



# WOMEN'S AGENCY AND WOMEN RIGHTS IN THE REPRODUCTIVE AND MARRIAGE SYSTEMS OF ROMANIAN ROMA: A STUDY OF SEVEN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY NETWORKS<sup>1</sup>

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Using ethnographic, ethno-historical and demographic data from the study of seven family networks of Romanian Roma living in Spain in early 2014 we have been able to complete the basic reproductive history of 93 Roma married women, and to analyze their efforts to postpone, space or stop definitively their pregnancies in order to obtain the offspring they and their families desire. These women come from different Romanian regions and belong to five cultural-linguistic groups that are often referred to as *Korturare/Churara*, *Spoitori*, *Kangljari*, *Ursari*, and *Lajeshi*. All of these families are interconnected in real time with their relatives in other nine European countries. The difficult "family planning" of these Romani women is resulting in a culturally distinct process of fertility transition. This process is taking place within a complex set of constraints, normative orientations and internalized dispositions that pertain to specific marriage and gender systems. In sum, in this paper we will analyze how Roma women from three generations manipulate, negotiate and endure a particular social organization of reproduction in the transnational context brought about by the migratory flows of post-1989 Romania.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A culturally distinct reproductive regime

A differentiated social organization of reproduction is a key element of Romani cultures everywhere. The key elements of these reproductive regimes concern the specific combinations of "demographic behaviors" that are somehow stable in time (Livi Bacci, 1998). These combinations of practices imply values, beliefs norms and dispositions that are interiorized by social actors. Normative orientations could be explored in discourses. However, such discourses are not always confirmed in practice or in the filtered aggregated results of practice that are demographic data.

The demographic structure of Roma populations is often the most visible and one of the most important differences with the majority populations. These differences have historical roots and have to be understood within complex systems of historical exclusion and discrimination that often induced dialectical processes of opposition, resistance, introversion and cultural reaffirmation. Besides, Roma specific patterns of nuptiality and fertility have to be situated (Greenhalgh 1995) in larger social and cultural processes concerning marriage, gender and kinship systems. Reproduction in its wider sense has not received enough attention, and rarely it has been integrated in the analysis or design of public policy concerning the most vulnerable Romani groups. The current Eastern European Roma migration is making Romani reproduction an important transnational process.

In our studies of some groups of Romanian Roma and of Spanish Gitanos or Calé we have observed culture-specific marriages systems at the core of the reproductive strategies of these groups (see Beluschi Fabeni 2013a, 2013b; Gamella and Martín, 2008; Gamella, 2000; Martín and Gamella 2005). We refer to these systems as "marriage" systems, but obviously they include gender arrangements and a social construction of gender expectations and their enactment, as well as the "gendered kinship" set of family rights and responsibilities for each role (Lorber, 1994: 30-31). Gendered sexual and reproductive scripts are thus critical aspects of the Roma social organization of reproduction. These systems are also a crucial part of the "gender imagery", the cultural representation of gender differences and expectations enacted in ritual and in language and artistic representation (Lorber 1994).

In this paper we will explore the reproductive history of a group of immigrant Roma women who lived in Spain in the last decade and who belong seven local family networks. Here we offer a preliminary summary of our results concerning both fertility and some basic aspects of marriage/partnership and gender systems.

### 1.2 Romanian Roma in Spain

Romanian Roma migration into Spain began in the early 1990s, increased notably between 1997 and 2008 and has decreased since 2009, mostly due to the diminishing opportunities in a time of recession

and budget cuts. This process of mobility must be understood within the unpredicted, rapid and massive migration of Romanians into this Spain<sup>2</sup> and other European countries. In this Romanian "exodus" some Roma groups were pioneers in moving and finding niches to make a living in different European Countries. Mobility for and to Spain is often a circular and complex process involving today groups in more than ten European countries.

Many Roma are invisible as 'Roma', albeit known as Romanian or Bulgarian. Some have lived continuously in the same place for a decade or more. Others have continued to travel, moving back and forth between Romania and other European countries such as Italy, the UK, Germany and France, where they have relatives that help them to stay and settle. They are truly Pan-Europeans: probably the most cosmopolitan population of similar educational or economic level in the Continent. Hence, the estimations of the whole Roma population in Spain can only be approximated. It is not possible to develop a representative sample of Roma people in Spain. Any project with some pretensions of reliability and validity has to experiment with new forms of sampling and establishing the target groups.

### 1.3 Family and household networks in Roma migration

Transnational networks of consanguineous and affinal kin have become a key resource in Roma migration. Roma migration is particularly familiar or kin-led. Other crucial contacts are friends and neighbors, mostly from the same cultural-linguistic-geographic communities. As Portes and Rumbaut proposed, "migration is a network-driven process, and the operation of kin and friendship ties is nowhere more effective than in guiding new arrivals toward preestablished ethnic communities" (1990: 32). In consequence, we have chosen family and household networks as the building blocks of our research sample. This seems to be the social formation that represents more adequately the way in which actors experience and communicate the main relations that link each other. Hence our approach has been to follow the definitions of the social agents themselves to include members of their families and local groups.

## 2. METHODS AND SOURCES

### 2.1 The sample: Seven family networks

In a long-term anthropological research that has already extended for two years we have studied seven local kin networks as defined by the subjects themselves as the main units of sampling and analysis. We have followed a criterion of self-identification. We have considered as Romanian Roma those Romanian nationals who defined themselves and their communities as *Roma* or with clearly related terms, as *Laeşi* or *Spoitori*.

We have tried to know all persons in the chosen networks living in the study area in the survey period. This has produced a form of sampling that is exhaustive concerning these "natural" units of analysis, local family networks. Hence, we consider that our sample is more representative than a chain referral sample or an intentional one. The networks guided which persons and households to include. In several cases the local populations we found were larger than expected by ourselves and other local experts.

These networks are embedded in larger transnational social fields (Molina, Petermann, and Herz, 2012), which originate in different Romanian regions and that live today in more than ten European countries. They connect people from the same linguistic-cultural-geographical groups all over Europe. Today knowledge circulates among nodes of these networks almost instantly due to the wide use of digital technologies. For instance, among the young, *Facebook* is a crucial resource for communication, knowledge and even social control in moral communities scattered in many countries.

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<sup>2</sup> . The number of Romanian residents in Spain has grown exponentially in the last decade. In 1999 there were just over 3,000 Romanians inscribed in local censuses. By 2011, there were near 900,000, about three hundred times more. They amount to near 16% of all foreign residents. In Europe, only Italy has a comparable number of Romanians living in its territory.

The obtained sample includes a variety of groups that show the diversity of Roma immigration to Spain. They come from four different Romanian regions (Transylvania, Banat, Oltenia, and Muntenia) and have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; they speak several Romani dialects (Matras, 2013) except people in one of the networks who are referred to as *Laeşi* and speak Romanian as their mother language. The original cultural-linguistic groups are denoted by different terms depending on the criteria considered and the perspective of the speaker as *Churara*, *Spoitori*, *Kangliari*, *Ursari* are common labels that refer to traditional occupational specializations, but that are open today to considerable negotiation and variation. Moreover, in Spain the people in these networks are living in diverse local environments, from large cities to rural towns, developing different forms of adaptation and being engaged in different income-generating activities (see Beluschi, Gamella and Gómez Oehler, 2015).

The main problem of this sampling procedure concerns those types of Roma immigrants whose networks are not represented in our sample, and that may differ from the studied groups in some crucial aspects of their social life.

## 2.2 Techniques for gathering data

In gathering data we have used a combination of methods informed by ethnographic fieldwork, including ad-hoc semi-structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews with single individuals or small groups, as well as informal conversations generated in participant observation activities.

In all interviews we tried to explain the character and goals of the project in a form that could be understood by informants, and asked for their consent. All data was immediately codified to render it anonymous and to maintain confidentiality. All names used in examples are pseudonyms.

The resulting survey sample includes 81 households and 543 people from seven local family networks living in Andalusian cities and towns by early 2014. In 518 cases we were able to obtain basic socio-demographic data of some reliability, triangulating the information gathered from interviews and, in some cases, from personal and family documents. Our analysis of socio-demographic data referred to these 518 individuals (see Beluschi Fabeni, Gamella and Gómez Oehler 2015).

## 2.3 A sample of married Roma women living in Spain

In the 81 domestic units surveyed we found 132 Roma women who had a male partner or have had one. Of these 132 married women, 126 were 18 years-of age or older and 6 were younger. Of this potential sample, we were able to reconstruct partially the reproductive life of 93 women who had been married and lived as a couple according to the understandings, definitions and norms of their own community. This sample included 70.5 percent of the total sample of 132 married women found in the seven networks<sup>3</sup>.

These 93 women were born between 1950 and 1999, and ranged in age between 14 and 63 years. Most of them were born between the 1980s and 1990s and their reproductive projects were not yet finished. In all cases but two, they have had children. In one case the marriage had occurred during the survey, and no children were yet born to the couple. There was one adult woman who had no children.

The elementary reconstruction of their reproductive histories is based on the list of their known living children and their respective dates of birth, and the birth dates of their partners/husbands. In some cases we also were able to record other aspects of their lives, including their marriage and parenting histories, the loss of children or pregnancies, the use of contraceptive methods, and their ideas, values and orientations about the number and gender of the children they expected to have. We used different methods to gather information on this subject, including interviews of the women themselves and their relatives, and checking their documents and records. The information was immediately codified and entered into a database in an anonymous manner. Only the month and year of birth was recorded.

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<sup>3</sup>. According to our knowledge, the other 29 women do not show a different pattern of nuptiality or fertility than those in the research sample.

### 3. RESULTS

In this paper we will concentrate in some of the processes that are observable in all the networks surveyed, although some important differences appear among networks, as well as among couples and domestic families within the networks. Next we will present some of the major results that emerge from the analysis of the surveyed data concerning mating and fertility processes.

#### 3.1 Universal marriage- low levels of celibacy

It seems that in the groups studied few Roma women remain unwed in their adulthood. There is no woman in our sample who remained celibate after 24. All had at least one socially recognized partner or husband. Total celibacy was also rare among women who live in Romania and in other countries and are related to our informants. We explored this in our interviews and collected only a handful of cases for the whole set of transnational networks. Celibacy, especially among women, was attributed to physical or mental disabilities, or to what subjects perceived to be a lack of beauty or attractiveness.

This coincides with the life histories and the declared goals and values of the people interviewed. Single lifestyle does not mean much in Roma culture. The ideal life of an adult is that of a sexual, fertile couple with a gendered division of tasks and responsibilities. Hence, marriage is less an individual choice than a collective necessity. Obviously there are exceptions, and the number of young Roma who live alternative lives to the "traditional" model is growing. But these are not common in the networks studied. In our in-depth exploration of large Roma networks living all over Europe we have collected references to a few men and some women who married out of their reference groups and are living independent lives, even as non-Roma.

Most births happen within socially recognized unions that are considered common law marriages by the partners themselves, their families and communities. For these Roma marriage is usually a socially sanctioned and public relationship with an important institutional base. Vernacular understandings of marriage may not coincide with official definitions by state authorities. In a number of cases we learned of men and women in our sample who were married "on paper" to other persons than those with whom they lived and had children. This often was the source of bureaucratic problems in countries of arrival. But information about "real" fathers and genitors seems to be a public –internal to Roma networks - issue. In fact, the community works powerfully to produce and share information that would be seen as private in other contexts or within the majority population at large.

#### 3.2 Early marriage and maternity

If marriage tends to be universal, often we found some urgency both among parents and teenagers in establishing the right matches. In our sample, the average age of women at their first estimated union is 16.4 years of age<sup>4</sup>. In most discourses today in all the seven networks explored, women should marry ideally between 16 and 18 years of age. Obviously there is considerable variation beyond those ideal ages and types. But in the groups of origin of these immigrant networks early marriages appear to be widespread and do not appear to be exclusively associated with poor or "traditional" communities. We found instances of this process in all the networks surveyed.

#### 3.3 The birth of first child

The age of mothers giving birth for the first time is a crucial indicator in the reproductive patterns of a population. It influences the total number of births that a woman might have, which, in turn, impacts the size, composition, and growth of the population. Moreover, the mother's age "plays a strong role in a wide range of birth outcomes (e.g. birth weight, multiple births, and birth defects), so it is critical to track the average age at which women have their first birth" (Mathews and Hamilton 2009: 1).

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<sup>4</sup> . In about 30 cases we were able to establish the date of marriage or the beginning of cohabitation. In the other cases we estimated it subtracting one year from the date of birth of the first known child. Both measures cohered in most cases.

In Table 1, we show the results of the analysis of this variable in our sample of 93 Roma women, 91 of whom have borne children. It seems that children came relatively early to these families. The average age of women who had given birth to their first child for the entire sample was 17.5 years of age. Half of these mothers had had their first child before their eighteenth birthday. The average and median age of women at their first births oscillated between 16 and 18.4 years old. Hence, the corresponding unions were normally established between 15 to 17 years of age. It is not uncommon to find Roma women who are mothers at 15 together with sisters or cousins who have their first child at 24. The whole range of early maternities needs further study. Nevertheless, it seems that in these Roma communities the average age of the first known birth remained low for almost half a century.

A small portion of the pregnancies documented in our sample occurred at 12 and 13 years of age. "Child pregnancies" are the source of stigmatization for the entire Roma communities, and their occurrence, even if exceptional, is easily manipulated by mass me

**Table 1: Age of mothers at the birth of their first known child by 5-year cohorts. Romanian roma women in seven family networks living in Spain, January 2014 (n: 91)**

| Birth period | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Min  | Max  | Q1   | Q3   | N  |
|--------------|------|-----------|--------|------|------|------|------|----|
| 1950 to 1954 | 16.0 |           | 16     | 16   | 16   | 16   | 16   | 1  |
| 1955 to 1959 | 18.3 | 1.1       | 18.3   | 17.5 | 19   | 17.5 | 19   | 2  |
| 1960 to 1964 | 16.5 | 0.7       | 16.5   | 16   | 17   | 16   | 17   | 2  |
| 1965 to 1969 | 15.8 | 0.8       | 16     | 15   | 16.5 | 15   | 16.5 | 3  |
| 1970 to 1974 | 18.4 | 3.4       | 17.5   | 15   | 23.3 | 15.6 | 21.5 | 6  |
| 1975 to 1979 | 17.4 | 2.5       | 16.9   | 13   | 21.5 | 15.9 | 19.1 | 12 |
| 1980 to 1984 | 18.0 | 2.5       | 18     | 14.6 | 24.5 | 15.6 | 19   | 21 |
| 1985 to 1989 | 18.4 | 2.8       | 18.6   | 14   | 24.5 | 15.8 | 20   | 18 |
| 1990 to 1994 | 17.3 | 2.1       | 16.9   | 13.5 | 20.5 | 16.0 | 18.9 | 18 |
| 1995 to 1999 | 15.6 | 1.3       | 15.5   | 14.2 | 18.3 | 14.5 | 16.1 | 8  |
| Total        | 17.5 | 2.4       | 17.2   | 13   | 24.5 | 15.6 | 19   | 91 |

Our results mainly concern three generations that loosely correspond to those of grandmothers, mothers and adult daughters. The oldest cohort, born between the 1950s and 1960s entered maternity at an earlier age on average than their daughters born between 1970s and 1980s. The reproductive life of these younger women occurred mostly after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. Note as well that there is more variation in this variable among the younger generations. However the number of women in the younger group is also much larger. In spite of this, some "granddaughters" born between 1990 and 1999 appear to be having children at an earlier age. It must be noted, however, that they are the most precocious of their generation. Many women of the same age have not had children yet. Hence likely the final average from this cohort will be higher.

### 3.4 Husbands' ages: same-generation marriages

The male partners or husbands of these women are commonly of the same age group, especially with regards to first marriages. In our sample, 93 husbands or male partners of the women surveyed were 2.33 years older than their wives. In 9 cases (9.7%) wives were older than their husbands. Only in three cases did the husband belong to an older generation; that is, he was at least 15 years older than his wife. In these three cases, none of the couples were first spouses. The cultural norm for the observed Roma marriages is that both spouses must be from the same generation and age cohort. Ideally, husbands should be a bit older than their wives.

### 3.5 A decreasing number of children

The 93 women in our sample had 3.5 living children on average. Yet this is not a significant figure, since the sample includes women from three or four generations. The maximum number of living children is 8. At the time of the study, two women had not yet had children. These estimates, though,

only account for the known children born to these women. They most likely underestimate their fertility rates, especially those of women from older generations. In the cases in which we were able to gather information on the delicate issues of childhood deaths, abortions and adoptions the total number of pregnancies increased between 10 and 30 percent

**Table 2: Number of live children of the romanian roma immigrant women from seven family networks by birth period of mothers, spain, 2014 (n: 93)**

| Birth period | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Max | Q1 | Q3 | N  | Age range |
|--------------|------|-----------|--------|-----|----|----|----|-----------|
| 1950 to 1954 | 8.0  | -         | 8      | 8   | 8  | 8  | 1  | 59 to 64  |
| 1955 to 1959 | 7.5  | 0.7       | 7.5    | 8   | 7  | 8  | 2  | 54 to 58  |
| 1960 to 1964 | 5.5  | 0.7       | 5.5    | 6   | 5  | 6  | 2  | 49 to 53  |
| 1965 to 1969 | 5.3  | 0.6       | 5      | 6   | 5  | 6  | 3  | 44 to 48  |
| 1970 to 1974 | 4.8  | 2.0       | 4.5    | 8   | 4  | 6  | 6  | 39 to 43  |
| 1975 to 1979 | 4.8  | 2.3       | 4.5    | 8   | 3  | 7  | 12 | 34 to 38  |
| 1980 to 1984 | 4.0  | 1.3       | 4      | 6   | 3  | 5  | 21 | 29 to 33  |
| 1985 to 1989 | 2.6  | 1.4       | 2      | 5   | 2  | 4  | 19 | 24 to 28  |
| 1990 to 1994 | 2.6  | 1.2       | 2      | 5   | 2  | 3  | 18 | 19 to 23  |
| 1995 to 1999 | 1.1  | 0.6       | 1      | 2   | 1  | 1  | 9  | 14 to 18  |
| Total        | 3.5  | 2.0       | 3      | 8   | 2  | 5  | 93 |           |

Table 2 also shows that each younger cohort seems to be having fewer children. This is significant in relation to those cohorts whose reproductive histories may have concluded, meaning women born between 1950 and 1975, that is, those who are at least 40 years-of-age. They include two generations of women: grandmothers and middle-aged mothers.

The oldest women in our sample may belong to the first generation of Roma women who have started to control their fertility, most likely by "stopping" having children in their 30s. Hence these women may belong to generations in which the norm of unrestricted fertility does not apply. Many women in both the generation of mothers (born between 1960 and 1979) and that of adult daughters (born after 1980) appear to have controlled their fertility using diverse methods of family planning.

### 3.6 The birth of the last child?

The tendency to stop childbearing long before the end of the reproductive life has been interpreted as a sign of the onset of a change in the pattern of fertility of individuals and communities (Okun 1995: 85). Many studies of historical demography have used the reduction in the differential ages of mothers at last births as indicating some purposeful use of birth control methods (Knodel 1987).

**Table 3: Age of Roma women in seven family networks at the birth of their last known child. Grouped by decade of birth of mothers. Measures of central tendency, dispersion and average of the present age of the women in each cohort (N: 91)**

| Decade of birth | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Min | Max | Age (Mean) | N  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|--------|-----|-----|------------|----|
| 1950 to 1959    | 34.3 | 2.3       | 33     | 3   | 37  | 57.7       | 3  |
| 1960 to 1969    | 29.4 | 5.3       | 27     | 25  | 38  | 48.6       | 5  |
| 1970 to 1979    | 29.1 | 5.1       | 30     | 21  | 36  | 36.9       | 18 |
| 1980 to 1989    | 25.5 | 4.3       | 26     | 16  | 33  | 28.5       | 39 |
| 1990 to 1999    | 19.2 | 2.3       | 20     | 14  | 22  | 19.7       | 26 |

As shown in Table 3, the older women in our sample seem to be completing the reproductive stage of their lives in their thirties, and the new generations seem to follow the same pattern. This is probably a sign of the beginning of the fertility transition in these families. It may have started in the late 1980s and 1990s. Note that the crucial cohort for this development are the women born in the 1970s, as they are the younger group that may have completed their reproductive "careers" and they are well represented in our sample. Table 4 appears to corroborate this. In this table we present data on the years that have passed since the women studied had their last child.



**Table 4: Years since last child per decade of birth of mothers. Roma women in seven family networks grouped by decade of birth of mothers (N: 91)**

| Decade of birth | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Min | Max | Q1 | Q3 | N  |
|-----------------|------|-----------|--------|-----|-----|----|----|----|
| 1950 to 1959    | 24.3 | 5.9       | 22     | 20  | 31  | 20 | 31 | 3  |
| 1960 to 1969    | 20.2 | 4.2       | 21     | 13  | 24  | 21 | 22 | 5  |
| 1970 to 1979    | 8.8  | 4.6       | 7,5    | 2   | 17  | 6  | 13 | 18 |
| 1980 to 1989    | 4.2  | 3.2       | 4      | 0   | 11  | 1  | 6  | 37 |
| 1990 to 1999    | 1.8  | 1.1       | 2      | 0   | 4   | 1  | 2  | 25 |

The three older cohorts of women in our sample, those born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, appear to have ceased having children years or even decades ago. The women born in the 1970s who are still fertile have been without children for almost 9 years on average. Even accounting for the exceptions, the trend seems clear: mature Roma women are using their agency to control their reproductive lives many years before menopause. However, this decision may prove precarious, and turn out to be just a long spacing of pregnancies. In this sense we must emphasize that our results mostly highlight a group of Roma women who still could have more children. So these results must be checked out with data that from older Roma women.

**Table 5: Total reproductive period of 91 Roma women in seven family networks residing in Spain. Years passed between the birth of the first and last known child, central tendencies and dispersion measures, and mean of present age**

| Birth decade | Mean | Std. Dev. | Median | Min | Max | N  | Present Age |
|--------------|------|-----------|--------|-----|-----|----|-------------|
|              |      |           |        |     |     |    | Mean        |
| 1950 to 1959 | 16.7 | 1.5       | 17     | 15  | 18  | 3  | 57.7        |
| 1960 to 1969 | 13.4 | 5.1       | 11     | 10  | 22  | 5  | 48.6        |
| 1970 to 1979 | 11.6 | 5.5       | 12.5   | 2   | 21  | 18 | 36.9        |
| 1980 to 1989 | 7.8  | 4.7       | 7      | 0   | 18  | 37 | 28.5        |
| 1990 to 1999 | 2.5  | 2.2       | 3      | 0   | 6   | 25 | 19.7        |

One consequence of this change is a reduction in the length of time devoted to pregnancies, giving birth and raising children. Table 5 shows the length of time in years that passed between the birth of the first and the last child for the Roma women in our sample. Again, the most relevant data concerns women born before 1979, as they are likely to have ceased having children.

Women in their late 50s and 60s had children over the course of 17 years on average. As our data may underestimate actual fertility rates, these women may have spent between 20 and 30 years bearing and bringing up children. The two following cohorts appear to have spent a considerably shorter period, but with much more variation. Moreover, as younger generations are expected to live longer, young Roma women may contemplate larger portions of their lives with no small children to care and strive for.

### 3.7 The ideal number of children

According to our conversations with Roma women of different generations, the ideal number of children has decreased among the younger cohorts. While grandmothers would prefer "large families" of 6 to 8 children, their daughters would have been happy with a smaller number (4 to 6), and the ideal number for the new younger cohorts has become further reduced (2-3 on average).

The gender parity of the offspring is a crucial aspect of these preferences. It has had a considerable effect on actual decisions and outcomes. Although sons are preferred in a society of intense virilocal-patrilocal orientation, daughters are also highly valued. These preferences are underscored by a multitude of emotional, symbolic and practical reasons, including the help that girls provide in domestic and care tasks, and their agency in marriage agreements and transactions. However, expressed desires concerning size and composition of offspring are merely one aspect to consider in relation to fertility outcomes. Actual fertility practices are conditioned by many different factors. But today in most



migrant Roma families children go to school and parents are increasingly declaring their preference for fewer children who grow in better conditions, or to put it in crude demographic terms, "quality" children.

### 3.8 Some reproductive stories

Let briefly describe some personal examples that illustrate the processes observed in the studied Roma groups.

Stela is a widow. She lost her husband when she was 38 and was left with 7 children; the youngest was 5 years old. Her situation in Romania was very difficult, so, by 2002 she travelled to Spain where two brothers of her husband were living with their families. Eventually all her sons moved with her to Spain, and her three daughters married away and live today in three different countries.

Stela was born in 1959, married at 16 and had her first child at 17. In the next 15 years she had eight live children. One daughter died in 1982 as an infant. The other seven survived to the present and have children of their own. During the first 16 years of her marriage, Stela had a child approximately every two years. At 32 she stopped having children. Five years later her husband died after a protracted disease. Apparently she never used contraceptive methods, but she underwent tube ligation after the birth of her last child.

Stela lives with two of his married sons, her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren in a rented flat in an Andalusian city. She is highly respected by her sons and daughters-in-law. Her children see her as an example of devotion, sacrifice and hard work. As she has been doing for decades, Stela gets up early and goes to some selected places in the city to beg for long hours. Many of her neighborhood donors have known her for years. They give her money (but not as much as before the recession) and also food they buy at a nearby supermarket at which door she also begs. Stela spends most of her earnings in paying bills and other needs of the house. Stela is an example of women born in the 1950s that stopped having children in their early 30s after having numerous offspring.

Luludži was born in 1989 in Craiova. She was first married at 16, but then separated from her husband a year later. Following this, at the age of 18, she joined her present partner Șandor. After living together for a few months, she got pregnant with her first son, who was born in 2007. Three months later she became pregnant again and had a daughter. In 2008 she moved to Spain with her husband and small children to live with her in-laws, who had a large house in an Andalusian town. Luludži's two children have attended a Spanish public school from early age and are proficient in Spanish.

Luludži does not want to have more children, at least in the foreseeable future. She lives with her in-laws in a house ruled by her father-in-law and would like to have her own house and live independently with her husband and children. The couple had been using condoms and the pill. However, three years ago she got pregnant while living in Spain. She decided to use the public family planning services in her neighborhood in order to terminate the pregnancy. In 2013 she got pregnant again unexpectedly. After much hesitation, she ended her pregnancy via the Spanish public health system.

Maržina was born in 1992 in eastern Romania. She married Nicolae at the age of 16. A year later she had her first child, a daughter. In the past five years she has not had more children. She wears an IUD (intrauterine device), which was implanted while in Spain. "My Spanish girlfriends helped me to get it", she told us. She says she would like to have more children, but when the situation improves. Her husband also wants more children and nags her about it off and on. Finally, by late 2013, she got rid of the IUD and soon became pregnant. In the second half of 2014 she gave birth to a second daughter.

When raising her first daughter, Maržina was supported and helped both by her mother and her mother-in-law, and even by her maternal grandmother. They had encouraged her to have children ("later you are too old") and promised to help and teach her how to care for them, a promise that they fulfilled. By moving to Italy and then to Spain with her husband, she lost that precious support. In the last three years Manuel and Maržina have lived a bit isolated from family links. Both their parents and siblings lived in another countries. Hence they decide mostly by themselves as a couple. Maržina told us that if the new baby had been a son, she would have been content with two children and may have

stopped her family there. She is very happy with her two girls, but she may try to have a son sometime in the future.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 4.1 Different marriage systems

Some important preliminary evidences derive from the analysis of the data found in our ongoing study. Our data seems to support the idea that, notwithstanding internal variations, most Romanian Roma sustain marriage systems and reproductive strategies that differ notably from the European or Malthusian marriages systems that have been common in Western Europe in modern times (Gamella and Martín 2008; Martín and Gamella 2005; Gamella 2000; Macfarlane, 1986; Hajnal 1965). Divergences may have increased recently as most European populations have entered these processes tentatively labeled as the "second demographic transitions" <sup>5</sup>.

In the Roma communities explored teenage marriage appears to be a complex, historically situated cultural strategy that may have worked in the past as a means of cultural resistance, affirmation and perpetuation. However, in the present context of declining mortality, longer life expectancy and the need for long-term formal education, teenage marriage is having new and unprecedented consequences for Roma families. Such a statement needs much qualification concerning differences among Roma groups and within groups (see Preda, 2010 for data on Roma groups in the Romanian region of Oltenia). Besides, those marriage/gender systems are not cultural primordial givens, but adaptations to historical circumstances mostly characterized by exclusion and discrimination.

Other authors have found evidences contrary to some of our arguments. For instance, in her study of long-term changes in a Hungarian village, Judith Durst (2002) has shown how poverty and segregation often leads to young women to resort to early marriage and maternity as a form of getting some independence and respect, and breaking with oppressive domestic circumstances in their families of origin. Therefore some of the marriage practices of Roma populations may respond to present circumstances and not to ingrained traditions, and may involve surprising historical transformations and differences between and within countries. The important work of Ladány and Szelény (2006), especially their historical reconstruction of the demographic change of the village of Csenyété in Hungary (2006: 41-120) confirms this different perspective on Roma fertility and early maternity in the group they study. Thus, the average age of Roma women at the birth of their first child seem to have decreased continuously in the twentieth century, reaching its highest level in the post-1970 period (Ibid.: 71, table 2.5). More historical comparative research is needed in this crucial field.

### 4.2 A non-Malthusian fertility transition?

Demographers describe human fertility as being constituted by two central dimensions: the *tempo*, that is, the timing of the first and subsequent childbirths, and the *quantum*, or the total number of children. It is a truism today that in most developed countries we have witnessed "a rising mean age at first birth since the 1970s, coupled with an increasing proportion of births among mothers at advanced ages, albeit with considerable country-level variation" (Balbo, Billari and Mills, 2013: 3). This process is generally referred to as "the postponement of childbearing", and has become the central focus of fertility research in late-modern societies.

Young Roma women in migration seem to be undergoing a transformation both in the *tempo* and *quantum* of their reproductive lives. We might be contemplating a culturally specific postponement

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<sup>5</sup>. In the last decade there has been a notable convergence between the Spanish and the Romanian populations concerning crucial reproductive parameters such as the age at first marriage, the age of first birth, total fertility rates, and the proportion of non-marital births, although some important differences remain (Hărăguș and Oaneș 2009; Bradatan and Firebaugh 2007; Rotariu 2006). This seems to affect also Romanian women living in Spain (Castro and Rosero-Bixby, 2011).

transition that would be *non-Malthusian*, that is, not based on a model of late marriages or late first births as used by many other European women. This change has come about in two ways: firstly, by means of a new reproductive career of lower fertility rates, and, secondly, by means of timed pregnancies that diverge from those followed by older generations of Roma women. In this cultural change our data points to some changes occurring in the reproductive strategies of Romanian Roma women of different generations.

First, the oldest generation (born in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s) had most of their children during the Ceaușescu regime. Many Roma women of this generation seem to have continued living under a regime of unrestricted fertility. Our data on this generation is indirect. There are few in the Roma populations living in Spain.

Second, in the cohort of women born in the late 1950s we find the first group of Roma women that underwent systematic control of their fertility, partly with the assistance of family planning services and contraceptive methods. They were in their 30s when Ceaușescu was overthrown. The main strategy of these women seems to have been that of "stopping" their reproductive lives after about two decades of intensive fertility. Those who were most successful in achieving this goal were probably those who worked together with their husbands. Most likely these women benefited from the improved availability of safer reproductive health services in Romania after the end of the repressive policies of the 25-year-long dictatorship (Hord et al. 1991; Kligman 1998; Keil and Andreescu 1999). Some Roma women of this generation, however, seem to have followed a regime of unrestricted fertility.

Third, in the younger cohorts we find women who seem to be developing a culturally distinct pattern of early maternity followed by a postponement of new pregnancies for several years. This may be a sign of a fertility transition occurring in most Romanian Roma groups that is now being played in different European countries. The intentional postponement of new pregnancies introduces new reproductive and familial patterns and new normative orientations into the lives of Romani women. Yet this reproductive pattern still contrasts with that of the other Romanian women and the Spanish women at large.

Many young Roma women today they seem to be increasing their capacity to control their fertility with more or less involvement from their male partners. International migration introduces new opportunities, both ideological and practical for Roma women in their family planning. This is new, historically, and may involve a change in the role of Roma women concerning their reproductive rights and health, an issue "of human rights, central to general well-being and crucial for achieving equity and social justice" (Magyari-Vincze 2006: 2). The new generations of Roma women appear to be introducing a critical element of agency into a process of cultural change of international dimensions. How does the fertility transition relate to the role of Romani women in their marriages, households, families and communities? Is this process somehow liberating the "multi-burdened" Romani women from some of their obligations at least for some years? Does this allow children to be better tended and cared for? Will these demographic changes contribute to the needed empowerment of Roma women in the near future? These are some of the questions that have to be answered by detailed ethnographic and demographic research.

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