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Зборник 23

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Садржај Summary

Мирослава Малешевић, <i>Културни обрасци у обликовању женског идентитета. Проблем одрастања основношколци у Београду</i>	7
Miroslava Malešević, <i>Shaping female identity: cultural patterns and the problems of coming of age among girls in elementary school</i>	20
Александра Павићевић, <i>Живот савремене сеоске омладине – на примеру села Дубона код Младеновца</i>	21
Aleksandra Pavićević, <i>Contemporary Rural Youth: Life in the Village Dubona Near Mladenovac</i>	34
Сања Златановић, <i>Свадба и конструисање идентитета</i>	35
Sanja Zlatanović, <i>Wedding and Identity Construction</i>	46
Јадранка Ђорђевић, <i>Ко кога наслеђује? – врањски крај у другој половини двадесетог века</i>	47
Jadranka Đorđević, <i>Who Inherits Whom in the 2nd Half of the 20th Century in the Vranje Area?</i>	61
Љиљана Гавриловић, <i>Живот у новој средини: балканска избегличка прича</i>	63
Ljiljana Gavrilović, <i>Life in new environment: the Balkans refugee' story</i>	92
Мирослава Лукић-Крстановић, <i>Методе и извори истраживања етничности: Срби у Батањи</i>	93
Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović, <i>Methodology and Sources put Forward to Explore Ethnicity: the Serbs in Battony</i>	101
Младена Прелић, <i>Етнички идентитет Срба у Мађарској: резултати истраживања</i>	103
Mladena Prelić, <i>Ethnic Identity of the Serbs in Hungary: Research Results</i>	117
Мирјана Павловић, <i>Асимилација и мањинске организације Срба у Темишвару у историјском дискурсу</i>	119
Mirjana Pavlović, <i>Assimilation and Serbian minority organization in Timisoara: a historical discourse</i>	134
Мирјана Павловић, <i>Међунационални односи: Срби у Батањи</i>	135
Mirjana Pavlović, <i>International Relations: Serbs in Battonya</i>	150
Јелена Љворовић, <i>Caste behaviors among Gypsies in Serbia</i>	151
Јелена Чворовић, <i>Кастинско понашање Рома у Србији</i>	168

Мирослава Лукић-Крстановић, <i>Спектакли XX века: политичке арене и културне сцене у Србији</i>	169
Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović, <i>20th century spectacles: political arenas and cultural scenes in Serbia</i>	188
Ивица Тодоровић, <i>Резултати истраживања обреда литија - допунски осврт</i>	189
Ivica Todorović, <i>Religious Processions: Additional Results</i>	213
Милина Ивановић-Баришић, <i>Промене у годишњим обичајима у подавалским селима</i>	215
Milina Ivanović-Barišić, <i>Changes in Annual Customs in the Villages Underneath the Avala Mountain</i>	235

Caste behaviors among Gypsies in Serbia*

In Serbia, Gypsies form a complex mixture of groups with a strongly emphasized antagonism between the groups. Among Serbian Gypsies, the “caste” system is still largely in use, along with a self-made hierarchy between the groups. These “caste” behaviors have found their main manifestation in the “match” in marriage and social hierarchy. The evolutionary success of these behaviors is probably due to their effect in preserving local/village traditions and distinctiveness. In turn, transmitting such successful behavior – a particular tradition – to descendants may not only increase the number of those descendants but also the frequency of that particular behavior.

Introduction

According to Dobzhansky, the Indian caste system is the most extensive human genetic experiment, although it may not be premeditated.¹ Caste is derived from a Portuguese word for lineage, breed or race, *casta*. The caste system in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE. There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, each related to a specific occupation. The leaders of Hindu society believed in the inheritance of character and assumed that a man’s occupation, together with his social status, are determined by the status of the family into which he is born. In general, caste is used to refer to a social group that is endogamous and occupationally specialised. Caste not only dictates one’s occupation, but dietary habits and interaction with members of other castes as well. Members of a high caste enjoy more wealth and

Key words:
Gypsies, caste-behaviors, marriage, Serbia

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¹ T. Dobzhansky, *Mankind Evolving: the Evolution of the Human Species*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1962.

opportunities while members of a low caste perform menial jobs. Upward mobility is very rare in the caste system. Most people remain in one caste their entire life and marry within their caste. A caste system is, in effect, a form of social stratification; in order to qualify as a caste, a unit must be an endogamous group, or if it is made of two or more endogamous groups, the several groups must have descended from a single endogamous group.²

Today, there are around 8-10 million Gypsies who reside in Europe; geneticists best describe various Gypsy groups as a conglomerate of genetically isolated founder populations. A recent genetic research on Gypsies suggests that most of the Gypsies are genetically closer to Indians than to European populations.³ More importantly, the research emphasizes the internal diversity of the Gypsies, who seem to be genetically far more heterogeneous than autochthonous European populations.

The Gypsies are probably of northern Indian origin, having moved out of that area some time between 800 AD and 950 AD, and migrated westwards into Europe, arriving there some time after 1100 AD.⁴ It is unclear why they left India, and there are no explanatory written documents. From linguistic influences preserved in all Romani dialects, it is most likely that Gypsy major migration route passed through Persia, Armenia, Greece and the Slavic-speaking parts of the Balkans.⁵ A number of early European historical sources refer to the Gypsies as Egyptians, and the term “Gypsy” is thought to mirror that assumption. Another common legend is drawn from an 11th century chronicle by a Persian historian, describing a group of 10,000-12,000 musicians and entertainers given as a gift to the ruler of Persia, Shah Bahram Gur, by an Indian Maharaja, during the 5th century.⁶ Linguistic and historical data, supported by new genetic studies, suggest that the European Gypsies, embracing a large number of socially different endogamous groups, may be a complex conglomerate of founder populations. Genetic results suggest a limited number of related founders, compatible with a small group of migrants splitting from a distinct caste or tribal group.⁷ According to geneticists, during its subsequent history in Europe, this founder population divided into numerous socially separated and geographically dispersed endogamous groups; various historical records portrayed the wandering Gypsies as “a group of 30 to 100

² V. S. D’Souza, *Caste Structure in India in the Light of Set Theory*, Current Anthropology, vol. 13, no. 1, 1972, 5-22.

³ L. Kalaydjieva, F. Calafell, M. A. Jobling, D. Angelicheva, P. de Knijff, Z. H. Rosser, M. E. Hurles, P. Underhill, I. Tournev, E. Marushiakova, V. Popov, *Patterns of inter- and intra-group genetic diversity in the Vlax Roma as revealed by Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA lineages*, European Journal of Human Genetics, 9(2), 2001, 97-104.

⁴ I. Hancock, *The pariah syndrome: an account of Gypsy slavery*, Ann Arbor, MI, Karoma Publishers, 1987.

⁵ A. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992.

⁶ A. Fraser, op.cit; T. Vukanović, *Romi (Cigani) u Jugoslaviji*, Nova Jugoslavija, Vranje 1983.

⁷ L. Kalaydjieva & all, op. cit, 97-104.

people led by an elder". The divisions, regarded by geneticists as a likely "compound product of the ancestral tradition of the *jatis* of India", together with the new social environment (Gypsy slavery in Romania⁸ and oppressive legislation prohibiting Gypsies from most western European countries, can be considered as secondary bottlenecks, reducing further the number of unrelated founders in each group.⁹

The group/tribe is still the primary social unit of the Gypsies. Group/tribe identity and the consequent divisions, prescribed rules of behavior and endogamy, language and dialects, and religion are based on tradition. Within Europe, individual Gypsy groups can be divided into main metagroups: the Gypsies of East European extraction; the Sinti in Germany and Manouches in France and Catalonia; the Kaló in Spain, Ciganos in Portugal and Gitans of southern France; and the Romanichals of Britain.¹⁰ Out of these, the greatest variety is found in the Balkans, where many groups/tribes with distinct social boundaries exist.¹¹ The various Gypsy groups/tribes or clans are usually called in Romani "romane endana", or "endaja", depending on a dialect.

A large majority of Gypsies may have come first to Serbia with the Turkish army in the 1300's. In the Balkans, through centuries of Turkish rule, Gypsies were segregated and very endogamous.¹² Still today, most Gypsy/Roma "tribes", so-called, emphasize a distinction between non-Roma and Roma, that is, *gadje* and non-*gadje*.¹³ The classification of groups/tribes as such is not uniform all over Europe: in some areas, mainly in the former Yugoslavia or in Hungary, almost every single local Gypsy community assume a specific name even when they do not display such an evident difference in dialect and occupation.¹⁴

In Serbia, Gypsies form a complex mixture of groups, within which one can identify a number of subgroups.¹⁵ Most Gypsies do not regard themselves as members of a single cohesive group, but identify instead only with their subgroup. These subgroups may be distinguished by their occupation, language and religion;

⁸ I. Hancock, *The pariah syndrome: an account of Gypsy slavery*, Ann Arbor, Karoma Publishers MI 1987.

⁹ L. Kalaydjieva, A. Perez-Lezaun, D. Angelicheva, S. Onengut, D. Dye, N. Bosshard, A. Jordanova, A. Savov, P. Yanakiev, I. Kremensky, et al., *A founder mutation in the GKI gene is responsible for galactokinase deficiency in Roma (Gypsies)*, American Journal of Human Genetics 65: 1999, 1299-1307.

¹⁰ A. Fraser, op. cit.

¹¹ E. Marushiakova & V. Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 1997.

¹² T. Vukanović, op. cit.

¹³ A. Mirga & L. Mruz, *Romi, razlike i tolerancije*, Akarit, Beograd 1997

¹⁴ M. Courthiades, *Towards a Typology of Balkan National Communities: Non-territorial Groups*. Unpublished manuscript, 1999.

¹⁵ J. Čvorović, *Gypsy Narratives: From Poverty To Culture*, The Institute of Ethnography, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade 2004.

their religion often depending on their location and circumstances. Many times, the names of the groups/tribes have been assigned by others rather than by Gypsies themselves; sometimes, the names describe a characteristic trade, religious affiliation, or other geographical or historical reference, usually in a non-Gypsy language, hardly ever in Romani. Still today, many Gypsies identify themselves by traditional occupations, even if such traditional occupations are no longer used. The Indian caste system must have influenced Gypsies in maintaining the principle of sons following on in their father's occupation. Even so that many Gypsy traditional occupations are no longer in use, a Gypsy might say: "I am...a coppersmith, tinker, basket-maker, bear-leader..". In the past occupational niches that Gypsies filled contributed to the Serbian economy. In Serbia, their traditional occupations made them a part of the economy, which benefited both Gypsies and non-Gypsies. The traditional Gypsy occupations include crafts like trough-making, basket-making, spoon-making, blacksmithing, ironsmithing and entertaining (music). Although they made a contribution to the agriculturally based Serbian economy, they were despised by the Serbian peasantry; craftsmen in general were held to be in a low social position, always occupying an isolated and the lowest status in the society.¹⁶ In time, Gypsy artisan products became indispensable, especially in Serbian low land areas, where they could make a living by selling their crafts.

Gypsies always depended on the needs and contacts with their host countries, as a source of their livelihood; many times Gypsies adapted to the different requirements of their social and environmental surroundings. The result is the great diversity of Gypsy tribes and the lack of identity as of an integrated ethnic group. Until very recently, the characteristic of all groups was that they did not mix with each other—there appeared to be a strong emphasized antagonism among the groups. A system that divides these groups, much like a caste system, still exists in some parts of Serbia today. In the past, with respect to other Gypsies, allowable marriage choices were largely restricted. Females in particular, were expected to marry someone within their particular tribe and most obeyed the rule by marrying within their group.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was performed among Gypsies in Macva, an agriculturally rich county in western Serbia, over three-years period, in 2002-2004. Data were collected on marital and reproductive histories as well as culturally prescribed.¹⁷

The Macva Gypsies have largely lost most of the distinctive "Gypsy" traditions: they have established permanent residence in villages and towns, and traditional occupations and dress are fading away. Some of them lost the Romani language and their mother tongue is now Serbian. There are different forms of

¹⁶ T. R. Đorđević, *Naš narodni život i običaji*, knj. VI, Književna zadruha, Beograd 1932.

¹⁷ J. Čvorović, *Sexual and reproductive strategies among Serbian Gypsies*, *Population & Environment* 25, 2004, 217-242.

Romani depending on which group the Gypsy belongs to. Interaction between different groups is limited, and the form of Romani spoken is an important means of distinguishing between groups. Still today, many Gypsies make the split between the groups based on the occupation and religion. For example, informants from the villages Macvanski Pricinovic and Drenovac make the division into eight tribes: Lejasi, Kaldarasi, Cergari, Gurbeti—Serbian Gypsies, Romanian-Karavlox Gypsies, Blacksmiths, Njamci-German Gypsies and Xoraxane. According to the informants, all tribes today are Orthodox but the German Gypsies who are Catholic and the Xoraxane, who are in fact Muslims, arrived from Turkey. One informant from the Gurbeti tribe, from the village Skradjani explained that his particular tribe arrived in the 18th century to Serbia from Bosnia, withdrawing from the Turkish rule. When they arrived, all bore Muslim names. It is told that they had to adopt the Orthodoxy in order to survive. The Gurbeti tribes in Macva used to be basket-makers and blacksmiths; their Romani language, in spite of the borrowings and mixture with Serbian, it is said, is the “only pure” Roma language, and they represent the “only true” Gypsies/Roma today. On the other hand, Karavlox Gypsies (Black Vlax or Black Romanians) and the Lejasi tribe both have the same origin-- Romania. In fact, the Lejasi are called Karavlox Gypsies by the other Gypsy groups in the region. However, the Lejasi tribe from the village of Drenovac strongly reject any connection or relationship with other Gypsies in the region: they claim to be 100% Serbs, and they speak Serbian as their first language, some Romanian but no Romani language at all. The Lejasi are all musicians, in contrast with other Karavlox Gypsies in the area who used to be spoon-and trough-makers. A strong detestation between the groups is present in everyday life, and there is a very little cooperation at the group/tribe level. A male informant stated:

Different Roma groups don't get along so well. Some Roma are really savages. Some behave like they are different people, not normal. In some places in Western Serbia, the Roma buy women. When the [music] band asks for money, they give a fortune. The same is for women: they buy them for money! Wild, isn't it? We don't have that custom.

The “caste” system is still largely in use, along with the self-made hierarchy between the groups. For example, the Karavlox Gypsies rank at the top among most Gypsy tribes in Macva, being peaceful and more sophisticated than the rest. According to informants, their “sophistication” comes from the fact that they have the best cooperation with Serbs in their villages. On the other hand, the Cergari tribe, who used to be above all nomadic, rank the last, being called “tough, unpleasant people”. However, in spite of their ranking and the “prominent” place the Romanian Roma occupy, the most prevailing attitude, when it comes to marriage, is that no one expressed inclination to marry outside his/hers own group.

The caste unit is characterized by endogamy.¹⁸ In the past, the Macva Gypsies were endogamous: it was preferred by group members to marry within. The groups maintained endogamy by marrying only Gypsies from their own or from nearby villages occupied by the same group/tribe. This kind of kinship-organized residence has helped to preserve a sense of local, distinctive identity and occupations.

The following describes the attitudes and behaviors of villagers from three different Gypsy groups: the Gurbeti, Cergari and Romanian Gypsies. The data and interviews were collected in several Macva' villages, and they regard Gypsy ethnicity, group/tribe identity and separation, and marriage practices.

The Gurbeti Gypsies

The Gurbeti make around 2/3 of the Gypsy population in Macva. Gurbet is a Turkish word meaning "beggar/wanderer". One of the wealthier village populated by Gurbeti is Macvanski Pricinovici. It is medium sized, relatively wealthy and typical of Macva's rural settlements. The majority of the villagers are Serbs whose main occupation is agriculture. The village has approximately two thousand inhabitants. There are 750 houses, of which 110 belong to the Gurbeti Gypsy group. In Macva, every Gypsy group/tribe has its own narrative about their particular ancestor/founder of the group and the group origin, and this is how the Gurbeti from Macvanski Pricinovic explain their colonization of Macva:

Our people came from India; that's what people say. I don't really know about our background, what I know I heard from our old people. They say that three Gypsy brothers came to Bukor. Three brothers, Marko, Jovanja and Joksim were blacksmiths. They travelled and moved around the world looking for a place to build a home. They carried their tools with them and stayed in places where people needed blacksmiths. They reached the village of Bukor. There were about three hundred Serbian houses and the brothers like that very much. They developed blacksmithing there, and began our lineage. From the first brother, Marko, came the Markovic family, from Jovanja the Jovanovic family and from Joksim the Joksimovic family. We're all Markovic, Jovanovic or Joksimovic, in the village of Macvanski Pricinovici. That's how we know who belongs to us: we're all kin, descended from one or other of the brothers. We used to be blacksmiths, but not any more.

The basis of the social organization among these Gypsies is their kinship relationship. Everywhere, kinship relationships are ranked relationships, and kin

¹⁸ V. S. D'Souza, *Caste Structure in India in the Light of Set Theory*, *Current Anthropology* 13 (1), 1972, 5-22.

terms facilitate this ranking.¹⁹ The hierarchy of various Gypsy groups is an important variable—the rank is fundamental to kinship cooperation, and its principal benefit is that it reduces competition, enhancing at the same time, the possibility of cooperation. In turn, cooperation enhances the ability of co-operators to compete with “outsiders”.

One informant from the Gurbeti tribe argued:

I can always recognize my own. Other Gurbeti [from nearby villages] are the same as we are: we speak the same dialect, we dress the same and we cooperate together. But Cergari Gypsies, they are very different from us; when I meet a Cergari, I don't always get what he says, even we speak the same language. I have to think twice what he said; that's because they have such a weird accent. Also, I can recognize one [Cergari Gypsy] by his clothes—they dress differently than us. And also by his face, and by his behavior. That's because they have very different mode of behavior and life than us. They used to go around in wagons; I know we never did that, my father told me: we were never into wandering, wagons, begging and bears. We never marry them. I know of only one girl from my village that married into Cergari tribe, but her mother died, and her father was not doing good, he was ill, so she left. There wasn't anybody to intervene, so she left. We also never marry them because they are from a different environment, a different village—if you go there, you can get beaten, you don't have anybody of your own. Cergari still do fortune-telling, and many of them steel. Since I'm from a different background, I can't follow their footsteps, even if they could be very rich today.

The behavior involved in Gypsy hierarchies is highly traditional, copied from ancestors and is encouraged among children from birth onwards.

Today, the villagers from Macvanski Pricinovici say that traditional endogamy is not so strictly obeyed anymore, even though it appears that most marriages fit the old norms. Most of them plainly explained that they learned “the proper” behavior from their parents, at home. One informant, Mika, a 40 year old male who is one of the founders of the Gypsy association/party in Macva, tells:

The word Rom means a man, but for me, it actually means that you should not be ashamed to say that you are a Rom. On the other hand, we say that we are Roma, but we live together with out peasants [Serbs], and the only thing that differs us, is our face color! We only preserved that we marry only Gurbeti, but that's fading now too. We married within the village to avoid misunderstandings and fights; you can't marry someone who has different mentality than your own.

¹⁹ L. B. Steadman, *Kinship, religion and ethnicity*. Paper presented at meeting of Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Albuquerque, NM 1992.

Although there has been some intermarriage with Serbs, Gypsies have remained largely endogamous and so a separate ethnic group. One informant explains:

We use to marry only our own nation [group/tribe]. We didn't marry farmers. Why should we? Our ancestors did it this way; a female had to be a virgin, not a woman, in order to get married. Even today this tradition is insisted on. When a Gurbet marries his son, he insists that his daughter-in-law is a virgin. Farm girls weren't virgins so often, like gypsy girls, that's because we marry too young, much too young. But there's one good side to that: when Gypsies marry young, marriage ties them down, so they can't fool around and do stupid things. You can't go out at night when you're married. When a man is married, he's tied down by his wife, that's good. Serbian children, on the other hand, don't get married until they're 25 or more, they're free to enjoy themselves, and they enjoy a lot of freedom. That's no good.

A widespread cooperation within particular Gypsy group is a result of a particular tradition—the behaviour involved in the rank among these groups is kinship behaviour, which involves personal recognition:

All tribes live by themselves: we don't mix with one another. One village, one tribe – that's the rule. What makes us the Gurbeti Roma here? We still have our tradition, that we are Roma and our name [Gurbeti]. It's our blood that makes us Roma: if my mother and father are Roma, I'm Roma too. We've stayed ethnically pure because we've held on to our tradition and managed to maintain it and we still stick to it.

There is an apparent distinction between Gypsies themselves, based on how strictly families or individuals maintain the old norm and distinctions. Even when this practice is not clearly visible, like in places where Gypsies largely adapted behavior norms of the majority, many Gypsies managed to enforce a social separation from not only from non-Gypsies, but from other Gypsy groups as well. An elderly Gypsy man tells:

Before, we used to marry only our Gypsies [Gurbeti]. I know why we did that: a girl who is taught to make baskets is no good for a man who makes spoons, or if she is from a Cergai groups, she doesn't know anything, and can't marry a blacksmith, she would be no good to him. The same is for peasants [Serbs]: their girls know how to attend the cattle and they know agriculture, what would they be doing married to a Gypsy who doesn't have anything? Besides, they [Serbian females] never wanted a Gypsy husband anyway.we don't marry other nations [other Gypsies], we marry only from our own tribe. That's how we know if a girl is from a good family. In the past, all non-Gypsies were *gadje*, like strangers to us, and we didn't marry them either. There was a sharp division in everything with non-

Gypsies, clothes, life, marriage, food, cleaning, washing... Today, most of it is lost. The thing that we marry within our own kind is still practiced today, but less. Only good head of the households [good families] still maintain that custom. ...[we are] All relatives, [in this village] one way or the other.

And even though other Gypsy groups live in nearby villages, in a close proximity, a sharp distinction, according to informants, still exists. This is how one informant explains it:

Romanian Gypsies, or Vlax, are totally different from us here. Their lifestyle, way of dressing, speech, everything. In our village of Macvanski Priciniovici there is no other group but Gurbeti, which is us. We have 110 houses, all Gurbeti Roma. But in other villages, there are other Roma, Horaxane, for example. They're Muslims and they're different from us. There are also Cergari Gypsies, the ones who used to travel around in wagons. They're dirty, filthy people, they lie and steal – that's their mentality. We could never have anything in common with them because we're very different people: we don't steal, we don't do magic and fortune telling, we have our own homes, our own families and we don't wander from village to village. We have many educated and cultured people, unlike the Cergari Gypsies.

The Gurbeti from Macvanski Priciniovici are still determined to keep “the old” custom alive. A father of two teenage daughters argues:

I have two daughters. I would never let my daughter marry into the Cergari tribe. Never, not even if I lose my mind. That's because they have a very different mentality from us. They like to fight a lot and to cast spells. It's their bad behaviour in general. It's not compatible with the way we behave. You can recognise them from they way the look, too. I can always tell which tribe a Gypsy belongs to when I meet him at the market or the fair in Sabac. It's recognisable. First by his clothes. Cergari Gypsies wear long skirts, in different colours, all bright and tacky; the Cergari men always have long moustaches and sideburns, big hats and gold teeth. On the other hand, we don't decorate ourselves with gold; they decorate themselves from head to toes and show off with their gold. We avoid showing off as much as possible. It just shows how crude they are. They speak a tough Gypsy language – we Gurbeti can't understand them. They use some ancient Indian words that they brought from India.

Given that selection for ethnic or, in this case, group, separation works on learned behavioural models, the more such separating mechanisms become established as part of the strict rules of a community, the greater the probability that

they will be preserved in that community in following generations.²⁰ Among Macva Gypsies, it was expected, especially from females, to get married to someone from within their particular tribe and most obeyed the rule by marrying within their own group. Many Gypsies claim that the main differences come from the different respective tradition of other Gypsies. A middle-aged informant stated:

I can tell a Romanian Gypsy straight away. They hold themselves differently from us, they dress differently, they walk differently and they speak a different dialect. Actually they don't know Romany at all, they speak Romanian or Serbian. And they avoid saying they're Roma – they don't acknowledge it. On the other hand, we always say, on censuses before, and today, that we're Roma. We were never ashamed to say who we are, me and my family. Always Roma. We don't make friends or deal with them very much. I wouldn't let my daughter marry a Romanian Gypsy either. Their traditions are also strange to me. I know them well, and their villages. They're lazy and dirty, they don't like to work at all; all they know is how to play their music. They can't even hold down jobs. They simply have a different culture from us. It's the same with Muslim Gypsies, they don't eat pork, which we all do. So what do you do then? It would be very difficult to get along with them.

The Cergari Gypsies

Of all Gypsy groups in Macva, Cergari Gypsies retained the most of their “gypsy” distinctiveness, by keeping apart from non-Gypsy and other Gypsy groups. The name Cergari comes from the Turkish word *cerga* for a Gypsy tent. They speak Romany and Serbian. The Macva Cergari reside in several villages: Misar, Zablace, Dumaca and Sabac, the largest town in Macva.

The Cergari declare themselves to be pure Roma. In the past, most were highly nomadic, doing coppersmithing, while many of their women made a living by fortune-telling, healing and begging. Most of the Cergari Gypsies emphasize their tribe/group background and take a lot of pride in it. An elderly female Gypsy from Dumaca explains:

We had no house, nothing. Not even shoes. We used to do coppersmithing. My husband was a coppersmith and my father too. Coppersmithing was what my family did, making cauldrons from copper. We would move from place to place, my mother and father and three kids, my two brothers and me, and we never had a house. We were always on the move...but we kept apart, we didn't mix. There are several Roma nations, but we were always honest, not like

²⁰ W. S. Abruzzi, *Ecological theory and ethnic differentiation among human populations*, *Current Anthropology* 23 (1) 1982, 13-24.

some people. We used to travel and get on with everybody, although we never mix with them. The only thing is that these Gurbeti Roma from Macvanski Pricinovic and Romanian Roma from Tabanovic, they marry and divorce over and over again, and that's no good. They're not honest people.

Because of their past frequent traveling, many of these Gypsies consider themselves "cosmopolitans"; unlike other Gypsies from the region, they claim to have "seen the world", as one Gypsy man explains. He further argues:

We are international people; we like to travel and go places but we don't mess and we don't try to mess with other people's business. We don't hate anybody. We just want justice and open road for our children so they could become nice and polite people. Roma nations are something like tribes, and these tribes are very different among each other. For example, we don't marry each other, or at least, it was like that. Young people started to get more freedom and liberty in their behavior, so these days they don't watch so much. But before, it was a rule. No one would marry a Gurbet Gypsy, or someone from Šahara, or Kanjara [Romanian Gypsy], for they are beggars and they don't marry. We didn't marry them because we had our pride. We used to go with our cergas [vehiles] around, and be very proud in our nice cerga, and camps, and pillows. The rest [other Gypsy groups] were just...beggars.

In their culture, females are of a special importance: they are the reproductively scarce resource, should they "marry out", the females' reproductive capacity is lost to the group. The Cergari still practice a brideprice, which is something that distinguishes them from the rest of the Gypsy group in the region. The Cergari have a saying: "Give me your gold and I'll give you mine", when "purchasing" a real girl, a virgin, that is. A female informant argues:

We still buy women, sometimes for a great price. Our tribe always asks for an honest girl, a virgin. But today there are some of our girls who marry Italian men, or German, or even Serb farmers. They are unfaithful because they marry outside the group.

Thus, marriage appears to be of a central importance in the definition of ethnic/group populations: ethnic/group endogamy preserves the distinctive ethnic/group characteristics within a community. Ethnic/group endogamy also preserves and maintains the adaptive traits like reproductive and subsistence strategies, access to resources or child-rearing practice. Among these Gypsies, the practice of endogamy helps to emphasise group identity and uniqueness in relation to neighbouring groups with whom marriage is discouraged.

The Romanian Gypsies

The “detest” Kanjara or Romanian Gypsies came to Serbia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They inhabit seven or more villages in Macva. The largest one, inhabited by the Romanian Gypsies, is Drenovac; it has nine hundred households of which ninety, or ten per cent, are Gypsy. The Gypsies speak Serbian as their mother tongue and Romanian as a second language. Romany, the Gypsy language, is not spoken at all. Most Gypsies in the village claim to be natives of Serbia because, as they constantly repeat, their ancestors were born and raised in the same village, Drenovac. These Gypsies claim to be more sophisticated and refined than other Gypsy groups - they don't marry or form social relationships with them. Instead, by their own account, they forge enduring social relationships with the Serbs from their village; almost all have Serbian godparents. Great emphasis is laid on kinship, and on the form of polite or correct conversation and behaviour among kinsfolk and with older people.

And although most acknowledge their Romanian Gypsy background, they reject any connection with other Gypsy groups. This may possibly represent a typical attitude, as expressed by one male informant:

I'm a Serb. I'm a hundred per cent, original Serb. My father and his father and my great grandfather were all born in Serbia. They always behaved like Serbs. We don't speak Gypsy language, we don't know a single word of it. We only speak Serbian, and we know some Romanian, but it's a dialect with about thirty per cent of Serbian words. We're different from the people in Macvancki Pricinovic, for example. They all speak Gypsy language and we don't understand them. They're Roma, Gurbeti. The others are Roma, not us. We have a different mentality from the Roma. We're much softer and we've never sold our girls. Maybe this isn't a nice thing to say, but we have more culture. Other Gypsies always call themselves Roma, but we never have. That's because we feel and see ourselves as Serbs. The Gurbeti would even speak their Gypsy language in front of Tito.

Gypsies have always depended on the needs of and contacts with their host countries as a source of their livelihood. They have frequently adapted to the different requirements of their social and environmental surroundings.²¹

These are the words of a native of Drenovac, Dragan Vasiljkovic, the president of the Roma Association of Western Serbia and a member of the National Roma Council:

The data indicate that the first Roma in Drenovac were immigrants from Romania. In the beginning, in the nineteenth century, there were only a few tribes living in the territory of Drenovac, they were named Jankovic, Vasiljkovic, Stankovic, and Jovanovic. They spoke only

²¹ J. Čvorović, *Sexual and reproductive strategies...*

Romanian, not Gypsy Romany and they had strong solidarity and cooperation within the group. The tribes which immigrated here from Romania have rather darker skin than the Roma here. Their main characteristic was that they didn't mix with the other Roma tribes which surrounded the village of Drenovac, such as the Gypsies from Priciniovici, Sevarice and so on. There are also many differences in traditions. It appears that language was the barrier that prevented them from mixing; and we also know that the other Roma groups didn't accept them as their own. Apart from the different language, the culture of these Roma immigrants didn't have much in common with the culture of the Roma groups which inhabited the territory of Macva. The most striking feature is that there was no intermarriage among the groups. The other difference between the Romanians and other Roma groups is that the Romanian Roma were musicians, not craftsmen like other Roma. The nature of the Roma from Drenovac is very different than the rest of the Roma: they are very modest, they are peaceful and more sophisticated than other Roma groups. We have no criminals, no domestic and street violence. The Serbs must have noticed this.

All informants insisted that the most important thing about their times past was that they did not mix with other Gypsy groups. Their restricted marriage choices maintained the local, village traditions, both in terms of marriage and occupations.

Discussion

In Europe as in Serbia, various Gypsy tribes/groups are divided today on the basis of religion, the language used, they have no common territory and their cultural models may vary from country to country. However, the Gypsy groups/tribes are breeding populations: individuals have genetic interests in their particular groups by virtue of having a greater concentration of inclusive fitness in their own ethnic/tribal group than in other ethnic groups.²²

Within an evolutionary and ecological approaches, an ethnic population/group is defined as an assemblage of individuals with a significant number of behavioral characteristics shared, a shared historical identity and a higher occurrence of marriage with members of the same population than with members of other populations.²³ Among these, marriage is of a central importance in the definition of ethnic populations: ethnic endogamy preserves the distinctive ethnic characteristics within a community. The extent of ethnic endogamy functions as isolating mechanism by enhancing ethnic identity and reproductive isolation of the

²² F. Salter, *Estimating ethnic genetic interest: is it adaptive to resist replacement migration?*, *Population and Environment*, 24 (2), 2002, 111–140.

²³ W. S. Abruzzi, *op. cit.*

population.²⁴ Furthermore, ethnic endogamy also preserves and maintains the adaptive traits like reproductive and subsistence strategies, access to resources, or child-rearing practice. In contrast, intermarriage among different ethnic groups has the weakening effect upon differentiation within human communities and threaten to destroy traditions. Endogamy is often applied on a society-wide level and assists in setting of group boundaries. Endogamy practices help to underline group identity and uniqueness in opposition to neighboring groups with whom marriages are discouraged.

In most of the European countries, the Gypsies remained separated and distinctive ethnic group. Gypsies' success in retaining their group identity has been due to not cooperating in one very important way, that is, marriage. Throughout the Europe, and especially in the Eastern Europe, Gypsy marriage pattern remained the same for centuries.²⁵ This pattern is characterized by endogamous (toward non-Gypsies as well as toward other Gypsy groups), early unions/marriages, an emphasis on girls' virginity, and encouragement of reproduction for all females. In Gypsy culture, females are of a special importance: they are the reproductively scarce resource, should they "marry out", the females' reproductive capacity is lost to the group. And although females play 'the subordinate' role to "dominant" males among Gypsies, there is always a demand and competition for women among Gypsies. This tradition was encouraged and acknowledged equally by males and females in Gypsy culture.

Therefore, Gypsies' behaviors are a result of their ethnic/group traditional strategy that encourages hierarchical division into groups/tribes, occupational specialization, endogamy and high fertility. Maintaining ethnic distinctiveness, including patterns of sexual and reproductive behavior, function to regulate competing population's access to resources, and the recognition that in one case the proximate causes of behavior may be largely inherited while in the other they may be primarily learned should not rule out the possibility that the selective pressures in both cases may be the same.²⁶

The dispersal of different Gypsy tribes/groups throughout Europe in the middle ages is explainable by the selection theory. When energetic demands for the efficient exploitation of different resources favor distinct adaptive strategies within the same environment, selection should produce socially diverse populations to the exclusion of one uniform.²⁷ In certain environments, it may be energetically cheaper for distinct populations to exploit limited and non-overlapping sets of resources, than for one undifferentiated population to exploit the total range of available resources. The most common examples come from the anthropological literature:

²⁴ P. L. van den Berghe, *Human family systems. An evolutionary view*, Elsevier Press, New York 1979.

²⁵ A. Mirga, & L. Mruz, *op. cit.*

²⁶ W. S. Abruzi, *op. cit.*

²⁷ E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: the new synthesis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1975/2000.

nomadic and sedentary populations.²⁸ Most significant here is the differential demand for mobility. Overt competition has been reduced through the development of more or less symbiotic relations, imposed in part by the greater power of the dominant population. Nomadic pastoralists and sedentary cultivators exhibit important symbiotic exchanges, yet they present a significant degree of competition with each other, as land, or a territory, is a finite resource required by both.

Since different strategies of resource exploitation select for different patterns of labor organization, selection within humans would favor any mechanism that maintained the adaptive organization of the community.²⁹ Inasmuch as ethnic endogamy maintains local ethnic distinction, selection would specifically favor those mechanisms that reduced the incidence of intermarriage among different ethnic groups in communities where ethnic specialization occurs.

Under stable ecological conditions the number of independent isolating mechanisms separating two or more local ethnic groups should increase in time. Reproductive isolation underlies the recurring pattern of ethnic relations associated with expanding pioneer populations.³⁰ Initial flexible interactions evolve into more rigid, stereotypical exchanges as the number of immigrants increases and the competition over resources intensifies. Premating mechanisms that foster “ethnic visibility” are quite common means used to enforce isolation between ethnic groups. Such mechanisms limit the interaction of local populations and highlight the recognition of ethnic identity reducing the likelihood of interethnic marriage. These premating mechanisms include residential concentration, occupation, distinct form of dress and speech, prescribed patterns of social interaction, courtship and marriage rules and other factors that exhibit local ethnic distinctions.

Since selection for ethnic differentiation operates upon learned behavioral patterns, the more such isolating mechanisms become institutionalized, as part of the explicit rules of a community, the greater is the likelihood that they will be maintained in that community in the following generations. The stereotypes of behavior are likely to lead to socially adaptive, appropriate behaviors a large portion of time.³¹

Among Gypsies, it is possible that the division into small groups/tribes of the founder population has occurred due to the pressure for higher mobility in the face of competition for resources and territory; has been consolidated further by oppressive legislation and maltreatment, geographic dispersal and cultural and linguistic divergences.

²⁸ F. Barth (Ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference*, Little Brown, Boston 1969.

²⁹ W. S. Abruzzi, *op. cit.*

³⁰ F. Barth, *op. cit.*

³¹ M. Daly, & M. I. Wilson, *Sex, evolution, and behavior*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, CA 1982.

The tribe/group, with its own endogamous professional-group organization was the primary social unit of the Gypsies for centuries. Their ethnicity was maintained by the rules based on tradition and endogamy, and their survival was made possible by the reproductive strategies they employed. Only the recent political and economic changes have led Gypsies ceasing to practice their original professions, accompanied by the weakening of traditional rules and endogamy.

Today, however, the practice of these behavioral rules varies from country to country, and tribe to tribe. Where in practice, the particular tradition among Gypsies is not favorable to change: even today, their maintenance of ethnic/group boundaries by endogamy fits into centuries- old traditional norms. Consequently Gypsy group/tribal endogamy practice preserved traditions, but at the cost of cooperation with outsiders.

Conclusion

In Macva, local Gypsy communities appear to be the central points of the practice of the “caste” system. Social life is fundamental to the way of life among rural Gypsies in Macva. Among Macva Gypsies, social stratification and limited marriage choice have preserved their local, village traditions, in terms of both marriage and occupations. These “caste” behaviours have found their principal manifestation and most elaborate organisations in marriage match making. Even today, there is an apparent distinction among Gypsies themselves, based on how strictly families or individuals maintain their old norms. Gypsies’ success in retaining their local kinship identity has been based on their endogamy, which preserved their adaptive traits, such as their reproductive and subsistence strategies, access to resources, and child-rearing practices.

The function of these behaviours, in their own settings, was to preserve the local or village tradition and distinct characteristics. Gypsies became more accepted or tolerated in places where their particular occupation was in need. It was thus, perhaps, the intention of the local group to preserve that particular occupation by not mixing and not establishing wider kinship and marriage ties with Gypsies in other villages, especially if they were from a different group. In this sense, once an ethnic group – Gypsies – has become endogamous at the local level, they have become almost identical to tribes, whose identification is distinguished by common ancestry. Individuals in a tribe assume they are a set of co-descendents and, given the regular occurrence of marriage within that set over time, this assumption is certainly true.³² A tribe or an “ethnic” local Gypsy group may also be culturally distinctive: their clothing and language may communicate their ancestry and their family names often indicate their “ethnic” or local identity. Such features are used by the individuals involved to identify genealogical distance, on the basis of which they may systematically discriminate and favour members of their own group over outsiders. On the other hand, endogamy towards the Serb villagers in Macva was as

³² L. B. Steadman, *op. cit.*

much imposed as it was self-maintained. It was difficult for any Gypsy to marry into a Serbian family.

There is no word for “custom” in Gypsy language.³³ Gypsy people usually describe repeated actions and rituals by saying “That’s how our ancestors did it, so that’s how we do it. It’s good to do it this way”. Gypsies have preserved, almost intact, old traditions which reach a long way back. Transmitting such successful behaviour – a particular tradition – to descendants may not only increase the number of those descendants but also the frequency of that particular behaviour³⁴. Such traditions, being inheritable and replicable, can influence their own frequency in succeeding generations.

³³ R. Đurić, *Seobe Roma*, BIGZ, Beograd 1987.

³⁴ L. B. Steadman, *Traditions are not explained by “r”*. Paper presented at meeting of Human Behavior and Evolution Society, Santa Barbara, CA. 1995

Јелена Чворовић

Кастинско понашање Рома у Србији

Кастински систем у Индији је, по речима Добжанског, до сада најзамашнији мада можда не унапред смишљен генетички експеримент. Генетички најзначајније јединице су под-касте, ендогамне групе на које је становништво круто подељено: човек мора ступити у брак с особом исте подкасте у коју и сам случајно спада. По традицији, касте и подкасте већином су имала посебна занимања. Традиционално прописивање занимања за сваку касту било је у вези с хијерархијском структуром друштва: ограничења су се односила не само на склапање брака између припадника различитих каста већ и на друге облике друштвеног понашања. Генетичари данас сматрају да Роми воде порекло из Индије, и да су напустили постојбину као једна међусобно повезана, ендогамна под-каста-племе које се временом разгранало у више мањих група и под-група. Традиционално, свака под-група је била специјализована за одређено занимање, и то занимање се преносило традицијски, са колена на колена. Неки Индијци и дан данас тврде да могу препознати којој касте припада човек из њихове покрајине. Исто тврде и Роми који живе у Србији.

Кључне речи:

Роми, касте,
понашање,
брак, Србија

Већина Рома се данас не сматра припадницима једне уједињене и хомогене етничке групе, већ се идентификује са подгрупом/племеном из које потиче, а чија религија и језик највише зависе од локације и околности. Не постоји јасна свест о јединству ромског народа: многи Роми не називају себе Ромима, и одбијају сваку везу са ромскином народом. Роми у већини европских земаља и даље поштују традиционалне обрасце понашања, у које спадају: ендогамија, како према не-Ромима тако и у односу на иноплеменике, куповина девојке, рани бракови, велики број деце, и чести разводи, као и намерна друштвена/групна изолација. Ова специфична ромска традиција – култура наслеђена од предака и пренета оралном традицијом на потомство – не само да је помогла и омогућила Ромима преживљавање током векова недаћа, него је и помогла да се очува ромски/племенски идентитет, али на штету заједничког живота и сарадње са не-Ромима. У раду се даље расправља о ендогамном облику брака и друштвеној хијерархији, као и подели на групе/племена код Рома у Мачви. Обрађено је неколико села: Дреновац, Мачвански Причиновићи и насеље Думаца, и три различите групе/племена Рома: Каравласи, Гурбети и Чергари. Анализирана је веза између традиционалне „кастинске“ ендогамије, занимања и хијерархије; анализа је показала одређену флексибилност ромског етничког идентитета, и открила однос између животних околности и очекиваних норми културног понашања, које се модификују у зависности од ситуације и друштвене средине.

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