

THE INNER WORLD OF ROMA CHILDREN

Iulia Feordeanu IAES Trainer, IAAP Router

(Presented at the International Jungian Conference in Rome, 2015, Social and Political Contributions of Jungian Psychology)

An Expressive Sandwork Project in Bucharest Romania

I would like to share what we found about **The Roma soul** during one of the sandwork projects

Just a few words about Expressive Sandwork. What it is and how it is done?

It is a transcultural non verbal method for offering psychological **support** to children in the situation where psychotherapy is not available. It is a **group** process that takes place with the help of volunteers who are trained by the International Association for Expressive Sandwork. Children are offered a **free** and **protected** space, where each can play in the sand-box, assisted in silence by one volunteer, once a week for a period of four to nine months. In this way, the **child's resources**, their innate potential for coping with the inner and outer challenges can be touched and activated. (pictures sandwork setting)

The Inner world of Roma children, as I will try to present here today, was first shown to us, during a sandwork project that took place last year in Bucharest (from October 2014 to April 2015).

The children belonged to a gipsy community from Bucharest. They have families but are poor and neglected. They are living in small houses, often very crowded, but they are settled. Please note that these are young children from 6 to 11 years, who have never experienced the nomad life in their existence. Yet, we have seen it continuously in their sandworks. They live here.

The volunteers were psychologists and all worked for the Child protection services, and knew about the issues that these children faced. (pictures with the team). This is our team of volunteers.

We are used to living alongside the gipsy community with a lot of prejudice on both sides. They become easily the receptor of the negative projections and often are scape goats when all sorts of accidents or illegalities occur. I was challenged from within to confront some of my own prejudices, by trying to find out more objective facts and to be emotionally open to receive also the stories of the children.

We started to explore the world of the Roma people: their history, their culture, their social issues.

And I want to share with **you** today, some of the information I have found out and some of the images from the sand, hoping that these may help us understand the different culture/ethnie and get to know it a little better, with objective facts.

The images they left in the sand have raised our curiosity. These images were somewhat different than the ones we were used to: we saw many horses, babies on horses, we saw music instruments, we saw a lot of egyptian figurines.. outdoor cooking, many many outdoor scenes of day to day life, all speaking about their nomad soul.

We saw many scenes with horses in the childrens sandworks

The horse is a very dear companion to the nomad Roma. These children have never had horses as they live in the city. Yet, as we could see, they depicted in their sand worlds horses, babies on horses and scenes with wagons.

Also, almost every session we saw scenes with outdoor cooking. This is not at all usual in Bucharest

There were also some images with the symbols of magic. Literally. We, as non Roma people, were fascinated.

It is considered that, when the Roma people left from India some more than 1000 years ago they made their living from singing and dancing.

Actually, there is a lot of ambivalence regarding the Roma people and their value in my country. On the one hand, they are the screen for projecting the other peoples shadow. But with their free spirit and their connection to the instincts they are the best natural

entertainers, dancers and musicians. If one wants to have a nice party or a successful wedding they must surely hire a Roma band. And it's true the music is really vibrant and inspiring.

In many of the sandtrays, children used music instruments, dances, ceremonies. In some of the pictures, all these themes were combined: music, outdoor cooking, nomad life.

We know that interculturality and solidarity are based on mutual understanding and the getting to know the other. During this project we have realised we did not know much about the Roma people, how they came to Europe, what was their history, their culture, their beliefs.

We started to gather information, and we found out about their migration from India, about the fact that they have been enslaved, forced to settle, denied their rights to trade, sing, speak their language, about them being persecuted in a number of ways until not so long ago, about their crafts and skills.

About Roma people history

Linguistic and genetic DNA studies state that they came from the north west of India. They belong to an Indo-Aryan ethnic group. They have migrated and/or came as slaves some more than 1000 years ago to Middle East, Northern Africa, the Balkans and Europe.

They are considered to have been people of a lower cast living by singing and music.

Today, it is estimated that in Europe live about **12 million** Roma people.

((Kenrick, Donald (2007): Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies) second edition, Scarecrow Press.))

Since their arrival in Europe, when they were not enslaved, expelled, forced to settle or rejected Roma have been self-employed artisans, entertainers, and traders in various commodities. Roma traditionally became horse trainers, animal dealers, and ratcatchers. The Roma economy has been built around self-employment and the perpetuation of old skills, plus the acquisition of new skills to adapt to new technological developments (picture).

Their early history shows a mixed reception. They have been enslaved in many of Eastern Europe's countries, then liberated for a short while. They have been expelled from different places in Western Europe in the 15 and 16th century (like (Meissen) Germany in 1416, Lucerne in 1471, Milan in 1493, France in 1504, Catalonia in 1512, Sweden in 1525, England in 1530 (see Egyptians Act 1530), and Denmark in 1536. In the 16th century, any Roma found in Switzerland were ordered to be put to death, with similar rules established in England in 1554, Denmark in 1589, and Sweden in 1637, while Portugal began deportations of Romanies to its colonies in 1538.

One of the most enduring persecutions against the Roma people was their being enslaved. In Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia, the 3 regions that form Romania today, **Roma were enslaved for five centuries, until abolition in the mid-19th century**

Slavery was widely practiced in medieval Europe, including the territory of present-day Romania. From before the founding of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in the 13th–14th century Legislation decreed that all the Roma living in these states were classified as slaves. Slavery was gradually abolished during the 1840s and 1850s.

A few words about forced settlement and forced assimilation

Nomads and the civilised look at each other with disapproval and misunderstanding. Why would anyone want to wander the wilderness and live in a tent? Why would anyone want to live in a box and obey unnecessary masters?

In the long run, the civilised won because their system generated superior technologies, larger populations, bigger armies, and better systems of knowledge-retention through the written word.

In many countries the Roma people were forced to settle. In the 18th century Marie Therese of Austria began a programme to turn Romas into new hungarians. They had no rights to own horses and wagons, they were forbidden to trade, their children were forcefully removed from them and fostered by non Roma persons. Marriage between Roma persons was prohibited. Later the wearing of traditional Roma clothing and the use of the Roma language were forbidden.

Similar attempts for forced assimilation took place in Spain, where Gitanos men and women were sent to separate workhouses, their children sent to orphanages, nomad life style forbidden, their language forbidden, even the word Gitano (gypsy) was forbidden. All these measures failed as the population refused the Roma integration

In Germany also in the 19th century Roma children from Nordhausen were taken from their families to be fostered by Germans (see Kenrick Donald, 2007, Historical dictionary of gypsies (Romanies), Scarecrow Press.)

In the 18th century Russia also encouraged settlement of all nomads, and the Polish introduced a settlement law. Bulgaria and Serbia banned nomadism in the 1880s.

Other examples of forced assimilation include Norway, where a law from 1896 permitted the state to remove children from their parents and place them in state institutions. This resulted in some 1,500 Roma children being taken from their parents in the 20th century.

We saw pictures of zoos in the children's sandworks. We did not understand exactly at first, but they might speak of their forced settlement and of losing their freedom as nomads and of being enslaved.



We could see how constrained these animals looked behind these solid walls.



So what fate waited for the Roma people in Europe? We know they were made slaves, force to settle. Sometimes they have been also killed on spot or mutilated

In the 16th century, the Diet of Augsburg declared that “whoever kills a Gypsy, will be guilty of no murder”. The massive killing that resulted forced the government to eventual “forbid the drowning of Roma women and children”. In the 18th century, it was ordered “that all adult males were to be hanged without trial, whereas women and young males were to be flogged and banished forever.”

In addition, they were to have their right ears cut off in the kingdom of Bohemia and their left ear in

Moravia. (Marko D. Knudsen. “The History of the Roma”. Romahistory.com.)

During the Second World War, the Nazis murdered 220.000 to 1.500.000 Romas.

They were sentenced to forced labor and imprisonment in concentration camps or killed on spot by death squads.

After the war, In Communist Central and Eastern Europe, Roma people experienced assimilation schemes and restrictions of cultural freedom. The Roma language and Roma music were banned from public performance in Bulgaria.

In Czechoslovakia, tens of thousands of Romas from Slovakia, Hungary and Romania were re-settled in border areas of Czech lands and their nomadic lifestyle was forbidden. In Czechoslovakia, where they were labeled as a “socially degraded stratum,” Roma women were sterilized as part of a state policy to reduce their population.

(Silverman, Carol Persecution and Politization: Roma (Gypsies of Eastern Europe) utural Survival Quaterly, summer 1995. Struggling for ethnic identity: Czechoslovakia s endangered gypsies. New York 1991)

In Europe, Roma people are associated with **poverty**, high rates of **crime** and behaviours that are perceived by the rest of the population as being **antisocial or inappropriate**. Partly for this reason, **discrimination** against the Roma people has continued to the present day.

Reviewing the situation in 2012, one Belgian magazine observed:

"On International Roma Day, which falls on April 8, the significant proportion of Europe's 12 million Roma who live in deplorable conditions will not have much to celebrate. And poverty is not the only worry for the community. Ethnic tensions are on the rise. In 2008, Roma camps came under attack in Italy, intimidation by racist parliamentarians is the norm in Hungary. Speaking in 1993, Václav Havel prophetically remarked that "the treatment of the Roma is a litmus test for democracy": and democracy has been found wanting. The consequences of the transition to capitalism have been disastrous for the Roma. Under communism they had jobs, free housing and schooling. Now many are unemployed, many are losing their homes and racism is increasing.

(<http://www.voxeurop.eu/en/content/article/1757331-bleak-horizon>)

During our project we saw that these are neglected children, but they are apparently not any different from any other children in the world: they play by themselves or among themselves, they need our presence, our eye gaze, they can be cooperative, they never stole any toy, they were gentle with us adults, and they trusted us enough to show us, pictures of their souls.

We are grateful to these children because now we know so much more about the Roma people and we are better prepared **to hold space** for them inside of us.

We understand now that they are vulnerable, poor and not educated people and do not know their resources. So because of poverty and lack of education, because of losing their roots, being forced to settle and forget about their inner strengths and freedom, they cannot adjust to the present reality well. It is true, the children are often neglected, abused in different ways, and grow up and some do the same onto their children. But this is true for non roma population also, that lives in poverty and lacks education and support.

If we see the free spirit in the Roma children, we may have to sort out different approaches for the education and **whatever that is** that we call their **integration**.

We want to emphasize that through the safe and protected space (ensured by the quiet room, the silence, the sand box and the genuine attention and interest from the adult) we

had the opportunity not only to assist these children in their individual process to self assertion and self discovery but, we were introduced and welcomed into an exotic world, into the soul world of the Roma nomad, a world of which we did not know much until then.

The sandwork projects helped us get to know a network of organizations that work with and for the disadvantaged persons including Roma people and help them with the creation of **social business** where the **roma craftsmen** can **sell their products**.

Roma or **not roma people, psychologists** and **business men, social activists** and **politicians**, we are all connected by invisible threads and we can feel this easily when we get involved in soul work. And sandwork is just this: work with **the soul** and with **the sand**.

Expressive Sandwork is a way in which Jungian psychology brings a **social and political** contribution to the world, because it is based on Jungian theory and has a social impact. And today multiculturalism and immigration are a hot political issue. Using Expressive Sandwork in working with children from different cultures helps us understand them and connect.

This is what we found out about the Roma people. They are the present day **nomads** in Europe. They seem to **value freedom** more than anything, and they seem to suffer and react when there are attempts to take freedom away from them. But **don't we all dream to be free?** Free from **constraint?** Free from **guilt**, free from **complexes**, free from **addictions**, free of **worries, free to just be?**