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[“Anti-Gypsyism and the Holocaust: Remembering the past and shaping the future”](#)

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**Testing the IQs of Roma children**

In her dissertation from 1943, Eva Justin conducts “psychological” research with Roma children in Nazi Germany and measures their intelligence. Her findings show that as a result of their low IQ: “Roma children do not have abstract thinking...; they have problems with concentration and attention...; do not have the discipline of German children...; the boys are genetically predisposed to be criminals;... and the girls are genetically predisposed to be prostitutes”. The recommendation drawn from her “research” is that Roma should be sterilized in order “to avoid the reproduction of asocial Gypsies who are not willing to integrate in the German society”. Forty-one Roma children from her study were sent to Auschwitz, where some were objects of the medical “research” of Dr. Josef Mengele and the others were killed in gas chambers. Only two children survived the concentration camp.

One might think that this was in the past and that these days such writings are not possible. However, similar publications also are found in contemporary Europe.

S. Bafekr (1999) studied “two culturally distinct groups: Poles and Romanian Gypsies”, using “projective tests and intelligence tests as an aid to understand many difficult situations”. According to the author, Roma children are often absent from school due to their culture: the knowledge acquired at school “does not conform to the values of Gypsy culture, particularly not at the cognitive and semantic levels” (p. 300). Bafekr (1999: 301) also writes:

*“On the standardized intelligence tests the [Roma] children scored far below average. At the same time, however, their ‘practical’ intelligence appears to be much higher than many children at the same age. Children as young as eight, for example, are expected to find their way around the city, survive in any situation, and give the impression of the independence. This finding is confirmed in virtually all the literature describing the educational problems of Gypsy children.... If the attitude towards education in Gypsy culture is considered along with their view of the world (which is pre-operational at the cognitive level), then different test results are all too understandable since they are based on ‘Western’ standards. At a minimum, then, we should stop assessing the intelligence of Gypsy children against Western standards using Western measures. Perhaps an attempt should be made to educate them in a way that guarantees a minimum of educational and cultural compliance between the two cultures.”*

Although Bafekr suggests that Roma children should be not measured by Western IQ tests, researchers continue to use them. Only five years later P. Bakalar, researching Czech and Slovak Roma children (2004:291), writes:

“Several studies in central Europe have shown that Gypsies tend to score lower on IQ tests. This has frequently been explained as the results of (a) the poor environmental conditions in which Gypsy families live and (b) language difficulties, because a number of Gypsies speak their own language and not that of the majority population. It is probable that the environment in which Gypsies typically live does not foster the development of intellectual abilities and social mobility. However, *the pervasive social failure of Gypsies in all studied societies raises the question of whether their intellectual deficit is due to biological/genetic causes as well as environmental differences.*” [author’s italics]

Bakalar considers that one of the problems of Roma children is that they speak their mother tongue, which causes them to get low scores on IQ tests. Strangely enough, the author does not question the cultural appropriateness of the IQ test. He clearly thinks that “Western” IQ tests are suitable for all cultures and are not culturally biased.

Another study by Kertesi and Kezdi (2011) compares ethnic Hungarian children from mainstream schools and Roma children from special schools and discovers that the test-score gap between Roma and non-Roma is similar to the black/white gap in the United States during the 1980s. The authors conclude that education and poverty play an overwhelming role in the large score gaps in ethnic tests in Hungary.

Rushton, Cvorovic and Bons (2007) and Cvorovic (2014), focusing on the IQ test performance of Serbian Roma. The first study tests Roma with Raven’s Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM), measuring “the ability to identify relationships”, “analogical thinking” and the ability to “think clearly”. Another test used in the study is the Colored Progressive Matrices (CPM). The Roma averaged very low scores on all tests. The authors found that the SPM and CPM percentile points convert to an IQ equivalent of 70. Although the authors mention that the tests used may not be culturally appropriate for the Roma culture, they conclude that “the Roma children grow up in culturally disadvantaged conditions [...] [they] are not as exposed to the intellectual stimulation and test taking attitudes typically associated with high test scores” (Rushton, Cvorovic and Bons, 2007:10).

Cvorovic’s newest book (2014) “The Roma: A Balkan underclass”, explains that two-thirds of the child subjects had been diagnosed with “light mental retardation”. The author gathers published IQ tests results, mostly using Wechsler tests, of reasonably sized samples with local populations as control groups. Adult Roma were shown to have intelligence scores very similar to South Asians, with

average adults indicating IQs in the 70 range in a wide variety of samples. According to the author “the poor scholarship of the children seems to be due to a mixture of low ability and a strong belief that education beyond primary school is of no interest or benefit”. The book is full of prejudices, stereotypes and racist statements about Roma and one can conclude from reading it, that the Roma are in this situation in Europe because they have clung to their culture for the eight centuries since they arrived in Europe – that living in Europe all this time has had almost no impact on them.

Comparing the publications on Roma intelligence of contemporary and modern European authors with the Justin’s dissertation from 1943, reveals similar writing styles used to expressing negative attitudes regarding Roma. There is just one difference between Justin’s dissertation and scientists of these days: today’s authors do not suggest the same recommendations that Justin did in Nazi Germany.

## **References**

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