

A Paper Life

Belgrade's Roma in the underworld of waste scavenging and recycling

*Mayling Simpson-Hebert, Aleksandra Mitrovic,
Gradimir Zajic and Milos Petrovic*

Description

About 12,000 people in the city of Belgrade, Serbia scavenge solid wastes for a living. Most are Roma, formerly called Gypsies, who are the poorest of the poor. Their way of life is primarily a result of generations of discrimination in education and employment. Children begin scavenging at an early age and often never attend school. *A Paper Life*, based on interviews with over 200 scavengers, reveals in their own words their everyday lives, the types of wastes they collect, the dangers they are exposed to, the harassments they endure, as well as their desires for a cleaner and more orderly way of life. Hundreds of thousands of people scavenge in cities throughout Serbia and the Balkans.

Who this book is for

This moving account is a wake-up call to city planners everywhere to remember those who make their living on the margins of society. The book will also be of great interest to anthropologists; sociologists; social workers; solid waste specialists; Roma scholars and activists; as well as university students of these subjects.

Geographical focus

The Balkans. Global relevance.

Chapter headings

1. Introduction
2. Roma in Serbia
3. Belgrade's Scavenger Communities
4. The Economics of Scavenging
5. The Working Conditions
6. Child Collectors
7. Improving Collectors' Lives

About the authors

Mayling Simpson-Hebert is a medical/environmental anthropologist. She conducted this research before and during her term as a Fulbright Scholar in Serbia. She has also undertaken anthropological research among women in Ireland, Iran and Philippines and has lived and worked in Nepal and Switzerland. She is currently a Regional Technical Health Advisor for Catholic Relief Services in East Africa and lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Aleksandra Mitrovic is a sociologist. She is President of the Society for the Improvement of Local Roma Communities and a High Research Fellow at the Institute of Criminology and Sociology in Belgrade. She has worked on Roma issues since 1982.

Gradimir Zajic is a sociologist who specializes in social problems and poverty. He is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Criminology and Sociology in Belgrade and a founding member of the Society. He has worked on Roma issues since 1982.

Milos Petrovic is an architect. He was one of the principal investigators of the landmark study of Roma settlements in the City of Belgrade in 2002. He is also a founding member of the Society.

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Keywords

Waste, scavenging, Roma, Gypsies, anthropology, urban planning, Belgrade, social justice



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