

Education and the Gypsy People of Australia: The Untold Story

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree
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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Wendy Morrow

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List of Terms in Romanes

familia	(familiyi pl) extended family group which is the major functional subdivision of the vitsa, traditionally includes married sons and their wives, children and grandchildren.
Gajé	the term used by the Rom to describe all people who are not Rom.
Gaji	(Gajé pl) is a non-Gypsy female.
Gajo	(Gajé pl) non-Gypsy male.
Gypsy	The word Gypsy is the word most commonly used by Gajé to describe the race of people also known as Roma, it is not a word of Gypsy origin, so whilst it is accepted as the title most well known and used by the Gajé, Gypsies themselves (particularly in Australia) prefer to refer to themselves as Rom.
kaha	a wooden box, usually painted black or gold. It is played by sitting on it and beating out a rhythm. Different tones can be made by hitting it in different places.
Kris	a trial to decide guilt or innocence presided over by the adult males of a community.
kumpánia	temporary community of people bound together by economic necessity for work purposes. It may be comprised of people from more than one matsia and from several vitsi and familia and is headed by a baro Rom (big Rom) who provides leadership and acts as a link with the Gajé.

marimé	a concept of cleanliness and purity observed by all Rom. Breaking the rules of marimé may result in being declared marimé, a kind of social death.
natsia	the largest grouping to which one would belong. It is the first unit of identification. The closest English equivalents would be tribe, nation or race.
ofisa	the room / shop in which a fortune - telling business is conducted.
Phuri dai	(literal translation - old woman), a term of respect given to the oldest, most respected female member of the family.
pomana	a traditional feast held three and nine days, six weeks, six months and one year after the death of a relative.
Rom	(Roma pl) is a male Gypsy.
Rom	(Roma pl) used to describe the Romani race of people commonly known as Gypsies.
Romanes	the language of the Rom.
Romanesthan	(literal translation - homeland of the Rom) the 'ideal' homeland of the Romani people which is much discussed but not yet realised.
Romani	the adjective of Rom.
Romni	(Romni pl) is a Gypsy female.
Travellers	used to describe both Rom and other related races of people who travel for occupational or other reasons.
tséra	(literal translation - tent) are the nucleus families of the familia.

- vitsa** each natsia is divided into vitsi (pl of vitsa, translatable as clan). The vitsa is in effect the largest 'family' group.
- wortacha** small groups of men or women who work together on a particular job. They work as equals, these groups will sometimes include the older children in a community who are learning the skills of the adults.
- zinnia** a 'table' set for a wedding, party, or any other important occasion.

Table i: Pseudonyms Used by Key Informants in This Study

Gender (Age years)	Pseudonym	Marital Status	Spouse (Age yrs)	Age of Children
<i>Familia A</i>				
Male Parent (58)	Bob	Married	Wife (53)	31, 27, 21, 16
Female Parent (53)	Marie	Married		
Female A (31)	Kathy	Promised		**4½, 3, Pregnant
Female B (27)	Nancy	Married	Husband (28)	5, Pregnant
Male C (21)	Michael	Married	Wife (18)	Pregnant
Male D (16)	Simon	Promised	Girl (14)	None
<i>Familia B</i>				
Male Parent (37)	George	Married	Wife (36)	14, 11, 5, 2
Female Parent (36)	Jackie			
Male A (14)	Henry			
Female B (11)	Karen			
Male D (5)	John	Promised	**Girl (4½) (Cynthia, from <i>familia A</i>)	
Female E (2)	Suzie			
<i>Familia C</i>				
Male Parent (49)	*Jason	Married	Wife (47)	28, 23, 21, 15, 11
Female Parent (47)	Veronica			
Male A (28)	Joseph	Married	Wife (20)	3, 1½
Male B (23)	*Harry	Married	Wife (25)	7, 4, 2, Pregnant
Female C (21)	Mardie	Promised	Boy (19)	Pregnant
Female D (15)	*Justine			
Male E (11)	*Fred			
<i>Familia D</i>				
Male Parent (39)	Tom	Married	Wife (32)	16, 12, 9, 6
Female Parent (32)	Samara			
Female A (16)	*Jane			
Female B (12)	*Mary			
Male C (9)	Peter			
Female D (6)	*Jill			
<p>Other Roma were interviewed, from many familia, but an exhaustive list has not been included due to its extensive nature. Familia listed about include only those whose members were quoted.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>W. Morrow</i></p>				

* Denotes people interviewed, but direct quotation of information is not used in the paper

Abstract

From an insider's perspective, this study investigates the attitudes of two groups of Australian Roma, Lovara and Ganești towards formal education. It also examines guiding principles and underlying attitudes of the Australian Government policies and laws pertinent to the types of difficulties experienced by the Rom in Australia.

The methodological approach adopted was the ethnographic case study which involved an in-depth examination of two families from different vitsa. The tools used were participant observation and key informant interviews. The initial use of these two families with later interviews with the wider Romani population was to facilitate extrapolation of the data to a wider usage. Although the two families appeared to have different views on education and its value, on closer inspection it was found that the main differences were on the surface, that the deeper convictions remained the same. The key informants from both families used the same arguments to justify both their views on education and the extent of formal schooling their children should receive.

As the researcher, I have a profound personal interest in furthering the education of the Rom. The gaining of literacy skills is important, not just for the children, but for the adults also. As a member of the Romani community, I have been able to casually observe and participate in developments and dilemmas arising over many years. Reporting on incidents through Romani eyes has brought a new perspective to the age-old problem of illiteracy. The incidents related in the case studies span some forty years and they illustrate that few substantial changes in the character of the education system in Australia have really occurred over that period.

Briefly, the following points capture the essence of the research.

Although the Rom in Australia number some sixteen thousand, five hundred people, they are a relatively unheard of and largely invisible, diverse population of people with a common heritage and set of traditions, although there may be differences in expression between groups. They also vary in terms of itineracy, and their social standing in, and amount of contact with, mainstream Western society. Knowledge about the Rom in Australia appears to come from outdated texts, international sources and often mis-quoted Rom.

They are a largely illiterate population and few of the children even today, are attending school. There have been some isolated instances of successful education within the mainstream education system, but on the whole tactics used to involve

Romani children in education have been unsuccessful. This mass non-attendance is characteristic of a global problem and is not unique to Australia. Nonetheless, the situation here is unique owing to the fact that it is largely unrecognised and never acknowledged.

Through the eyes of the standard battery of psychological and educational tests, where, in addition to assessing their educational skills, the amount of cultural capital these children possess in terms of the dominant culture are assessed, Romani children often present as classic cases of deprived children, coming from deficient homes. On closer inspection, it is probable that it is the tests themselves which are deficient, failing to take note of the rich cultural heritage of the Rom themselves. As the struggle for survival gets tougher, we may find that the very attributes, the cultural capital, that Romani children possess will stand them in good stead, provided that they become literate along the way. As the provision of these literacy skills is the vital stumbling block, it is the one requiring most urgent attention.

At the commencement of this study, the attitude of the Rom towards education was extremely negative. However a number of interesting strategies have been put forward by the Rom themselves and these warrant further investigation. Several of these may also have application for wider groups of children, from other ethnic minorities. The most notable of these and the most widely supported is that of distance education,

which would allow the Rom to empower their children with literacy skills, whilst keeping them close to home.