

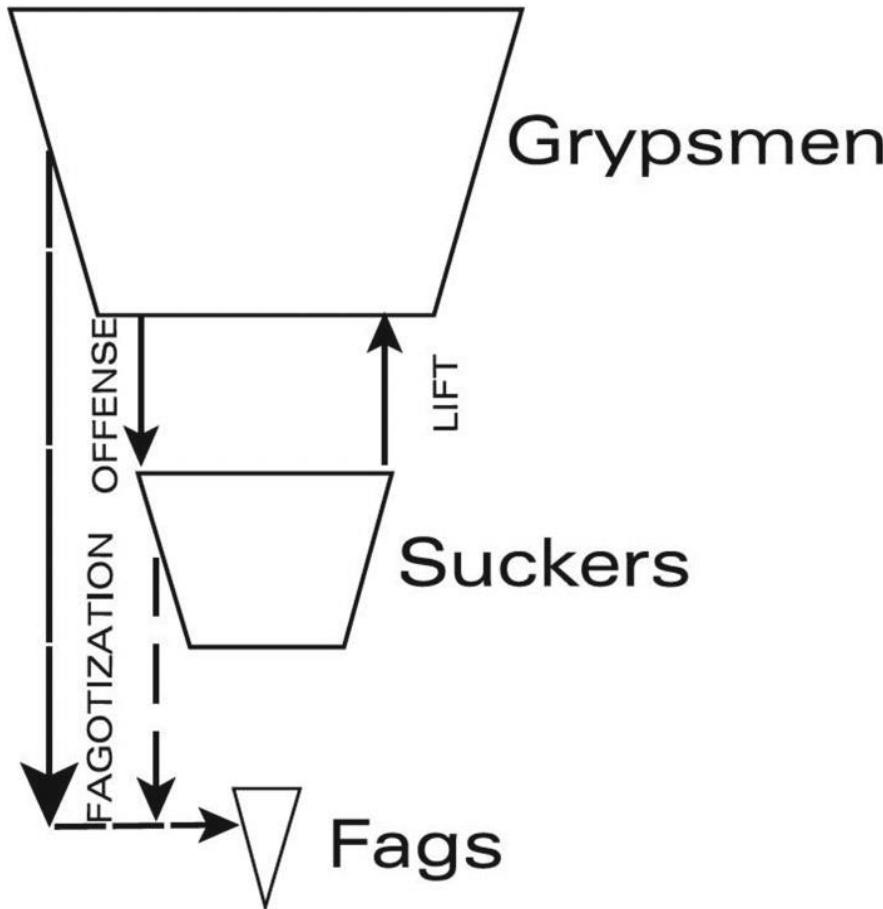
# Prison subculture in Poland before and after 1989

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University of Warsaw

# Prisons in Poland between 1945 and 1989

- Imprisonment was the main, almost the only, state response to crime
- The goal was retribution, even revenge from the state, not rehabilitation
- Prisons were severely overcrowded
- Employment was used to exploit the prisoners
- All goods, including food, were in short supply
- In 1973, 130,000 prisoners were guarded by just 16,000 Prison Service officers
- The largest waves of riots swept through Polish prisons in the years 1955-1956, 1971-1972, 1981, 1984 and the strongest in 1989
- To be able to control situation, Prison Service was equipped with machine guns, batons, gas, dogs and handcuffs, was allowed to beat prisoners, but was also allowed to do agent work among the prisoners

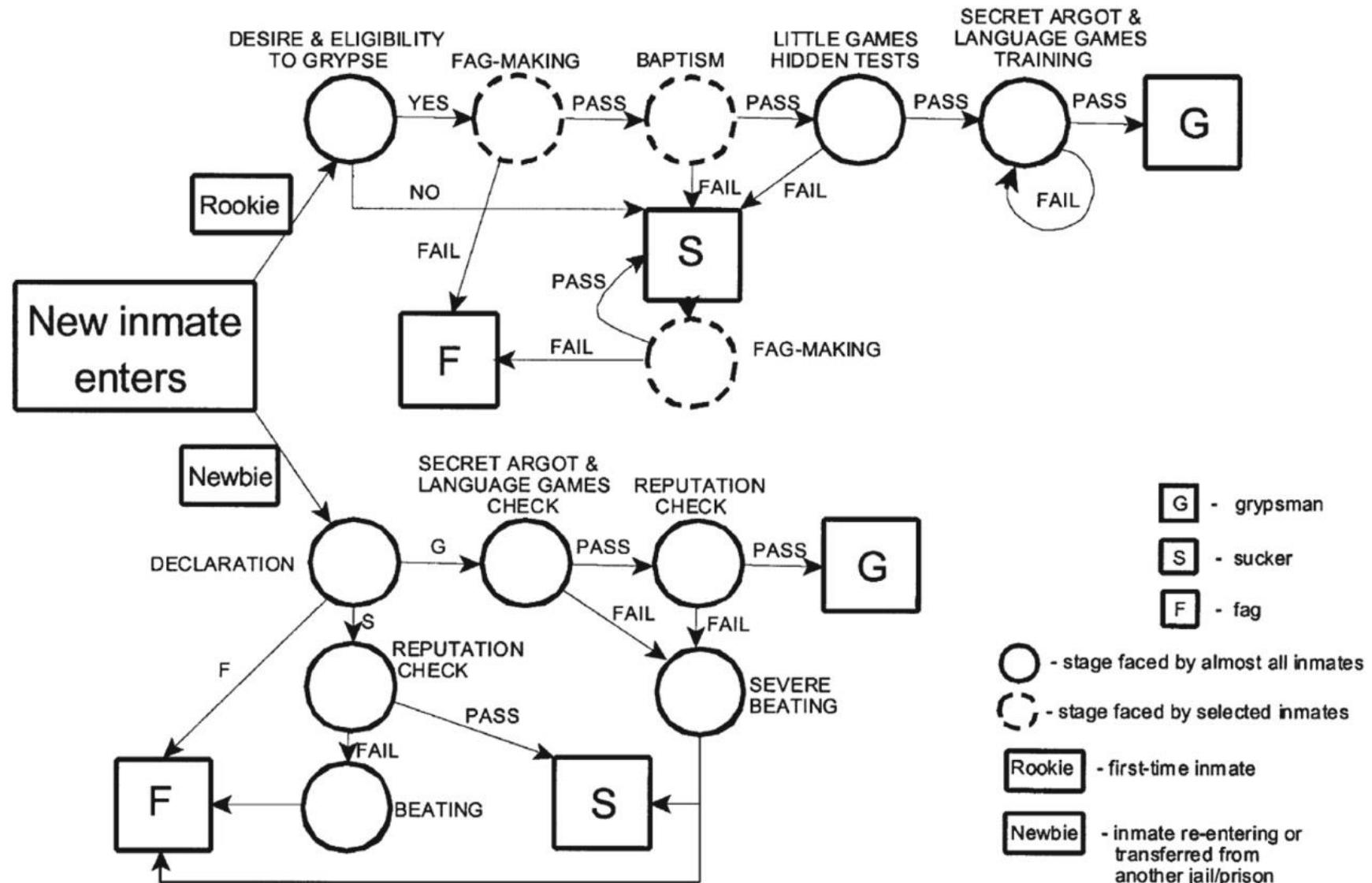
# Prison hierarchy



# Fundamental norms of gypsies subculture

- Honor
- Solidarity
- Refusal
- Help
- Hygiene

# Grypsman initiation



# Everyday life

- Boredom
- Tea
- Art and culture

# 1989: Transition

*Don't fucking beat 'em!*

Dr. Paweł Moczydłowski (new Director General of the Prison Service)  
at a briefing with prison and detention centers wardens,

May 1990

# Social Structure, Allocation to Castes and Lack of Gypsman Initiation

- Gypsies in minority
- Decline of subculture rules
- Lack of initiation
- The role of drugs
- Prison argot now known by everyone
- The role of money

# Everyday life nowadays

- TVs, tape recorders, Playstations
- Coffee instead of tea
- Drugs instead of tea
- Popculture instead of prison culture

# Two faces of the same subculture

- Before 1989
- After 1989

Thank you for your attention ☺

... and



# EUROCRIM 2026



26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
of the European Society of Criminology

## EUROCRIM 2026 “FRONTIERS OF CRIMINOLOGY”

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