

Roma in Soviet Ukraine: Ways of Life and Forced Sedentarisation Before and After the Second World War

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This article introduces a variety of Romani groups living in Soviet Ukraine and their ways of life—sedentary, semi-nomadic and nomadic—highlighting that semi-nomadism is omitted category in scholarship even though most of the Roma in Soviet Ukraine maintained a semi-nomadic way of life. Through the discussion of the notion of nomadism, the research analyses how the Romani ways of life have changed over time from before and after the Second World War. Examining the Soviet policy towards the Roma in Soviet Ukraine (1930s–1950s), particularly, the creation of the *kolkhoz* system and the issue of the “Khrushchev Decree”, the paper argues that the changes in Romani ways of life occurred due to suppressive policies of the Soviet state directed to the forced sedentarisation of Roma.

There is a tendency in academic writing in the field of history to refer to Roma as a homogeneous group. Frequently, historians write about Roma (or in the best case, about Sinti and Roma) as one people without deepening their knowledge regarding different Romani communities. On the contrary, anthropologists and ethnographers focus on solely one community often omitting social connections and historical context. Nevertheless, researching the variety of Romani groups from a historical perspective allows scholars to learn diverse cultural and social backgrounds and experiences of Romani communities. Such knowledge leads to a better understanding of Romani life and relations between Roma and non-Roma, including hierarchical relations between Romani communities and state systems.

In the context of Ukraine, the knowledge regarding the diversity of Romani communities helps to analyse the Romani ways of life—nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary—and the notion of each way for different Romani groups. In turn, understanding this notion sheds the light on to what extent the life of different Romani communities has been changed owing to historical events such as the sedentarisation of Roma by the Soviet state in the 1930s and the 1950s. The first phase of the sedentarisation is related to the creation of the *kolkhoz* (Soviet collective farm) system in the very late 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s when the Soviet government started to organise so-called “national *kolkhozes*” and among them, “Gypsy *kolkhozes*”. The collective farms as a system were created in the first years of Soviet Ukraine’s existence; however, the state policy of collectivisation was introduced by the Soviet government (under Joseph Stalin) and intensified between 1929 and 1933. The aim was to transform individual farms into group (collective) farms that collectively shared responsibilities for increasing “state grain procurement” and reducing “peasants’ ability to

withdraw grain from the market” (Fitzpatrick 1994, 4) which would also reduce the economic power of wealthy peasants (Britannica).

The second phase is connected to the so-called “Khrushchev Decree” of 1956, according to which the sedentarisation of Roma was immediate and compulsory, with criminal punishment for those who disobeyed the order. The attempts to settle Roma by the Soviet system left a certain mark on the individual and collective memory of Roma in Ukraine that reflects the Romani experiences during the Soviet time. Thus, the forced sedentarisation of the Roma serves as an example of the Soviet repressive and suppressive system. Various cases of this system have been studied in application to different ethnic groups, minorities or indigenous, however, the study of the suppression of the Roma is far from exhaustive (see, Conquest 1986; Kulchytskyi 2005; Applebaum 2017).

The article focuses on the different groupings of Roma living in Soviet Ukraine and their ways of life, highlighting that most Roma were semi-nomadic rather than nomadic before the Second World War and until 1956. This paper analyses the notion of being nomadic for several Romani groups in Ukraine and the changes in Romani ways of life, particularly transitioning from nomadic and semi-nomadic life to sedentary. I argue that this transition occurred mainly owing to the policies of the Soviet government directed to forced sedentarisation of the Roma. Examining the forced sedentarisation as Soviet suppressive policies towards Roma, may bring us a better understanding of the Roma experiences in Soviet Ukraine, on the one hand, and enlarge the knowledge regarding the mechanism for suppression applied by the Soviet Union regime towards its minorities, on the other hand. It should be noted that the “Gypsy kolkhozes” and the “Khrushchev Decree” of 1956 are large phenomena and I will examine the issues specifically related to my analysis of how these Soviet policies changed the ways of life for Roma.

Although some scholarship on Roma in Ukraine exists it is largely ethnographic and linguistic in focus. Therefore, knowledge about the Roma continues to be fragmented and diffused, particularly when examining the everyday lives of Romani families in Soviet Ukraine. Nevertheless, several scholarly works have provided some analysis of the suppressive Soviet policies towards the Roma (see O’Keeffe 2013; Edele 2014; Demeter, Bessonov and Kutenkov 2000). Yet, there are few academic works that examine the sedentarisation of the Roma and its consequences in Russia (Ural region) and Ukraine based on archival documents (Kilin 2005; Byelikov 2008) and in Belarus based on interviews (Bartash 2015). The topic was also mentioned in several essays published in Ukrainian scholarly journals such as *Etnichna istoriia narodiv Yevropy*. However, those essays are lacking analysis and the usage of sources is problematic from an academic point of view in some of them. For instance, several papers of historian Olesya Rozovyk are based on archival materials and bring interesting official Soviet statistics of registered Roma. At the same time, those essays demonstrate the scholar’s incompetence in describing the structure of the Roma society. Referring to the archival sources without applying any critical thinking method to the used archival materials, Rozovyk reproduced negative stereotypes regarding the Roma when mentioned “Gypsy clans” and “Gypsy barons”—both terms are nonsensical for Roma in Ukraine but were spread among non-Roma (Rozovyk 2011, 69). Thus, the scholarship regarding Romani groups, the sense of nomadic life, and sedentarisation of Roma in Soviet Ukraine is limited to some extent.

This article is based on an analysis of several sets of sources. It brings together the research findings on Romani groups from various scholarly works to date in

several languages, including English, Ukrainian, Russian, and French. For analysis of the Soviet policies, the official Soviet documents (orders and decrees) are used in their original form published by the Soviet authorities. The interviews recorded from Roma in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and Romanes (in translation) are used to coherently bring to the fore certain aspects of Romani life such as the notion of nomadism, the sense of life in family and the relationships between Roma and non-Roma in Soviet Ukraine. These video interviews were selected from a broad collection of the USC Shoah Foundation Visual Archive and the Yahad in-Unum Visual Archive and accessed in various ways: online subscription through the institutions and via fellowship by working with archives directly at the institutions. The transcripts of interviews in Romanes were accessed through the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies Archive. Some interviews in Ukrainian and Russian cited in this paper were recorded by the author in the form of audio files and notes during the 2010-2015 ethnographic and oral history fieldwork in Ukraine and Moldova (contact the author for access to the data and information on other archives). While working with the interviews, I remain aware of the limitation of memory and specificity of the recollections made after the event which are also conditioned by the purpose of interviews, the personality and approaches of the interviewers, and the preparation for interviews from both sides – the interviewees and the interviewers (Grele 1992; Denzin 1997; Yow 2005). Thus, the current paper combines approaches to the sources from several disciplines: history, memory studies and ethnography.

It is important to note that the Roma are “a specific ethnic community—an ‘inter-group ethnic community’—which has no parallel in the other European nations” that has its hierarchical system and specific structure (Marushiakova and Popov 2001, 33). The Roma dispersed from India and arrived in Byzantine Empire around the eleventh century and gradually formed metagroups, groups, subgroups, and micro-groups (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 3; Marushiakova and Popov 2014, 146). This segmentation, on the one hand, and consolidation, on the other hand, as discussed by Vesselin Popov and Elena Marushiakova, continues to be the specificity of the Roma ethnic community (Marushiakova and Popov 2014, 191). Therefore, researching the Roma is a difficult task in which the scholar has to be aware of Romani groups’ division and certain traditions across these varying groups. In this way, a comparative analysis of Romani testimonies from their different points of view needs to be undertaken in consideration of other ethnographic, linguistic and historical materials to bring a better understanding life and history of Roma, particularly in the twentieth century.

Talking about themselves to non-Roma, Ukrainian Roma use the words “Tsyhany” (in Ukrainian) or “Tsygane” (in Russian) in the plural as a self-appellation which was established as exonyms in Ukrainian and Russian writings in literature, history, anthropology, and art performance throughout the centuries. In most cases, these words reflected ethnicity and did not have a derogatory connotation; however, stereotypes (both positive and negative) were formed and tied to these ethnonyms. In this article, I use the words “Tsyhany” or “Tsygane” in inverted commas when Roma use these self-appellation. Referring to Roma, I use the word “Roma” as a noun and Romani as an adjective.

Romani Language and the Formation of Romani Groups

The Romani peoples speak the Romani language, Romanes. Researching different Romanes dialects in combination with the impact on Romanes of other languages, linguists explained the formation of various Romani groups. Romanes is not a

homogeneous language but rather consists of multiple dialects, which sometimes significantly vary under the impact of other languages. By researching these dialects, one can understand from which language certain words were borrowed by the Roma and how the words were transformed in particular dialects of Romanes. This understanding brings knowledge regarding the migration of Roma: which countries the Romani people passed through, for how long they stayed, and where they resided. However, not all Roma speak Romanes. Therefore, some researchers prefer to use the term “Gypsies” referring to both Roma and those who belong to Roma owing to other characteristics but not Romanes language.

Linguistic research significantly contributes to understanding the Romani groups' kinship, forming certain groups and splitting themselves further into micro-groups. Hence, Romani people are not a homogeneous group, they are divided into metagroups, groups, subgroups, and other micro-groups within a specific geographic area. This division is based primarily on linguistic research. Lev Tcherenkov and Stephane Laederich consider four large Romani metagroups that can be identified based on common or similar language, history, trade and traditions. These groups are the Vlax, the Carpathian, the Nordic and the Balkan (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 302). Linguist Yaron Matras proposed the same division based on only linguistic characteristics (Matras 2005).

According to these scholars, the Vlax metagroup concentrated around the historical Wallachian and Transylvanian regions (within contemporary Romania), and its subgroups migrated throughout Europe and beyond (Matras 2005, 9). The main characteristic of the Vlax dialect is a strong influence of the Romanian language (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 424). Most of the Roma resided in Ukrainian lands in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries belong to the Vlax metagroup. Following the spelling in Romanes, these groups are the Kalderaš (other names are the Kelderari, Căldărari, or Kotliary), the Kišinjovcurja (Kišinjovurja, Kishiniovtsy, Bessarabian Roma), the Lingurari, the Lovari (Lovara), the Rišarja, the Rusynski (Hutsulski) Roma, the Servi (Servurja, Ukrainka Roma) and the Vlaxi (Vlaxija, Vlaxurja, Katunarja; Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 424).

The Carpathian metagroup, or according to Y. Matras, central group with its two subdivisions into Northern Central and Southern Central, spreads to parts of Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary and Transcarpathian Ukraine. This metagroup has linguistically experienced strong southern Slavic and Hungarian influences (Matras 2005, 10; Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 241). The latter is related to the Northern Central subdivision. The Plaščuni and the Ungrika Roma are two Roma groups belonging to the Carpathian metagroup and live in western Ukraine.

The Nordic metagroup with the dialects of western and northern Europe also includes the Iberian Peninsula and southern Italy. This group linguistically also may be divided into North-Eastern (Baltic) and North-Western (German-Scandinavian) groups (Matras 2005, 10). The German language impacted the Nordic group. The Romani groups that belonged to this metagroup and resided in Ukraine before and after the Second World War are the Gimpeni, Polska Roma, Sinti and Xaladytka Roma (Ruska Roma).

The Balkan group included the Black Sea coastal dialects (Matras 2005, 10) and was strongly influenced by Turkish and Greek languages. It may be considered the oldest metagroup in Europe compared to others (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 303). Several Romani groups from this metagroup can (or could) be found in Ukraine: the Kırımurja (the Kırımlides, Kırımlitika Roma, Tatarika Roma, Kırımı, or Crımı), the

Tajfa (Dajfa) and the Ursari (Ursarja). Over time, each group developed its tradition of living, occupation, and way of life. Understanding these issues is important for further analysis of the impact of Soviet policies on various Romani groups.

The Ways of Life: Sedentary or Nomadic?

Various Romani groups maintained different ways of life which relatively can be categorised as nomadic, semi-nomadic (or semi-settled) and settled/sedentary. These categories reflect the history of the Romani everyday life on Ukrainian lands, though the “semi-nomadic” category is vague and requires further clarification. In most publications of which I am aware, the scholars use only two categories—nomadic and sedentary—to discuss the Romani ways of life. However, a significant part of the Roma in Soviet Ukraine maintained neither of these ways of life, particularly in the period between the First and Second World Wars. In private academic discussions, the category of “semi-nomadic” Roma is present but is not reflected in academic writings.

Despite the stereotypical image of Roma as nomadic people in the Russian Empire, it should be noted that several Romani groups, for instance, a significant part of Servi and Tajfa/Dajfa, settled already in the eighteenth century, if not earlier (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 422; Marushiakova and Popov 2016, 34). Once settled, those Roma remained sedentary and lived in their own huts and houses through the centuries. When urbanisation started in the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union, Roma started to own flats in the towns and cities. Several Servi and the Kišinjovcurja groups became sedentary in the late 1920s through to the 1930s in connection with the creation of the *kolkhoz* (the Soviet collective farm) system; other groups were prevented from nomadising during the Second World War owing to the occupation of Soviet Ukraine by Nazi Germany and its allies. Then, after the war, they remained settled (Damaskin). The rest of the Roma became sedentary after 1956 when the Soviet first secretary Nikita Khrushchev issued the Decree “On Reconciling Vagrant Gypsies to Labour”, according to which all Roma had become settled under pain of criminal punishment (*Vedomosti* 1956, 547). Thus, despite the wide sedentarisation of the Roma on Ukrainian lands at the beginning of the twentieth century, if not earlier, the Roma still appeared as travellers or nomads in the imagination of the majority of non-Roma that can be observed through literature and cinematography.

Yet, the ancestors of almost all Romani groups living in contemporary Ukraine, except the aforementioned Tajfa/Dajfa and a part of the Servi groups, were previously nomadic. By using the term “previously” mainly the period before the twentieth century is being referred to, and only in a few cases, before the Second World War. After the Second World War, there were no nomadic Roma in Ukraine in the full sense of being travellers, as I explain below.

What is meant by being nomadic Roma is travelling around the year, including wintertime, from one place to another with short stays (from one day to two-three weeks) in the same place. Traditionally they travelled by *tabor/tabir*, as the Roma call it in Russian/Ukrainian. The word “taboro” came from the Kalderaš/Vlax dialect and may be translated to Romani camp or community. The *tabor/tabir* was a micro-group of Roma from the same group or subgroup connected by close kinship. Considering that Roma typically had four or more children (up to as many as twelve), the number of people in one *tabor/tabir* could vary between twenty and one hundred. For example, one *tabor/tabir* in the Odesa region (southern Ukraine) consisted of more

than seventy people before the Second World War (Tsynia). In Servi nomadic groups, *tabor/tabir* usually consisted of several families: between three to five as minimum and fifteen to twenty as maximum (Makhotina and Panchenko 2019, 24). The Roma travelled in covered chariots/wagons, and their size, outlook and decorations depended on the traditions of the Romani subgroup and its material situation. When Roma discuss their nomadic life, they rarely count people as “families” but rather by chariots. One chariot meant one Romani family of the closest kinship (a married couple and their children; sometimes also under-age brothers and sisters of the married couple and their elderly grandparents). For instance, a *tabor/tabir* of the Kelderaš group, which nomadised in western Ukraine (in the former Polish territories before 1939), consisted typically of ten to twelve chariots (Kwiatkowska) of which one family of the closest kinship occupied one or two chariots. Other Romani families (apparently Kišinjovcurja), who nomadised in Bessarabia and then in Romania before the Second World War, had fifteen to twenty chariots (Radukan). The Roma explained that such a difference in the number of chariots depended on the possessions of the Roma, for example: clothes, linen, pillows, kitchen stuff, instruments and equipment for work (Kotliarova). When one *tabor/tabir* met another on the road, even from the same Romani group, often the Roma of both *tabor/tabir* did not join together to continue their travels. In addition, they did not stay together or alongside in the same locality. For example, a Romani man Dmitrii Sheulitsa, whose parents nomadised before the Second World War, explained the issue of kinship:

The kinship was – that one brother, then one nephew [counts other people] – all of them as ‘ours’, same understanding [of each other]. It was considered that all of them were our people. When [we] met with other *tabors*, they were considered strangers. We arrived [to stay at a certain place], and they stayed there [at the same place], then we stayed separately from them [and did not join] (Sheulitsa).

However, such attitudes to each other did not preclude Roma belonging to different groups or subgroups from communicating among themselves. There were cases of common nomadising by Tavrian Servi and Kuban Vlaxi, whose traditions and customs were similar (Makhotina and Panchenko 2019, 24). Sometimes Romani youngsters got married despite belonging to different *tabors/tabirs* and even different Romani groups. For instance, such marriages existed between the groups of Vlaxi and Servi or Kelderaš and Lovari.

Some Roma talked about their nomadic life before the Second World War in interviews that I analysed. For instance, Nadzieja Kwiek was born in 1935 to a mixed family of the Kalderaš (father) and the Lovari (mother); Maria Kwiatkowska was born in 1925 to a family of the Kalderaš group. Both talked about their nomadic lives in the late 1930s in western Ukrainian lands, which belonged to Poland in the inter-war period (Kwiatkowska and Kwiek). Both Kwiek and Kwiatkowska had the same maiden name Goman which emphasised their connection to the same Kalderaš family in their younger years, which means they all nomadised together with their parents. Yet, those nomadic families were exceptional cases even before the Second World War that my fieldwork and analysis of the interviews recorded by the USC Shoah Foundation have confirmed.

Semi-Nomadism and Its Notion for the Roma

There is a general tendency among historians to assume that the majority of the Roma in the Soviet Union, with some minor exceptions, maintained a nomadic

style of life (Kotljarchuk 2014, 12; *Materialy* 2009, 57). Based on my source materials, I can state that the overwhelming majority of Roma in Ukrainian lands stopped their nomadic lives before the Second World War, and accepted semi-nomadic or settled ways of life. When the Roma talked about their nomadic lives in recorded interviews (both those that I analysed and those I have conducted myself), they explained how they eventually rented huts/houses for the winter. The Russian ethnographer Mikhail Plokhinskii wrote in his articles already in 1905 that “In the summertime, Tsygane usually nomadised from one place to another... In the wintertime, they usually rented a dwelling for themselves and their horses, paying for themselves and their horses a certain fee...” (Plokhinskii 1905, 201).

Roma people that have been interviewed about their life in Soviet Ukraine have explained the meaning of the semi-nomadic way of life before the Second World War and up to 1956: travelling during the warm season and staying in one place—a house or rather a hut—during the cold season. Although the interviewees did not call this way of life “semi-nomadic” but rather used the term “nomadic”, I think it is important to single out that this way of life is distinguished from nomadic or sedentary ways of life. During my fieldwork, I noticed that some of the Roma were very proud of their ancestors’ nomadic lives and emphasised that they were real “Tsyhany”. Other researchers also confirm that belonging to (semi)nomadic families evoked pride from the Roma descendants in the Servi group, which was divided into nomadic and sedentary in the past (Makhotina and Panchenko 2019, 23).

Thus, Roma who rented lodgings for the cold season and travelled during the warm season can be viewed as semi-nomadic whereas those who had their own accommodation and stayed there for the cold season but continued to travel during the warm season can be considered semi-settled. My research confirms Elena Marushiakova’s point of view that in Ukraine in the first half of the twentieth century, Roma always spent the wintertime in their own or rented dwellings (personal communication with Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov). Although I could find no information in the source materials to confirm that the Roma owned their own accommodation, I can assume that some Roma really received their accommodation from the Soviet state.

The regions for semi-nomadisation varied from group to group. Some of the Romani groups trespassed quite a significant territory over the summer. For instance, the radius of nomadisation for Kišinjovcurja was from Moldovan Bessarabia to the Ukrainian south and through the Crimean Peninsula to the Russian Kuban, where they stayed for the winter seasons and the following year returned to Bessarabia. Thus, in this case, the Roma covered more than 2,000 km during the warm season (Lebedev). Overlapping areas also had Kuban Vlaxi and Tavrian Servy groups present (Makhotina and Panchenko 2019, 24). Other Roma travelled to neighbouring regions. Some of the Servi nomadised only in the southern part of Ukraine: Kherison, Mykolaiv and Odesa regions (Shul’ga). They could cover around 400–600 km. Some Roma had even smaller areas for travelling: Kherison, Mykolaiv, and up to Kryvyi Rih regions (Sheulitsa), and they covered around 300–400 km per season. The Krimurja nomadised in the “Tavria region”, as they called it. The Roma conveyed that they deemed the Kherison region and the Crimean Peninsula areas to be “not far” even though the Roma could cover as much as 200–300 km over the warm season (Ninitsa).

Semi-nomadisation depended on three factors: Roma’s will to move, Romani families’ economic situation and weather conditions. The Roma in Ukraine began

to travel by mid- or the end of March and continued until the end of October. A Romani man Leonid Shul'ga, who was born in 1938 and whose family was semi-nomadic before his birth and then again after the Second World War from 1945 until 1956, recalled:

Well, see, at that time, all Tsyhany nomadised. It started from their ancestors: their parents and then them [means the kids when they grow up]. Generally, the Tsyhan(ska) [life] was such [that] they could not stay in one place. Well, [they] overwintered, the spring arrived, became warmer [they] harness the horse and (shows by hands the road). [In summertime] we stayed in afforestation areas, tents [originally, *shatra*], and villages. That was the Tsyhan(ska) life. (Shul'ga)

Some of the Roma spent only three to four months rather than half a year nomadising, which suggests that the process of sedentarisation was slowly progressing. Every year, the Roma rented houses or huts in villages, where they preferred to stay in the cold season between the end of October and mid to late March. The Roma rented huts or houses from local peasants, in most cases in the same village every year and for many years. This way, local non-Roma, mainly Ukrainians, knew the Roma who rented the huts and trusted them. Dmitrii Sheulitsa talked about renting the hut for the winter in detail:

We travelled in familiar villages, and [the non-Roma people] knew [us]. They said: "Ah, our Tsyhany arrive our *tabor*". Well, we did not have our own houses. We rented flats... We arrive, and people [non-Roma] already knew [us]. If one hut was not vacant, then [we] went to another. [People said] "These Tsyhany are ours; they are good!" You rent a flat and overwinter there. (Sheulitsa)

Those Roma who had larger areas for nomadising could rent houses or huts each year in different villages. For example, Leonid Shul'ga said, "Where we found ourselves when the winter came, there we rented huts", and listed the names of the villages where they stayed (Shul'ga). Semi-nomadic in her childhood, Romani woman Vera Kotliarova (born 1925) recalled that "It does not matter where we travelled, but we always returned to our village Tomakivka and spent the winter there. [We] rented flats because we did not have our own hut ["flats" means huts or even rooms because there were no flats in the village in an urban sense]" (Kotliarova). To receive a place to live for the cold seasons, some of the Roma made an official contract to work with *kolkhoz* [Soviet collective farms] where they stayed and worked during the winter time. A Romani woman Sofiia Bakro (born in 1922), recalled her semi-nomadic family life in her childhood before the Second World War:

When the winter is coming, he [father] applied to *kolkhoz* for a contract... You know, in winter, one will not nomadise, [it is] cold, and he, my father, applied to stay and work in *kolkhoz* for three-four months. (Bakro)

Each subgroup travelled in their chosen region throughout the year and each time stayed nearby or in a particular village for a certain period of time, usually between several days and a couple of weeks. One Romani semi-nomadic man recalled his life "...When nomadised...well, there were such places where people [non-Roma] lived closely, and we always stayed there [upon arrival]" (1261UK). In this way, the Roma knew that the locals would treat them well, and local non-Roma knew "their Tsyhany" and waited for the Roma to offer some work or get some entertainment

(Lebedev). Such attitude of non-Roma to Roma helped the latter earn money or rather some food during their short stays.

When staying, the Roma usually set up the tents (*shatra*) where they lived and slept overnight. The Romani endonyms *Katunarja* and in Russian *Shatiorniki* can be translated from Romanes as “those who stayed in tents (*shatra* or *katuna*)”. The *Katunarja* is the second endonym of the Vlaxi group (the first is the *Vlaxurja*; Makhotina and Panchenko 2019, 23; Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004, 421). The *tabor*'s horses and chariots were nearby.

While staying in tents, Roma performed some work for local non-Roma, during the daytime which only Roma could do. Each Romani (sub)group had different occupations/specialisations, such as, inter alia, horse traders, smiths, cauldron-makers, tinsmiths, shoe-horse makers and felt-boots makers. Some Ukrainians recalled in their interviews that the Roma were very qualified specialists:

Tsyhany were specialists! They are such people - specialists! [They] made rings for fingers and made earrings for girls. [They] forged sieves. [They] repaired shoes... For example, if I needed something: to repair shoes or winter shoes - I went to Tsyhany. These people are specialists. They are masters. (1264UK)

The same Ukrainian man recalled how the Roma could forge the metal and make kitchenware, tin the kitchen *utensils* and frying pans, and how Ukrainians paid the Romani specialists not with money but with food such as milk, eggs and chicken (1264UK). Roma from the Vlaxi or Servi groups recalled staying in one place for two to three weeks when working as smiths for local villagers (Lebedev). For the most part, it was the men who had a specialised trade and the Romani women would either stay in tents and look after their children, cooked and do laundry, or go to the village to undertake fortune-telling, palm-reading or simply beg. Some Roma recalled that they “arrived in the village, stayed [on the village outskirts], went to the village, acquired something [food], cooked, ate and travelled further” (Ninita). “Acquired” in this context exactly meant palm-reading, fortune-telling or/and begging as the latter was a common occupation for women of Romani groups such as Servi, Vlaxi, Kišinjovcurja and Krimurja. There were few exceptions among the Romani *tabors/tabirs* where the women (if they did not know how to tell the fortune and were unsuccessful in begging) could steal some products such as eggs, fruits, vegetables and even chickens. A Roma Dmitrii Sheulitsa recalled that upon arrival to certain villages, the head of the *tabor* warned all the Roma:

Look, our *tabor* is from here [meaning they regularly stay in this area during the nomadic period]. People, go to the village and do not do any harm [to the villagers]! There were such Roma who stole chickens... There were such too... So, all the people [non-Roma] knew us [in places] where we travelled: ‘they are our Tsyhany, they do not do any harm’ [people] said. (Sheulitsa)

Usually, Roma recalled such negative details about other *tabors* rather than their own (Zolotarev and Kotliarova). Because of such incidents, the image of the Roma as hard-working people could be spoiled and all Roma were not welcome in villages where the incident occurred. The existence of such *tabors* contributed to the creation of negative stereotypes among the non-Roma population regarding the Roma. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a deeper examination regarding occupation and gender division of labour in different Romani groups.

In the evenings, the Roma usually lightened a bonfire, played instruments, danced, and sang. These merriments attracted the villagers who watched or sometimes even danced and sang along with the Roma and often gave some food to the Roma to “thank” them for the entertainment (Lebedev). There are numerous examples within the interviews with Roma in which they recalled these moments of everyday life before and sometimes after the Second World War. Such positive moments contributed to the establishment of positive stereotypes regarding the Roma that are reflected in Ukrainian and Russian literature as the image of the Romani people being good dancers and musicians.

The Kolkhoz and the Sedentarisation of the Roma by the Soviet State

Stereotypes have played a crucial role in attitudes towards the Roma by non-Roma in everyday life. Negative stereotypes regarding the Roma flourished across Europe throughout centuries and included being illiterate, “uncivilised,” bringing disease, being beggars and thieves and seemingly travelled to the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union (see, Trumpener 1992). The positive stereotypes regarding the Roma existed alongside negative ones among the Ukrainian population of Soviet Ukraine. Both types of stereotypical views reflected the attitude to Roma based on the views formed during their co-habitation in the same geographical, social, political, and often cultural *milieux*. Some Ukrainians talked about the Roma as talented and skilful, especially about Romani women who could dance and sing. Regarding the Roma men, the sources convey that Ukrainians saw them positively and even during the German occupation, they asked the Roma to repair the kitchen stuff and admitted that the Roma were “real specialists”, describing them as skilful and helpful (1264UK and 1263UK).

Based on negative stereotypes, the Russian Imperial state saw the Roma as a threat and the Tsarist regime tried to settle nomadic Roma in two villages in Bessarabia, supplying them with some money for agricultural activity and constructing huts for the Roma families. However, the Roma returned to their nomadic lifestyle after several years (Barannikov 1931a, 27; Sirbu 2016, 53). According to the ethnographer M. Plokhinskii, “The Russian [tsarist] government seldom differed the Gypsies from the common mass of the population, but always tried to merge them with other ordinary people and make out of them [Gypsies] farmers” (Plokhinskii 1905, 202-203).

From 1920 until 1931, the Ethnographic Commission at the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (today, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine) continued research on Roma culture, conducting ethnographic fieldwork and work with archival documents on Roma (Pavlenko 2015, 118-120). During this time, linguist and ethnographer Aleksei (Oleksii) Barannikov published significant works on Roma ethnography in Ukraine. He stated that “depending on personal sympathy of different authors, we see either sharp condemnation of Gypsies or soppy sentimentalism” (Barannikov 1931a, 30). Barannikov noted that many authors wrote that Roma occupied themselves only with begging, smuggling, stealing, fate-telling, and wild dancing. Some of the authors whom A. Barannikov cited called Roma a “cursed tribe”, “without any kind qualities falling in all sins” (Barannikov 1931a, 30). Although, he also noted that other authors mentioned positive characteristics including their alleged fondness for freedom, dancing, singing and playing music, and he praised the beauty of Roma girls (Barannikov 1931a, 31).

The Soviet state used and spread further negative stereotypes in its policy toward the “Gypsies”: Roma were “popularly defined as unruly nomads, parasites, and mar-

ginals” and considered to be the “most backward’ minority people” (O’Keeffe 2013, 5). After its establishment, the Soviet state created the requirements for the Soviet population, including Roma, to match the Soviet ideals of the new Soviet society. According to Terry Martin, the Bolsheviks believed there was only one path for achieving the society’s highest development. Different nationalities had to follow this path, despite being located at different points on their way to this development. That meant the nationalities had to be helped by the Soviet state to progress on this path (Martin 2001, 126). Soviet ideology conveyed that all aspects of society had to be useful, rational, disciplined, and so on – all characteristics that were not deemed to be part of the Roma nomadic or semi-nomadic ways of life. Brigid O’Keeffe argues that “as the personification of backwardness and inscrutability... Gypsies threatened the Bolsheviks’ ideal vision of New Soviet Men and Women. The accursed ‘Gypsy question’ was thus an inescapable Bolshevik problem” (O’Keeffe 2013, 5).

In contrast, Marushiakova and Popov argue that in the Soviet Union context, the expression “backward” or “culturally backward” did not have any pejorative connotations. Instead, it positively meant “special care” from the Soviet state for developing culture and lifting the Roma “to the status of equal Soviet citizens” (Marushiakova and Popov 2021, 696). I disagree with this statement: if one nation decides to “elevate” another without consent, this means the imposition of power, at the very least, or worse, suppression. To be identified as “culturally backward” did however bring some advantages for the Roma, particularly for newly formed Romani organisations, because such a viewpoint also meant financial support for education and cultural events. Therefore, some Roma actively exploited their “backwardness,” praised the Soviet government, and even asked for more financial aid. However, on the one hand, the main goal of the Soviet state was to depoliticise national identities “through an ostentatious show of respect for the national identities of the non-Russians” and dissolve the ethnic identities and cultures in one “all-Union socialist culture” (Martin 2001, 13). On the other hand, the support of non-Russian “backward” cultures also allowed the Soviet state to recruit non-Russian peasants and workers to promote the political agenda. Thus, I believe that one has to consider the intention rather than its practical implementation through which the Roma arguably benefited.

Trying to “civilise” the Roma, on the one hand, and following the Soviet strategy of controlling peasantry, on the other, the Soviets decided to create so-called “Gypsy *kolkhozes*” in the late 1920s up until the beginning of the 1930s. The creation of the *kolkhoz* system in the Soviet Union was one of the critical historical events that changed the lives of nomadic and semi-nomadic Romani groups. Writing about the creation of the collective farms for Roma, Soviet linguist and ethnographer A. Barannikov seemed very positive. He claimed that placing nomadic “Gypsies” with sedentary in *kolkhozes* was a very successful Soviet approach to dealing with “The Gypsy Problem.” Moreover, he claimed that the experiences of being in the *kolkhozes* influenced positive changes in the “psychology of the Russian Gypsies” (Barannikov 1932, 188, 192). Apparently, he meant that nomadic Roma will learn agriculture from sedentary and the successful example of how to be sedentary had to encourage nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma to settle. At the same time, as Tatiana Gabrielson noted, Barannikov stated that many times he heard from the “Gypsies” that grain production was not the “Gypsy” trade because they could neither plough nor sow and that their profession was to trade, however, the Soviet state wanted Roma to become labours (Gabrielson 2006, 17; Barannikov 1931b, 53).

Most of the interviewees did not remember their experiences of the *kolkhozes* because they were too young nor could they relay the experiences of their parents. They recalled only that their families worked in *kolkhozes* during the cold season. Some of the Roma repaired *kolkhoz* inventory—such as ploughs and harrows or collected hays into haystacks—in exchange for food and accommodation (Bakro, Barieva and Kotliarova). In some *kolkhozes* before the Second World War, the Soviet authorities gave skilled Roma free huts for two purposes: to provide specialists in metalworking to *kolkhozes* and to settle nomadic Roma in certain places (Kantemirov). However, I could not find first-hand accounts of those whose relatives had been placed into specific “Gypsy *kolkhozes*”, though many Roma recalled that they were placed in regular *kolkhozes* in Soviet Ukraine, meaning along with Ukrainians. Some Roma tried to escape from *kolkhozes* and return to their nomadic or semi-nomadic ways of life, most notably during the man-made Great Famine in Ukraine in 1932–33 under the Stalinist Soviet regime known in historiography as the Holodomor.

On 27 December 1932, passportisation was introduced in the Soviet Union to prevent migration from countryside to the cities. In this way, the government reacted to the flight of rural populations to cities who tried to escape the consequences of Stalin’s famine-inducing policies (*Postanovlenie*). Passports were not issued to villagers and *kolkhozniks* (*kolkhoz* workers); legal leaving a *kolkhoz* was only possible with permission from that *kolkhoz* (Fitzpatrick 1993, 763). Most Roma were ineligible for passports owing firstly to the fact that only a small number lived in towns and cities and the majority of the Roma lived in the villages. Secondly, Roma were deemed ineligible for passports or any residency permits as “unreliable elements”. The Soviet government’s distrust of Roma even led to a special operation conducted in 1933 to round up the Roma who were based around Moscow and deport them to Siberia (Werth and Moullec 1994, 43–44).

Considering the circumstances of famine, a part of the Romani peoples, probably, escaped *kolkhozes* illegally, without any documents and permits, and returned to their previous semi-nomadic or nomadic life. Yet, another part of the Roma stayed in *kolkhozes*, for instance, a big family of Servi group the Krykunov, which was nomadic or semi-nomadic before the 1930s. Igor (Ihor) Krykunov born in 1953, recalled his family history during the interview with T. Gabrielson:

Our family had travelled along the route from Kharkov [Kharkiv] to the Don and Kuban’ for many generations, since the seventeenth century for sure. This history has been kept in the memory of my family, and I learned it from my grandmothers, it comes from *their* memory. The men in our lineage were blacksmiths, and since their trade was in great demand in the region, the trade route had been worked out and remained stable. They migrated along that route, from village to village. When the work was finished in one village, they collected their equipment and moved to the next. In 1927–28, when collectivization reached Kuban’, my relatives settled and started a Gypsy *kolkhoz* exactly on the spot where they happened to be staying at the time. (Gabrielson 2006, 18)

Definitely, the *kolkhoz* system forcibly changes, to a certain extent, the life of nomadic and semi-nomadic Romani groups turning them to sedentarisation. The second shift in changing the Romani ways of life occurred during the Second World War, particularly the German and Romanian occupation of Soviet Ukraine. The occupiers immediately shot Romani *tabors/tabirs* if met them on their way (1261UK). Generally, any wandering or moving people, particularly in groups, were considered as partisans or

spies by the occupiers and had to be immediately shot on the spot. Despite the fact the German occupiers exterminated Roma in Ukraine regardless of their way of life being sedentary or nomadic, a part of the Roma tried to mix up with Ukrainians and stay in one place without moving anywhere. Sometimes such a strategy was successful and Roma managed to survive.

It should be highlighted that familiarity with both the *kolkhoz* system and with those Ukrainians working and heading the *kolkhozes* saved the lives of several Romani families during the German and Romanian occupation of Soviet Ukraine. Attempting to escape from the occupiers, Roma arrived at *kolkhozes*, to where they were accepted and, in some cases, protected by the *kolkhoz* heads who provided them with jobs, rather than denouncing them to the authorities. Some heads of the *kolkhozes* even issued or falsified official papers for the Roma, and their nationality was stated as “Ukrainian” or “Moldovan” in those papers, rather than “Roma” (Kirichenko and Flora). Frequently, the occupiers could not identify the Roma in Ukraine without denunciation or checking the official records such as, for instance, the certificate of birth where the nationality could be stated. Declaring papers issued by official authorities such as heads of *kolkhozes*, Roma could survive, especially if the heads of *kolkhozes* personally protected Roma by confirming to the German or Romanian officials that Roma are in fact Ukrainians or Moldovans. Some nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma remained in *kolkhozes* after the war ended and hence changed their way of life and become settled.

Forced Sedentarisation of the Roma: The “Khrushchev Decree” of 1956

There is no evidence that nomadic Romani groups existed and continued to maintain their nomadic way of life after the Second World War. Most likely, all such Romani groups either turned to a semi-nomadic (or even sedentary) way of life or have been exterminated by the German and Romanian occupiers with, probably, exceptional cases. Nevertheless, those semi-nomadic Romani groups, who survived the Nazi occupation, returned to their way of life after the war, probably with some exceptions of those who decided to settle thanks to their survival in *kolkhozes* (Flora and Damaskin).

Apparently, the post-war famine of 1946–47, post-war reconstruction in the late 1940s—beginning of the 1950s, and the death of Stalin distracted the attention of the Soviet authorities from the Roma. However, the new First Secretary of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev decided to resolve the “Gypsy question” once and for all. The last and the most successful attempt to sedentarise Roma occurred in 1956. The Decree, known among Roma as the “Khrushchev Decree” and referred to in the scholarly literature as the Decree “On Vagrant Gypsies”, was approved by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR members on 2 October 1956. The official title of the Decree was “On Reconciling Vagrant Gypsies to Labour” and it was officially published in *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, dated 5 October 1956 (*Vedomosti* 1956, 547). The Decree prohibited all Roma from nomadising and obliged them to maintain social duties such as permanent residency and “socially useful labour” (*Vedomosti* 1956, 547). Those who did not follow the order were to “be punished in accordance with the verdict of the people’s court by deportation for a period of up to five years in conjunction with corrective labour...” It further stated that an investigation was to be carried out “in accordance with the current criminal procedure” (*Vedomosti* 1956, 547).

On the same day, 5 October 1956, ordinance #1373 of the Council of Ministers of the USSR was published. The ordinance obliged the Councils of Ministers of the

Soviet Republics to settle (find the place) “vagrant Gypsies” in their permanent residences, employ them, and organise cultural and everyday life services for new settlers. All mentioned actions had to be done within a three-month term. The Council of Ministers of the Soviet Republics also had to provide accommodation for the Roma (rooms, flats, huts, or private houses) or, if this provision was not possible, they were to provide the Roma with a monetary loan for the construction of their own homes. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR was obliged to issue passports for officially employed Roma and issue *propiska*, a temporary or permanent record of registration in the USSR according to their permanent place of residence. As with the Decree, the ordinance emphasised that those Roma who left their permanent residence or evaded “socially useful labour” had to be found and sentenced according to the Republic’s criminal codes (*Biulleten* 1956, 58-59).

The Decree had a significant impact on the Roma; fearing punishment, they started to settle or were forced to do so by the authorities. Even though there were isolated cases of semi-nomadism up until the 1970s in western Ukraine, particularly in Zakarpattia (Transcarpathia; Kuz’menko), most Roma had become sedentary soon after the Decree was issued. Many Roma received flats or small huts (one room) provided to them by the Soviet state; the huts were made of clay or wood (Sandulenko and Kozachenko). The vast majority of the Roma were ordered to settle in rural areas. Therefore, they were employed in local *kolkhozes* where they had to give away their horses, chariots and work inventory/equipment. Although many of the Roma men had specific trades or occupations (they were blacksmiths or tin-smiths but also felt-boots makers and musicians), the majority of them had to work in roles assigned to them by the authorities, as masons, carriers of fodder, coal, or wood (by horses), and on harvest collection (Ninitsa, Chebotar and Kozachenko). Roma women also worked in *kolkhozes* undertaking harvest collection or other general work in the fields, and as milkmaids (Ninitsa and Bulat).

Many interviews with the Roma contain information regarding the “Khrushchev Decree” and its aftermath. Moreover, one gets the sense from the interviews that Roma started to talk about this issue without any specific questions or leads from the interviewer. It is evident from these first-hand accounts that there is a common tendency to discuss the Decree as a traumatic event but to also recognise that sedentary life has benefits in comparison to leading semi-nomadic lives, including a more stable education for the children and comfort for the elderly people (Fedorenko and Bulat). In the conversations and interviews, the vast majority of the Roma who maintained a semi-nomadic way of life before 1956 recalled it as harsh but nice, with some romanticism. They also revealed their suffering when they had to stop nomadising but at the same time, the Roma stated that the settled life was better and easier than the nomadic. For instance, Galina Ninitsa reflects on her life after 1956: “In the beginning, we did not want to go to work in *kolkhoz* (...) And now to spend the night outdoor? – Never. I am already afraid of darkness” (Ninitsa).

The comparison of the impact of the Decree “On Vagrant Gypsies” with the suffering during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine reveals a traumatic experience of the former nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma. This pattern can be observed in several interviews with the Roma, particularly of an older generation born in the 1920s or early 1930s. Although, the after-war generation who nomadised only in their very childhood romanticised the nomadic life and recalled how Roma suffered when the law was issued. For example, semi-nomadic (before 1956) Roma Yevgeniia Bulat, born in 1930, recalled her trauma several years after she was forced into a sedentary

life. She said that she and others from her *tabor/tabir* lived with memories of their nomadic life and only later got used to being settled (Bulat). Previously semi-nomadic Roma Mariia Vursova, who was born after the end of the Second World War, recalled that when the Roma learnt about the Decree they terribly cried:

It seemed to them as horror, as the end of the world! They were afraid when the Germans arrived but this [the Decree] seemed even more terrible to them. They imagined that they would be shot and killed. They thought that was the end for them and they could not understand how to live further. ... They thought it was worse than the war (means the Second World War). ... They cried when horses were taken from them. (Vursova)

Yet, some researchers analysing the situation in Soviet Belarus and the Soviet Union more broadly have concluded that the transition from nomadic to semi-nomadic and from semi-nomadic to settled was determined first of all by socio-economic conditions rather than the Soviet state political decisions. They argue that growing urbanisation, the opening of factories, and the general transfer towards new methods of work, as well as to new technical means would have meant increased sedentarisation among Roma either way (Bartash 2015, 49-50). I agree that the evolution and reforms created a different environment for the Roma and challenged their semi-nomadic way of life; however, the required changes would take decades to be gradually accepted by the Roma without the restrictive Soviet policies that were implemented. After the implementation of the 1956 Decree, rare cases of Romani semi-nomadic life were recorded and there are no official regional statistics. Nonetheless, it means that the majority of Roma were forced to settle with immediate effect and had little time to prepare for their new sedentary way of life.

Conclusion

The variety of the Romani groups and subgroups in Ukraine demonstrates the complexity and diversity of Romani social, cultural, and everyday life. The knowledge regarding these groups opens the door for learning more about Romani experiences, including ways of life, the geography of settlement or nomadising, occupation, etc. In spite of several Romani groups, which lived in Ukrainian lands, settled as early as the eighteenth century, and seemingly were integrated into Ukrainian society to a large extent, several Romani groups still maintained nomadic way of life before the Second World War. At the same time, the vast number of Romani groups maintained a semi-nomadic way of life in the 1920s and the 1930s and seemingly many Roma returned to the same way of life after the Second World War. In my view, it is important to include the sub-categories in academic discussions on Romani life in Soviet Ukraine. Unfortunately, academic works in history tend to divide the Romani people in the Soviet Union into the oversimplified categories of nomadic and sedentary, and scholars do not address the issue of these sub-categories: semi-sedentism and semi-nomadism. Therefore, the use of a semi-nomadic category for the Romani way of life challenges the academic tradition.

The notion of nomadism among the Roma and their inter-family and inter-group relations allows us to better understand the life of Roma inside Romani communities in Soviet Ukraine before and after the Second World War as well as Roma and non-Roma relations. Discussion on Romani nomadism in Soviet Ukraine demonstrates a shift in changing Romani ways of life from nomadic and semi-nomadic to sedentary due to the social-economic situation in the Soviet society created by certain political decisions. The first such decision was the creation of *kolkhozes* in

the late 1920s until the early 1930s which was imposed on the Ukrainian Roma among other people in the Soviet Union. The creation of the Soviet *kolkhoz* system and the forcing Roma to live in these *kolkhozes* exemplify the suppressive policies of the Soviet Stalinist regime.

After the first experiences of being forced into the *kolkhozes* by the state power, some of Roma apparently remained settled of their own volition. The second shift occurred during the Second World War when, being under the German and Romanian occupation, all Roma without exception were subject to extermination. Paradoxically, some of the Roma found their way to rescue in *kolkhozes* created by the Soviet state and remained operated during the German occupation of Soviet Ukraine. Some of the Roma stopped their semi-nomadic or nomadic life during the war and did not return to it after the war ended.

The third and final shift in changing Romani ways of life occurred after the Second World War when still many Romani groups, who survived the German and Romanian occupation, resumed their semi-nomadic way of life in Soviet Ukraine. The Soviet suppressive policy towards the Roma culminated in October 1956 after the issue of the Khrushchev Decree which prohibited the Roma to nomadise under the threat of criminal punishment. Then, the semi-nomadic way of life of Roma drastically stopped. Although a few isolated Romani groups attempted to maintain the semi-nomadic way of life until the beginning of the 1970s, the criminal punishment for nomadism, along with the transformation of socio-economic relations in Soviet Ukraine, forced the Roma to sedentarise. Nowadays, neither nomadic nor semi-nomadic Romani groups or *tabors/tabirs* exist in Ukraine. All Roma maintain only a sedentary way of life due to political suppression throughout the history of the Second World War and the Soviet Union. Further analysis of the life of Romani groups and subgroups and their responses to the Soviet policies may display a new way of researching sedentarisation within each particular group.

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