, they do not invite the *khoja*¹¹ to give the prayer for the dead, and the body of the deceased is not rolled in the traditional chiffon sheet. Rather, it is laid down and buried in a coffin. The owner of the warehouse near Roma cemetery tells us that time and again he is puzzled by the sight of a Romani funeral: as soon as the deceased is laid into the ground, all people present run away in panic, where only those in charge of covering the grave with land remain. It is not seldom the case that some such Roma individuals celebrate their slava (most often St. Nicolas). The richest Muslim Romany from the neighbourhood, Memet, for instance, laid his father to rest in the Orthodox cemetery in the town, and his wife in the village cemetery in nearby Geglj.

¹¹ Muslim priest (translator's remark).

Mild intolerance is seen between the Orthodox and the Muslims (we take the liberty of concluding this from a discussion with an “Orthodox” who works as a loading worker), but this does not prevent them from smuggling goods or playing music together. However, a number of individuals from both groups ever more regularly start attending the sermons of priests from Christian Adventist Church, which slowly spreads its influence from the nearby village of Donja Brijanja. Due to persistent missionary work, typical of new Protestantism, a purely Romani Adventist community has been established in the village.

The history of the graveyard, called simply “Gypsy cemetery” by the villagers, is also interesting. Once it was part of a larger piece of land, where an old Turkish cemetery was located. After the liberation of Serbian territories from the Turkish reign, that we mentioned above, the Roma kept practising Islamic culture and burying their dead in the same spots. At the same time, Turkish graves were becoming destroyed by the tooth of time. As compared with that distant period, the size of the graveyard is considerably smaller today. Not knowing that this had once been a cemetery, Serbs built three large residential houses in its upper part, and so found the remains of bones when laying the foundations (Ph. 9). In the lower part, the Roma held on to their right to bury their dead, although local villagers offered to transfer the graveyard to another location, as they planned to build a school there.

As time passed, traces of old Turkish tombstones vanished, and similar was the fate of older Roma memorials. For this reason, contemporary researchers, like us in Lebane, could easily make a mistake and assess that the cemetery is not actually so old. For lack of space, into the spots of old final resting places of ancestors, new deceased were buried. During this process, old tombstones were dug up and moved – no one knows where to.

The cemetery is located just by the regional road Medveđa-Lebane, it is a small “enclave” covered with grass in the middle of the Serbian settlement, inhabited by the newcomers from the nearby village of Krivača. It is not fenced, and graves are irregularly ordered – only a few of them have a simple fence made up of welded, black metal rods – and one cannot say it is very tidy (Ph. 10).

The oldest tombstones made of stone and granite originate from the sixties of the last century. They bear clear tokens of Islamic faith – star and crescent. More recent monuments, made of marble, also have these signs (in some places, layers of colour can be traced, mostly blue). However, in other traits, they do not at all differ from graves with a cross. Ceramic pictures are present everywhere, as are the data on the deceased: name and surname, year of birth and death, who built the memorial (Ph. 11). We do not find the situation – registered in the graveyards of Belotinac – that in some tombs the side containing basic data is not turned towards the inside, i.e. toward the tombstone (as is the case in Serbian cemeteries), but instead to the outside.

That these are Muslim Roma can be judged only by last names in the more recent monuments, because the first names are often “Serbian”: Dra-

gan, Gordana, Danijel... A possible interpretation of inscriptions is given by uncle Boža, our informant. With no misgivings, many Roma took Serbs for their best men. As in the Roma nation such links are very strong, there were no objections to the wish of godfathers to give their godchildren Serbian names. In addition, there must have been some Orthodox influence from the majority population.

Confirming that in this cemetery only Roma Muslims are buried, our hosts could not clearly answer whether among them a few Orthodox might have “found” their resting place. We read the inscription on a granite tombstone, with a cross engraved, and ceramic photographs (Ph 12):

JUMEROVIĆ
VIOLETA AND SLOBODAN
1977-1985 1948-
REČKOVIĆ
ALIJA AND DRAGICA

We left the exclusively Roma cemetery in Krivača, at the very entrance to Lebane, and moved on to the town Orthodox graveyard, towards the exit from the town. A store owner, working opposite the cemetery, directed us to a dusty road toward the very rim of the cemetery, where we found a few graves with clear images of Orthodox Roma, but also a grandiose tombstone, built by sons and daughters to their parents, Islamic Romani couple, Maksut (1942-), and Javorka Kurtić (1950-2004) (Ph. 13).

Conclusion

We vouch for the position that it is a matter of *free will* of any ethnic group, its segment or individual, to decide how and where they will build their “eternal house”, so that the local community is obliged to provide them with conditions for the implementation of such a free and unimposed choice. Whether this is (a) separate lot, (b) separate space, physically divided from the Serbian part of the cemetery, or (c) mixed burial site – is less important (burial outside the place of residence does not comply with this democratic procedure and we do not support it).

Examples from three districts of Southeast Serbia represent desirable varieties in (A) *separate, so-called Gypsy cemeteries, physically divided from the so-called Serbian ones*, or (B) *so-called Serbian cemeteries, together with other deceased locals*. The choice of the modality was sometimes not uniform within the Romani community – as was the case with the “excursion” from the so-called Gypsy cemetery to ethnically clean Serbian graveyards in Lebane – but this also testifies to the freedom of choice.

Romani communities in Belotinac and Mala Plana are Orthodox, small in numbers and for long assimilated with the locals. The individual act of destruction of the old Belotinac Romani cemetery is condemnable, but the answer of the community to this development is not: they did not seek a new

lot, but they found a place for the final rest of the neighbours of Romani nationality in the village graveyard, though still towards its very end. The Roma from Mala Plana, too, have their own part of the joint cemetery. Even if the story that it had once been on the other side of the road was true, the unmarked grave space of the young man unfortunately killed in World War Two, among Serbian tombstones, and no reaction to the selection of the space for Mile Pavlović's tomb, clearly testify to the former and present sentiment among the villagers in Mala Plana. Decades of living together, in the Orthodox cultural environment, and equal economic, social and cultural position have annulled any possible intolerance between the majority population and the Romani minority. Hence our expectation that in remote Serbian rural areas in the future there will be no dramatic changes in the well-established relations which include tolerance and unity of the Orthodox flock, whether their nationality is Serbian or Romani.

The situation is a bit different when Orthodoxy and Islam become intertwined, usually in urban cores or town edges. Krivača is a suburb of Lebane, and many Roma in the village are the only group in this area practising the faith of the former Ottoman Empire. Preservation of Islamic symbols and rites among the Roma of today is no longer a matter of hardcore defence of their identity, but rather that of elementary respect of tradition. Constantly influenced by the surrounding Serbian Orthodox culture, the old Roma Muslim religious and confessional pattern has suffered numerous transformations, which is seen today in ritual burials and death-related customs, too. The old burial place and star and crescent on the tomb are still there. However, generations of links with best men and godfathers from the Serbian community have resulted in tombstone inscriptions in Cyrillic script, Serbian names, and the practice according to which the deceased is buried in a coffin. Individual enmities have not threatened the tradition of two peoples and two faiths living together, nor their readiness to constantly exchange cultural patterns (which has always been the advantage of Romani people). Cases in which Roma Muslims were buried in the joint village cemetery, and those of Orthodox Roma buried among their Muslim compatriots, *strengthen our estimation that separated Romani graveyards will slowly give way to common burial locations.*

In the past, separate burying the Roma was a necessity – the remains of the deceased needed to be protected from instances of vandalism. In modern times, open intolerance of other ethnicity, religion, or confession is an exception, a result of delinquent behaviour. The Roma are no longer what they used to be, victims of collective persecution, social distance towards them is decreasing, there are fewer and fewer reasons for their self-ghettoisation and physical segregation. Although there are many things yet to be done in the long process of their integration into Serbian society, they are on a good road to win for themselves a life worthy of human beings. The culture of death (burying and types of cemeteries) is a pebble in the intercultural mosaic of multiethnic and multiconfessional societies: yet a pebble very important for minorities, such as Romanies.

APPENDIX

PROCEDURE DBĐ2001

PROCEDURE DBĐ2001 FOR GATHERING OF DATA ABOUT ROMA, ROMANI-ORTHODOX AND ROMANI-MUSLIM CEMETERIES IN VILLAGES IN SOUTHEAST AND SOUTHWEST SERBIA

(Professor Dr. *Dragoljub B. Đorđević*)

Name of the place, village:	Distance from municipality place (in km):
It has a church: a) yes b) no	It has a mosque: a) yes b) no
Population (census from 2002):	Number of Roma (exactly or approximately):
Prevail (circle): a) Orthodox Roma b) Muslim Roma	
Does the number of Roma increase or decrease?	
a) increases b) decreases	
Reasons for moving: _____	
If there are no Roma, were there any before? a) yes b) no	

Orthodox Roma celebrate: 1) <i>Only Đurđevdan</i> 2) <i>Only Vasilica (so-called Romany New Year)</i> 3) <i>Only slava (name day)</i> 4) <i>Đurđevdan and Vasilica</i> 5) <i>Đurđevdan and slava</i> 6) <i>Vasilica and slava</i> 7) <i>Đurđevdan, Vasilica and slava</i> 8) <i>They do not celebrate anything from the above</i>
Orthodox Roma celebrate <i>litije (religious procession), zavetina (village religious festival)</i> , a) yes b) no
Are Orthodox Roma so-called believers of three-four rites (baptizing, marriage, slava, funeral service): a) yes b) no (describe): _____

Muslim Roma celebrate: 1) <i>Only Đurđevdan</i> 2) <i>Only Vasilica (so-called Romany New Year)</i> 3) <i>Đurđevdan and Vasilica</i>
Some Muslim Roma celebrate <i>litije (religious procession), zavetina, that is village religious festival</i> : a) yes b) no ; <i>slava</i> : a) yes b) no
Muslim Roma:
1. <i>circumcise children</i> : a) yes b) no 2. <i>Go to mosque on regular bases</i> : a) yes b) no
3. <i>bury according to Muslim law</i> : a) yes b) no 4. <i>Fast for Ramadan</i> : a) yes b) no
5. <i>celebrate Ramadan and Kurban Bairam</i> : a) yes b) no

Roma are buried:
a) In their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery which is physically separated (how and how much) from so-called Serbian, that is Muslim ;
b) In their own, so-called Gypsy cemetery which is physically connected (how) with so-called Serbian, that is Muslim ;
c) In so-called Serbian, that is Muslim cemetery (how) mixed with other citizens ;
d) In some other cemetery, outside place of living (reasons: prohibitions, tradition and so on.)

Description of cemetery
Brief description should be on the back side of the paper general condition of cemetery (hygiene and keeping); is it fenced or not; condition of grave (fenced or not, elements of kitsch, craft elements or elements of so-called peoples' craft, which col-

ors prevail); condition of monument (quality, keeping, deceased person information and its grammatical correctness); epitaphs (note); are there any busts, chapels and similar; cases of Muslim Roma who were buried in Orthodox cemetery and vice versa; if it is a separate Romany cemetery compare it with the condition of Serbian, that is Muslim; name cases of shabby Romany cemeteries and graves and similar.

PHOTOGRAPHY



Ph. 1



Ph. 2



Ph.3



Ph.4



Ph. 5



Ph. 6



Ph. 7



Ph. 8



Ph. 9



Ph. 10



Ph. 11



Ph. 12



Ph. 13