

Chapter 1

Introduction

Human behavior is best understood as being part of a life-history - a suite of traits genetically organized to meet the trials of life - survival, growth, and reproduction (Rushton 1985). Forty years ago Edward Wilson (1975) advanced a theory of species differences in life history and reproductive strategies in which species are categorized on a continuum running from r strategists to K strategists, r strategists having large numbers of offspring and investing relatively little in them, while K strategists have fewer offspring and invest heavily in them by feeding and protecting them during infancy until they are old enough to look after themselves. Fish, amphibians, and reptiles are r strategists with large numbers of offspring and minimum investment, while mammals are K strategists with fewer offspring and greater investment. The K strategy is particularly strongly evolved in monkeys, apes, and humans. Species that are K strategists have a syndrome of characteristics of which the most important are larger brain size, higher intelligence, longer gestation, and a slower rate of maturation in infancy and childhood. An updated version of this theory has been presented by Promislow and Harvey (1990).

Both r - and K -strategists have the same goal: the increase of their genes in succeeding generations. Species are only relatively r and K . Humans are very K -selected when compared to other species, though some people and groups are more on the K end of the continuum than others. This theory was extended to the

three major races by Rushton (1985, 2000), who proposed “Differential-K theory”, stating that Mongoloids (Northeast Asians) are the most K evolved and Negroids (sub-Saharan Africans) are the least K evolved, while Caucasoids (Europeans, South Asians and North Africans) fall intermediate between the two, although closer to Mongoloids. He supported his theory by documenting that the three races differ on over 60 co-evolved sets of morphological, physiological, developmental, psychological and behavioral traits including brain size, intelligence, sexual behavior, length of gestation, rate of maturation in infancy and longevity. For a theoretical explanation of these differences Rushton adopted Lynn’s (1991) theory that when early humans migrated out of Africa into Europe and Northeast Asia they encountered colder environments that exerted selection for greater intelligence, larger brain size and more K evolved life history strategies. Rushton (2004) extended his Differential-K theory further to explain social class and other group differences in speed of maturity, life and reproductive span, number of offspring, birth intervals, amount of parental care, infant mortality, even social organization, altruism and sexuality.

In this monograph we extend Rushton’s Differential-K theory further by proposing that the Roma (European Roma) are a high r - low K people. The best estimate is that about ten million to twelve million Roma live in Europe, a population equal to that of Sweden or Austria (Ringold et al. 2005). In terms of their absolute and relative size, the Roma population differs in Western versus Eastern Europe. Due to the subjective nature of Roma ethnic identity and their “ethnic mimicry”, the population figures should be treated as estimates. Only 1.5 million Roma live in the five largest Western European states which have populations between 30 and 80 million each. The remainder of the Roma population resides in Central and Eastern Europe (Liegeois and Gheorghe 1995). According to the Council of Europe, the largest

concentration of Roma minority is in Bulgaria (around 750,000 or 10.33 percent of total population), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (around 200,000 or 9.59 percent of total population), Slovak Republic (around 500,000 or 9.17 percent of total population), Romania (around 1,850,000 or 8.32 percent of total population), Serbia (around 600,000 or 8.18 percent of total population) and Hungary (around 700,000 or 7.05 percent of total population) (Council of Europe 2010). In the rest of Europe, Roma make around 3.83 percent to 0.06 percent of total population. Western Europe's largest Roma populations are found in Spain (estimated at 630,000), France (310,000), Italy (130,000) and Germany (70,000). These shares are likely to increase in the near future due to high population growth among the Roma and decreasing fertility among the majority populations.

Roma communities tend to be segregated and characterized by poverty, unemployment, poor education and poor quality housing. Throughout Europe, the Roma experience social exclusion, a lower life expectancy (ten to fifteen years lower than the European average), have a higher infant mortality rate and an unemployment rate of up to 80 percent (UNDP 2006, Uzunova 2010). Finding ways to integrate them into the European society remains an ongoing concern.

The name Roma refers to persons who identify themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, *Cigani*, Manouches and Sinti. They are a diverse population of South Asian stock which migrated to Europe from northwest India between the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Fraser 1992). Much of their history in Europe has been characterized by persecution by non-Roma, known to them as *gadje*; *gadjo* is the singular form used by the Roma to denote any non-Roma, *gadje* is the plural. This term is used by nearly all Romani-speaking people (Mirga and Mruz 1997). Although they share the same origin and similar history in Europe, many Roma do not regard themselves part of a cohesive ethnic group. Many

more educated Roma are likely to deny their ethnic identity, trying to leave behind their “Gypsiness”. Those who identify themselves as Roma tend to be of very low social status, eager for state funded social benefits, or those with political ambitions. Media are full of reports of misplaced money, suspicious accounting schemes, corruption and bribery in Roma NGOs and parties. Competing Romani leaders frequently openly accuse each other of misusing money (Barany 2002).

Since their coming to Europe, the Roma have been received with hostility and have been blamed for everything from petty stealing to child stealing, cannibalism and Satanism (Fraser 1992). Small, endogamous populations of Roma traders, craftsmen and entertainers have lived for centuries within European societies, competing for their own economic and territorial niches (Oakley 1983). Past nomadism was an important characteristic of many Roma groups. Their flexibility and willingness to move location allowed them to exploit marginal opportunities within their hosts’ economies. Given this special economic niche, they never approximated to economic self-sufficiency. The Roma have engaged in whatever occupations they find available, mostly trading with outsiders in the surrounding society. Most of the employment that they have found has been marginal to the *gadje* economy and has consisted of tasks which no one else has wanted. When these sources of income are inadequate, they have obtained what they need "from the land," which often, though not necessarily, means thieving (Lauwagie 1979).

At present, Roma communities are scattered throughout Europe, usually in relatively small, isolated, ghetto-like communities near villages and cities. An estimated 2.5 million speak a language remotely related to Romani, and, even within that group, there are many different dialects with only basic similarities. The remaining eight to ten million speak the language

of their host countries (Crowe 1996, Fraser 1992). Many Roma tend to stay apart from the mainstream of society by choice. Among the general Roma population in Europe, for example, education and technology are not significant factors within the culture and are not traditionally considered important. A noted example is their illiteracy: even when provided with a schooling system in their own language, many Roma fail to complete even a basic education (Ringold 2000). Hence, the Roma are perhaps the most segregated ethnic group in Europe. Despite multiple entities such as national governments, various non-governmental organizations and Roma community members and activists applying diverse approaches to improve the situation of the Roma in Europe, their efforts have been, to a great extent, unsuccessful. This is due to the social antagonism between the Roma and non-Roma, and the self-segregationist and ethnocentric nature of particular elements of Roma culture (Uzunova 2010).

In the past, the Roma culture evolved around the concept of *marime* – the instructions which define non-Roma as ritually unclean and polluting and thus discourage interactions with outsiders (Weyrauch 2001). Even for Roma groups with fading or weak *marime* beliefs, most groups restrict their interaction with non-Roma to economic transactions and brief encounters with officials or institutional representatives such as welfare or hospital staffs. The most important cultural element of traditional Roma society is the *kris*. This term relates both to Roma law and to the assembly of elders who impose it. The law includes an elaborate code of morality and family law. One of its most important elements in traditional Roma culture regulates marriage with *gadje*. For a Roma to marry an outsider could mean immediate and permanent exclusion from the community (Sutherland 1975). Roma traditions include a number of mechanisms to prevent *gadje* from interfering with their world.

Within Europe, the most striking differences between the Roma and non-Roma Europeans are their different rates of fertility, mortality and life expectancy at birth. In spite of the combined efforts of various governmental, non-governmental and humanitarian agencies and organizations the situation of the Roma has not improved much. The Decade of Roma Inclusion was launched by the World Bank in 2005, focusing on the four target areas of employment, housing, health, and education. The participating countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and then Serbia and Montenegro. UNICEF (2007) has warned that the Roma population is growing rapidly and, unless the economic and social opportunities for Roma open up, there will not be a sustainable solution.

Volumes of scholarly, advocative and journalistic works have been produced in recent years in order to try to explain the reasons behind “the Roma problem”. This “Gypsmania” comprises literature which is vast and diverse, characterized by the absence of a general theory and lack of empirical basis to most theorizing (Ruegg 2009:111). What follows is a selective review of this growing literature from the countries with substantial Roma populations and a discussion of some of the most important issues, namely the reproductive behavior and strategies of the Roma. After all, reproduction is all important for evolutionary success and reproductive scheduling is central for the evolution of life histories (Liu and Lummaa 2010). Thus many important works dealing with other subjects of Roma culture are excluded from the review in order to focus on these features.

The focus of this manuscript will be on the Serbian Roma with whom I have worked for more than a decade. Many Roma in Serbia reject any connection with Roma people in general. In fact, many of my Roma informants refer to the official term – Roma – as their “title” and nothing more. In 2002, they were granted the

status of a national minority by the Serbian government but this legal act did not affect Roma daily life or status. The president of one local Roma association argued:

Some asked for it [the status], and got it... We were *Cigani* before, now we are Roma...I'm a Serbian *cigan* and Serbian *cigan* I will stay. But now we have the title: Roma (Čvorović 2010:18).

Although the English term “Gypsy” is an equivalent to *Cigani* in Serbian throughout this manuscript the official name Roma will be used. Using a scale of *r-K* strategy I will discuss the important mechanisms of the Roma way of life that contribute to their higher fertility and mortality. Other important features of the Serbian Roma traditions like kinship organization, residential patterns, ethnicity, status of women, traditional stories and narratives, etc. were described in previous studies (Čvorović 2006, 2008, 2010).

Many surveys have been conducted regarding the reasons leading to the higher fertility and mortality rates of the Roma and several suggestions were put forward as to the possible link between the Roma's way of life and their demography (Cohn 1973, Vekerdi 1988, Okely 1983). The Roma high birth and mortality rates and shorter life expectancy are usually explained as the result of their poverty, low level of education and socioeconomic status, associated with poor judgment about the future troubles caused by a large number of children and inadequate health care and coverage. Similar explanations focus on the non-usage of contraception and poor reproductive knowledge of Roma women. Because the Roma have limited access to modern medical devices and health care/family planning they are much less able to control their fertility than other Europeans. In addition, since the majority of the Roma have little

schooling or vocational skills many of them are unemployed and they do not feel bound to sacrifice reproduction for “cultural goals” as much as an average European with higher average socioeconomic status (Berezkei 2000).

Although these explanations are quite probable there are alternative hypotheses. Several studies based on evolutionary theory have attempted to explain the adaptive character of Roma behaviors. Based on life history theory it was suggested that Roma populations in certain studied areas (Hungary and Serbia) exhibit more of a low investment mode of reproduction than surrounding non-Roma populations (Berezkei 1993, Berezkei et al. 2000, Čvorović 2004). Following the general life history approach this difference has usually been attributed to the different socio-economic environments experienced by Roma and non-Roma populations, but also as a result of a mix of both genetic and cultural dispositions. In these studies, neither low education nor low occupational status has been found to be a main reason of high Roma fertility. Thus, in addition, another hypothesis to account for the difference in fertility and higher fertility rates among the Roma and non-Roma is sought in the differential kinship networks as a valuable resource (Berezkei 2000). Extended kinship cooperation has been evolutionarily successful. In general, the rural Roma population has many more close and distant relatives than the non-Roma: the Roma keep tighter and closer contact with each other, and they spend more time helping their relatives in direct child-rearing activities, compared to non-Roma, who in turn lack kinship support as a crucial resource to decrease the costs of childrearing and increase the probability of investing in another offspring. Another likely alternative explanation is that the Roma came to identify with a model of large family that has a high value as a norm in their culture. Children born to a large circle of kinship network will learn that a great number of children is expected in their society and a demand

for high fertility will remain strong through generations (Berezkei 2000:294).

These evolutionary studies suggest the most probable factors affecting high fertility and the role of some of the Roma traditional behaviors. Nonetheless, other factors may also account for the success of Roma groups, i.e., maintaining a distinct identity and successful reproduction.

Evolutionary theory suggests that the way we behave today can be understood by considering which behaviors increased the relative survival and reproduction of our ancestors (Palmer and Steadman 1997, Michalski and Shackelford 2010). Engaging in particular behaviors in certain environments increased ancestral humans' chances to out-survive and out-reproduce those less successful. The offspring of these ancestors had some chance of inheriting the genetic structure responsible for the successful development but, regardless of the genes involved, all offspring could have inherited certain successful, learned patterns of behavior – traditions. In response to similar cues, both inheritances may have resulted in reproductive success. That is, when we study the Roma and their traditions, including reproductive behavior, we actually study adaptations, widespread traits that presumably were successful in the past. For instance, given that even today religion tends to be traditional (i.e. vertically inherited from parents to offspring, see Steadman and Palmer 2008), different religions may have encouraged different traditional reproductive strategies and life histories (Čvorović 2012). Throughout the Balkans the main division among various Roma tribes/groups has always been along the line of tribal and religious affiliations, Islam versus Christianity. Moreover, recent demographic reports indicate that native Muslim populations in the Balkans continue to grow much more rapidly than non-Muslims (Kettani 2010).

Do we observe any fitness differential between various Roma groups? Measure of lifetime reproductive success is a common method in describing fitness differentials. In theory, the better the social and ecological position of one's descendants within the population the better the correlation with long term reproductive success (Kaplan and Hill 1986). Most of the offspring of *r*-strategists die young, but since there are so many of them, enough will reach reproductive age and reproduce to assure their parents' genetic survival. Although *K*-strategists produce less offspring, a larger proportion survives. Because we cannot predict, on the basis of a previous knowledge, what behaviors *r* and *K* strategists would use, or how successful they would be, we can try to measure the past successful traits that resulted in reproductive success. For instance, what was the role of general psychological processes such as general intelligence, or age at first reproduction, in pursuing evolutionary goals among the Roma? Consistent with life history and *r*-*K* theory, intelligence fits into an evolutionary framework along with family structure, reproductive and sexual behavior, longevity and several other life history traits that correlate with one another (Rushton 2004).

Several life history traits including intelligence and reproductive success – measured as the number of surviving children and grandchildren – will be compared between Serbian Roma and other ethnic groups. To paraphrase Jones (2009), do populations with a poor life expectancy at birth and high fertility rates take an essentially different route than populations with good and high life expectancy at birth and low fertility rates? After reviewing the current situation and behaviors of the Roma in selected European countries, I present data collected from original fieldwork among Roma communities in Serbia.