

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANY POPULATION

UDC 316.7(=914.99)+314.1(=914.99)

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**Abstract.** *The paper gives a summary as well as an analysis, from the sociological point of view, of the basic characteristics of the Romany population, bearing in mind the peculiarities of this population in Serbia and in the Balkans. After a detailed discussion of the ethnogenesis and demography of the Romanies, the author gives a detailed description of their culture, habitations and education, occupations and the manner in which they earn their living, as well as their family and marriage relationships.*

**Key Words:** *Romanies' Ethnogenesis, Demography, Habitations, Education and Occupations*

1. *ETHNOGENESIS OF THE ROMANIES.* Despite the fact that the Romanies have been living in Europe for many centuries while the interest in their origin has existed for almost as much time, until recently no one could say with any certainty who the Romanies actually were, where they had come from, how many of them there were and what kind of social community they lived in. Most attempts to find answers to the previous questions were mainly concerned with the culturological determinants, that is, with the determination of the Romanies' genesis by means of the elements of their culture, customs and the very way of living. The assumptions, very often colored by mysticism and fantasy, were mostly based on the Romany lore itself, namely the lore that was not only obscure but also relatively scarce. The difficulties related to the determination of the Romanies' ethnogenesis also arose from the attitude of the Romanies themselves towards their own customs - otherwise the most important topic of interest and explanation of the essence of the Romanies' ethnos - which they often changed and adjusted to the surroundings in which they found their more permanent settlement. By changing their customs, faith or even accepting a foreign tongue, the Romanies were gradually losing the links with their own homeland and thus they contributed to the creation of the most frequently false assumptions about their origin.

The most outstanding interest in the science dealing with the Romanies' origin emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mostly in the ethnological and anthropological literature, while in the last decades it did not only become more extensive but it also appeared in other sciences including - which is of special importance - linguistics. Namely, it is on the basis of the linguistic studies (S. Berberski, 1975) that today it can be with a great degree of accuracy claimed that the Romanies' origin is in India where from they moved to Europe in several mass migration waves. Thus Clebert, one of the best connoisseurs of the Romanies in Europe, claims that they come from Punjab (Clebert, 1967) while the outstanding Yugoslav romologist Tatomir Vukanović relaying on the linguistic findings states that the Romanies' homeland is in the province of Kabul, that is, in the Northwest Indija (T. Vukanović, 1983). He also claims that the Romanies' migrations from their homeland started in the Middle Ages and ended in the late nineteenth century. The reasons for the migrations probably lie in frequent and cruel Mongolian intrusions into the territories settled by the Romanies; thus, they first moved toward Persia and Armenia, while somewhat later they left for Mesopotamia and Egypt. It is possible that at the beginning of their long journey the Romanies did not receive a warm welcome in the mentioned countries which was a good reason for them to continue their great journey toward Byzantium and other Balkan countries. The time of the great Romanies' migrations, according to Berberski, must have been in the period between the fifth and the twelfth century (Berberski, 1975), while Clebert thinks that this was the period from the tenth to the fourteenth century when, actually, three great migration waves started in three directions. The first migration wave was directed towards Egypt, the second was northern and western, while the third one led across the Aegean Sea and its islands towards Southern Greece (Clebert, 1967).

The movement towards the Balkan peninsula took place at the time of the Turkish campaign at the Balkans; the fact that the Turks remained at the Balkans for five centuries explains the reason why the Romanies remained on this territory for the longest period of time and in the greatest number. Still, the Balkan countries were not the ultimate European territory the Romanies could reach. Namely, as early as the fifteenth century their presence was recorded in Transylvania, France and Danmark while in the first decades of the sixteenth century it was also noted in Poland, Russia and Sweden. Nowadays the Romanies are to be found in the North and South Americas or even Australia which is a proof that they live on almost all the continents and in the majority of the world countries; yet they are in the greatest number at the Balkans.

The Turkish campaigns at the Balkans with very precise military goals were also characterized by a specific way of tolerating the foreigners that adjoined them including the Romanies. Though not sufficiently known, they were still welcome as masters of the crafts needed by the army (blacksmiths and flute players), the Romanies would prove themselves useful for doing rather cheap favors on the long journeys undertaken by the army. Running away from the barbarians (Huns and Mongolians) that invaded their territories, the Romanies in their escape obviously had no clear idea of where they should stop. Thus, they made the simplest choice of all: to conquer the unknown. This goal would determine their movements for ages later. Still, these movements should not be understood as expansionist; quite the opposite, the Romanies would *drift along* in a way that appears modest or even shy even if great groups of people are concerned.

While settling down on the Turkish territory of the conquered Balkan regions, the

Romanies showed their readiness to accept foreign customs. They were also ready to change their faith and to fulfill almost all the rulers' expectations. They did whatever they were told to do; they practiced the crafts needed at the moment. The military establishment needed those craftsmen that would be useful for further conquests. In that way the Romanies survived as the Romanies not despite their history but with its help.

The Romany population is not homogenous. Regarding the Balkans, it should be stressed that among the peoples as well as in the referential literature there are different names for the Romanies. They are mostly divided referring to their faith or crafts or the directions of their migration to the Balkans. Regarding their *confession*, the Romanies are divided into *Vlaški* and Turkish or non-*Vlaški* Romanies (R. Uhlik, 1955). The *Vlaški* Romanies settled down in those parts of the Balkans that are otherwise settled by the Rumanian (*Vlaški*) population; among them the Romany native language has almost completely disappeared. The non-*Vlaški* (Turkish) Romanies mostly live in the southern parts of Serbia and Macedonia; a great number of them also live in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Montenegro. Regarding *the migration direction*, that is their coming to the Balkans, our most distinguished romologist Tihomir Đorđević has found that there are four groups of Romanies living in Serbia, namely:

(1) Turkish Romanies who settled down together with the Turks. The Romanies whose date of settlement cannot be claimed with surety are called *Gadžikano* Romanies (meaning Serbian Romanies), whereas those whose date of settlement is known are called *Korane* or *Korkane* Romanies (meaning Muslim, Koran Romanies). These two groups differ regarding their language though the linguistic base is the same. In the past they were mostly artisans, cattle traders and players.

(2) White Romanies came to Serbia from Bosnia and the greatest number of them settled in the River Drina region known as Podrinje (Šabac, Ljubovija, Krupanj). Their faith is Muslim whereas they only speak Serbian.

(3) *Vlaški* Romanies came to Serbia from Rumania where there used to be two great groups of Romanies, namely, *Princely (Kneževski) Romanies* consisting of several groups (named after the crafts they were practising such as *Linguari* or spoon-makers, *Miners* who panned gold from the rivers, *Ursari* or *Mečkari* who were the nomads named after their bear-taming skills) and *Slaves* or the Romanies who used to live on the monastery or noblemen's estates. In the whole history of the Romanies the last mentioned group lived under the most difficult conditions: the only slavery in Europe in the nineteenth century was in Rumania and it almost exclusively involved the Romany population. (4) Hungarian Romanies or the Romanies from Banat (province in Vojvodina) came from Austria and their arrival is mostly connected with horse-trading.

This classification of the Romanies done by T. Đorđević has been accepted by the greatest number of romologists (T. Đorđević, 1932).

The greatest number of the names used for different groups of Romanies are most often related to their professions. In Serbia where there are more than 50 different names; the Romanies are almost exclusively named after their trades; they are either blacksmiths, nail-makers, spindle makers, bear-tamers, wool carders, drill-makers, etc. In the past or even today it can be heard that the Romanies are called Gypsies. However, for the majority of the Romanies the name "Tsiganin" is pejorative and that is why it cannot be found in the Romany language. The first naming of the Romanies was recorded in 1100 as *Atsincana* derived from the Greek word "athigganiein" (meaning "not to touch") which is

mispronounced by people as "atsinganien" that later on got its final form "Tsiganin" ("Gypsy"). This name very soon disappeared and was replaced by "Egyptian", otherwise the name reserved for the Romanies who came to Europe from Egypt. In Great Britain the Romanies were named Gypsies, in France they became Gitanes whereas in Spain the Romany became Gitanos (Berberski, 1975).

Today almost throughout the world the name "Romany" is used as derived from the word "roamanu" meaning the Romany language whereas the word "Romany" or "Roma" means "man" or "people" who speak the "Tsigansky" or Romany language (T. Vukanović, 1983).

2. *DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS*. Just as the origin of the Romanies has remained unknown for so much time, so are there different data related to the number of the Romanies. These data spring from two sources: the first refers to the estimates made by good connoisseurs of the Romanies' ways whereas the second source comprises official statistics (Population Census). Regarding the estimates, the referential literature states that the overall number of the Romanies in the world amounts to eight millions whereas sometimes even the total of fourteen millions is also mentioned. The statistics about the number of the Romanies also show the same typical insufficiency of reliable data. This can be explained by using the example of the Southeast Slavic countries (in which the number of the Romanies is the greatest) in which the following reasons can be relatively clear: first, the Romanies' spontaneous mixing and assimilation into the native society, second, the enforced assimilation (most often proscribed by the decrees) and third, persistent social isolation of the Romanies' community that reacts to the census by adjusting itself to the current requirements and circumstances of the society it exists in. Since the Romanies have been living at the Balkans for many centuries together with the Slavic peoples, there have been processes of spontaneous and *non-violent assimilation*; something similar has taken place in other countries as well. Despite non-violent and spontaneous merging and assimilation of the Romanies into other peoples, there were also *enforced assimilations* that were most prominent in the Austria-Hungary empire. The regulations by Maria Theresa from the seventies of the eighteenth century related to the rights and duties of the Romanies in the Austrian empire reveal the policy towards the Romanies whose exclusive goal was to assimilate them by force (taking away of the children, prohibiting their in-marriages, etc.). A similar policy towards the Romanies was in Rumania where the enforced assimilation was most prominent especially in the eighteenth century during the so-called Gypsy slavery (the time that the *Karavlas* date from, namely, those Romanies who accepted the Rumanian language as well as most of their customs and today feel like Rumanians).

So far as the *Population Census* is concerned, it should be stressed that the first census of the Romanies appeared in the fifteenth century. Namely, the first census of the Romanies was done in Rumania in 1475 by the Turkish authorities for the sake of collecting the imperial taxes; somewhat later the census was done on the Serbian territory as well (T. Urošević, 1962).

In the censuses dating from that time and even up to now it can be noticed that the data about the Romanies are highly *unreliable*, that is, inaccurate which is a consequence of several reasons. First of all, in the first censuses (under the Turkish rule) there were

great nomadic migrations of the Romanies; moreover, until the fifties of the twentieth century there was not any issue concerning the declaration of ethnicity stated in the census, so that the Romanies declared themselves regarding their confession or native tongue.

In the former Yugoslavia as late as 1948 there was a subjective statement of ethnicity required in the census so that the Romanies were registered according to the statement they made. However, the percentage of the Romanies in the overall population *has varied* from one census to another (1948: 0,5; 1953: 05; 1961: 02; 1971:04, 1981: 07) which shows unreliability of the data. It is obvious that the Romanies declared themselves according to their own estimate of the social climate or the expectations of the others (of the environment they live in or of the census officials themselves or sometimes they were even forced to do that). Just like in the past their religious confession was a mimicry, namely the way of adjusting themselves to the unfavorable social conditions they lived under, so today the declaration of ethnicity has a similar function. That is why it can be assumed with certainty that there were always more Romanies than it is shown by statistics.

The real number of the Romanies, therefore, has not been definitively determined either in the world at large or in our country; this fact, still, should not considerably affect our conclusions about their overall social position or the characteristics of their ethnicity. When the number of the Romanies is concerned, what seems important is their *territorial dispersion* within particular regions not only due to the historical facts but due to their way of life as well.

When talking about the Balkan countries in which the Romanies have remained for the longest period of time and in the greatest number, the reasons for their considerable concentration should be looked for in the historical circumstances of the Turkish rule for many centuries when the Romanies' migration wave was at its greatest. Besides, since the Turks first appeared in the southern parts of the Balkan peninsula (Macedonia and southern parts of Serbia) and remained there for the longest period of time, the Romanies appeared in these parts in the greatest number. The percentage of the Romanies' share in the overall population regarding the republics of the former Yugoslavia, regarding the Population Census of 1981, amounted to: Bosnia and Herzegovina 0,2, Montenegro 0,3, Croatia 0,1, Macedonia 2,3, Slovenia 0,1, Serbia 1,2 (Kosovo 2,2, and Vojvodina 1,1). The regional presence of the Romanies in the former Yugoslavia is directly connected with the historical events on the territory. Coming together with the Turks, the Romanies lingered in the conquered regions in which they would settle down for good. It is very important to stress the fact that the Romanies ended their nomadic ways - as a characteristic way of life - that is, they settled down for good (in special settlement quarters called *mahalas*) as early as the Turkish rule.

The Turks' retreat from the Balkans was not followed by a retreating migration wave of the Romanies probably because, among other things, they had no place to return to or because the Turkish army did not need their help any longer. One of the more important reasons for their permanent settlement surely was a relatively benevolent and tolerant attitude of the new authorities in Serbia and Macedonia towards all the ethnic groups. As for Serbia, the Romanies are the most numerous in the municipalities of Niš, Vladičin Han, Surdulica, Bujanovac and Bojnik.

Regarding the *demographic structure*, the Romany population is one of the youngest.

The most numerous age group of the Romanies in Serbia is that of up to 14 years of age, namely, children. If this group is added the one from 15 to 24 years of age, it can rightfully be claimed that the Romany population is very young since the group up to 24 years of age amounts to more than a half of the overall Romany population, that is, 62%. On the other hand, the group that is considered as old, meaning of 60 and more years of age, is not numerous; it is involved in the overall number with only 4,11% (Population Census, 1981). Considering the birth rate of the majority population the Romanies' birth rate is four times higher; the same stands for the mortality rate which is over 15%.

3. *CULTURAL TRAITS.* Any attempt to understand the Romany community, especially its culture, is made even more difficult since the Western civilization, as no other has done, has imposed on it its behavior pattern as well as a value system dominated by the belief in the monolithic human behavior thus neglecting very important elements that were later to be discovered by culturologists and anthropologists. Namely, they have found that the human behavior that is a creation of the (local) community is exceptionally changeable. It is liable to *receiving* and *giving*, meaning to the interaction while, at the same time, it is devoted to an almost unimaginable preservation of *all that is autochthonous*.

The example of the Romany community is only one of many others in which there is an interaction of cultural contacts, namely, in which there is an intertwining of cultural traits as well as preservation of the cultural identity of the community. More precisely, the history of the Romany community almost always represents a part of the environment and society in which it has found itself and in which certain relationships have set up as well as mutual influence. In a peculiar cultural interaction, the Romanies have always received more than they have given - regarding the elements of their own culture - while still preserving their own peculiarities that have kept them compact in the greatest number of the countries they live in.

Surely, one of the most important elements that have kept the Romanies as a specific ethnic group is their *language*. "The Romany language is the only 'book' they have carried along with them from India; it represents their collective memory and it is the very testimony of this nation's consciousness about the world, their own selves and others" (R. Đurić, 1985). However, it must be remembered that the Romanies preserved their ethnicity even in the countries in which they have lost their own language as, for instance, the *vlaški* Romanies did in Rumania or as some other Romany groups did in Serbia (Šumadija). The Romany language is not monolithic; it is a set of various dialects which as a consequence of the following: first, the Romanies left their homeland as various tribes each speaking in its own dialect, and, second, wherever they stopped in their migrations, they accepted the words from the native people thus creating special types of the Romany languages (R. Uhlik, 1955). The Romanies in our country speak the Romany language which is a mixture of Romany dialects; R. Uhlik has found that there are three main dialects, namely, *laješki*, *arlijski* and *tamarski* (R. Uhlik, 1961).

As for the spiritual cultural achievements, the most prominent place in the lives of the Romanies is taken by *music* as "an important Gypsy trait" as said by T. Đorđević claiming that the music played by the Romanies in Serbia is primarily an artisan product (... "they sell music in the same way they sell any other artisan product, as any other craftsman masterpiece") and that it is adjusted to the needs and taste of the surroundings - that is

how the "Russian Romany music" or "Hungarian Romany music" or "Serbian Romany music" and so on came to be recognized (T. Đorđević, 1933). What is important regarding the music played by the Romanies is doubtlessly the fact that music is cherished by the Romanies, that is, the instrument-playing craft is passed on from one generation to another; this skill has become one of more important and recognizable traits of the Romany ethnicity.

Another relevant aspect of the Romanies' spiritual culture is related to the religion and myths of the Romanies' ethnic community. As for *religion*, it should be stressed that it was found a long time ago that the Romanies, before coming to Europe, had started from India as pagans and that, depending on the country, that is, religion they encountered, they accepted those religious rites and customs that dominated in the society in which they lived for a shorter or longer period of time. It can be said that the Romanies are mostly Orthodox Christians when among the Orthodox Christians or that they are Muslims when among the Muslims or Roman Catholics when among the Roman Catholics. However, with the passage of time, the Romanies, by accepting the reduced religious practices of both the Muslim and the Orthodox Christians, started to create their own specific confession that represents a mixture of Islam and Orthodoxy including some pagan elements. Still, it seems that it is too early to speak about a separate Romany religion; rather, it can be said that the religious rites have some specific traits that often represent a mixture of two basic religions the Romanies belong to at least when the Balkan countries are concerned.

The spiritual culture also comprises the traditional *lore* and *customs* that are very diverse and numerous in the Romany community. As for the *lore*, what is very favorable is story-telling usually done only in the Romany language; that is why only a small number of stories has been recorded.

As for the Romany *customs*, it should be said that all the Romanies do not have the same customs. In their long migrations, they kept on changing their customs adjusting them to the environments they settled down in, while also accepting, at the same time, many foreign ones. Likewise, in Serbia the traditional culture is of various forms so that it can be said that many Romany customs in different parts of Serbia are utterly dissimilar. However, there are some customs common to all the Romanies. The most important common traditional holidays are New Year's and St. George's Day that are celebrated in all the Romanies' homes regardless of the confession.

4. *ROMANIES' HABITATIONS*. In their long history, while moving from one country to another, the Romanies most often settled down close to urban settlements. Their attachment to towns was primarily related to their professions (crafts) that they could practice for the army they came along with and that mostly resided in towns. Coming together with the Turks to the Balkans, the Romanies also settled in Serbian towns as well as, to a small degree, in villages. The Turks had special regulations for ordering the Romanies' settling down. These regulations determined the places for building residential quarters for the Romanies; their quarters had to be on the periphery of the town or the city, separated from the Serbian houses. They came to be called *mahale* or *džemati*.

Such a distribution, that is, location of the Romanies' settlements is almost the same even today in a greater part of Serbia. These are actually the settlements of the old type

and they can easily be spotted and recognized. The houses are quite worn out and unstable; the hygiene is rather low; the streets show quite visible traces of the lack of sewage; here and there there can be a new house built; all in all, everything bespeaks that the Romany mahala in Serbia has preserved the same appearance described by the travellers as something "special."

The very spatial isolation of the Romanies' communities has as a consequence the fact that its inhabitants feel somewhat "different"; they have no clear idea about their surroundings; rather, they have an illusion of their independence and self-sufficiency. The misery visible by the naked eye suggests to any observer that the people living in such settlements are immune to all sorts of class and professional divisions that otherwise follow him at every step.

The Romanies build their houses on their own; only a small number of them lives in the so-called "social apartments"; those who do are mainly full-time employed. The building quality of the majority of houses in the Romany quarters is unsatisfactory, namely two-thirds of the houses are built of poor material (most often mud and straw). It is not rare to find in the Romany mahalas some improvised objects such as houses made of mud or old railways cars, buses and so on. It does not need to be stressed that the household appliances are exceptionally modest.

Regardless of how much segregated it is, the life in the Romanies' mahala has in certain aspect contributed to the preservation of their ethnic identity. Namely, the very isolation they live in has provided for the preservation of their ethnicity, that is, it has prevented their merging and assimilation into the majority population surrounding them since the "ghetto" way of life does not only imply residual isolation but the very way of life.

5. *SCHOOLING*. The problem of the Romanies' involvement into the educational system is surely one of the most crucial ones since it represents one of the most important prerequisites for their integration into the society. The reason for this lies in the fact that a degree of schooling and of qualification is the condition for employment, while the Romanies are for the most part unemployed due to this very reason. Regarding the other ethnic groups in Serbia, the Romanies are most illiterate; the percentual share of the Romanies in the illiterate population of the former Yugoslavia (in 1981) was 35% (Albanians, 22%, Muslims, 21%). In the same year, the percentage of the Romanies with no elementary literacy (elementary school) within the overall population was 79%, with elementary school 17%, with grammar school 4%, whereas the overall number with a high school or University was less than 200!

It should be stressed that the Romanies for the most part live in the municipalities whose economy is underdeveloped. Therefore, their environment is unfavorable. Besides, the Romanies still live in mahalas even today with a very few contacts with the others while they are socializing among themselves very intensively. The children at the earliest age rarely have an opportunity to hear or learn any other language except for the native one. The Romanies' children in a very small number attend pre-school institutions (kindergartens) which is a consequence of the *conditions* set for attending such institutions including the one requiring that *both the parents* should be employed. The Romanies - parents are rarely employed in the traditional sense. Besides, in the Romany



family rarely is there an employed mother, meaning there is no crucial condition fulfilled for attending kindergardens. Thus it happens that the Romanies' children go to school without any or sufficient knowledge of the language that the teaching is done in.

The Romanies' children education as a possible channel leading to social promotion is too long, uncertain and expensive; besides, it requires much patience and work. The fact is that the Romanies' children have no conditions for attending school. They live in an exceptionally packed up house in which it is hard to find some space for books or some silent corner for learning. Thus it turns out that they fail to be successful at schools. This can be ascribed to many reasons including the fact that the education factor in the social environment they live in is not the least important one. The children even after four years of elementary school surpass their parents in the "degree of education" since their parents are most often illiterate. In addition, the Romanies' children tend to face numerous hardships at school since they are poorly dressed, with uncombed hair, sometimes not clean enough due to their living in non-hygienic conditions. The children education is an effort that the Romanies' family cannot make on its own. This is one of the reasons for early leaving of school. Any success in school is hard to achieve regarding the competition with other children who are superior regarding the knowledge of the language that the teaching is done in and who, regarding the Romanies' children, surely have more pre-school knowledge obtained within their families. Of course, the teaching staff that is most often burdened with prejudice towards the Romanies is also liable to quick and relatively easy sending of the Romanies' children to special schools. Moreover, the official recognition of the special school diploma with that obtained after the regular school has given a "chance" to the Romanies' parents to give easily their assent to sending their children to special schools; it is relatively easy and fast to get a diploma; very often theirs are pseudo-retarded children.

In addition to the objective conditions in which the Romanies' children live and grow, their education is surely affected by their parents' aspirations that are rather very low. The lack of ambition regarding the children's education explains for their rather late going to school and their early leaving of it. The parents' attitudes towards the children's schooling are neither especially nor even stimulating at all. The task assigned to the child by the parents is very low at the very beginning. The parents' view of schooling is negative in the two crucial aspects, first, the formal school education is of no value on its own, and, second, it is not very much respected in the Romany population. In other social layers and groups, as it is known, both the above-mentioned aspects are highly appreciated.

6. *PROFESSION AND WAYS OF EARNING FOR THE MEANS OF LIVING.* The Romanies are characterized by their own *ethnic* peculiarities (especially by their special culture) and, at the same time, they represent a *social layer* whose status immediately springs from their position in the social division of labor. The basis for forming this layer that can be, regarding its features, regarded as socially deprived and poor is its *activity* and *kind of work*. Marx stated a long time ago that "there are layers making up parts of the classes or standing between them, namely, the layers not directly belonging to any of the basic classes (middle class and lumpenproleteriat) though they are attached to them; these layers are not, however, independent - they are attached *only to their professional activity*" (Marks, 1964). The importance of the Romanies' professions - with very good

reasons - was insisted on by one of the best connoisseurs of the Romanies in our country, Tihomir Đorđević, when claiming that "the Gypsy profession is what has conditioned their ethnic self and preserved their existence as Gypsies... The Gypsy professions have branched into tiny segments thus creating in them a special kind of individuality and a special *social layer*." (T. Đorđević, 1933).

On their way from India the Romanies remained for quite a long period of time in the cradle of metalworks, that is, in Persia and Armenia where they had a chance, as workers or maybe even slaves, to learn the metal workings skills. It is possible that in those places they also learnt how to make things of wood since it is more than obvious that they were very skillful in those crafts when they came to the Balkans. Though in the medieval Serbia there were blacksmiths and wood-carvers, the Romanies imposed themselves on the new environment thanks to their knowledge and skill and especially their cheap goods (that they most often exchanged for other stuff) which soon led to the Serbs' giving up those crafts.

Of all the crafts that the Romanies used to deal the most frequent one was *that of blacksmith* that was most needed and appreciated by the majority population. Something similar was with the objects made of wood needed by the Serbian population, namely, objects like trough, baskets, etc. In the past there were other crafts in Serbia dealt with by the Romanies such as horse-trade, bear-taming, grill-making and feather-collecting. One of the very important skills remaining till the present day has been *playing*. The playing of various instruments, most often the violin, the trumpet or the drum, represents a skill cherished in the Romanies' families till the earliest age. Therefore, the Romanies dealt with various professions in the past, namely, the professions that always were or soon became exclusively *Romanies' professions*.

"The crucial moment" in the history of the Romanies in Serbia is quite difficult to determine, but it is certain that it happened during the society's reform, namely, in the late fifties and early sixties of the twentieth century. The social reform meant industrialization and great migrations from the village to the city as well as completely new values and consumption-orientation. The new times also required a new division of labor asking for education and qualified work force by means of the formally organized education system. The Romanies were without school and qualification; thus, they were unable to involve themselves into the new bearings of the social development. Today, they still lack better schooling opportunities for the fact that they start their families rather early and that, in view of their tradition, the school does not take an important place in their system of value. They are skillful craftsmen, but their skill in manual manufacturing of the up-to-now needed objects of iron and wood no longer interests either urban or rural population.

The social changes that took place in the sixties, therefore, the Romanies met totally unprepared. Only a small number of them managed to find jobs in the so-called social sector whereas the majority remained unemployed. In 1961 only 2% of the Romanies within the overall population had personal income, meaning a permanent job; in 1981 the percentage increased to 5%. Since they were not involved in agriculture, that is, they had no land (living in suburban quarters, that is, mahalas) they very soon became the city poor. In the city the Romanies most often do the worst paid and stigmatizing jobs such as the communal cleaning service, the cemetery maintenance, the household cleaning, etc.; most recently they have begun to collect garbage, to pick up herbs as well as renew some old crafts such as basket-weaving for which there is a growing interest at the market.

7. *MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS.* The Romany family lives under special conditions, that is, in such a type of local community (mahala, ghetto) that represents, in all of its aspects, a special quality. The Romany family, namely, lives in a limited and firmly-enclosed space, segregated. This is one of the key factors of its organization and functioning. In the mahala the family has almost no possibility for privacy and independence. Within a packed up city space and a packed up residential space the Romany family is left to spontaneous regulation of its relationships that are most often colored and determined by the inherited customs very reluctantly changed. Behind the ghetto facade the family relationships are taking place in the form of depersonalized way of life and, for the observer, the relationships that are hard to understand.

Traditionally, the Romanies get married very early, young men of 14 to 15 years of age, young girls of 12 to 13 years of age. Though the ethnically endogamous marriage is still present in the Romanies' community (in the past the marriage was almost exclusively endogamous), there are more and more marriages between the members of different ethnic and national groups. The wedding feast is a very important rite among the Romanies; basically it is more social than individual. Those customs are similar in both the Muslim and the Orthodox Romnies' communities. As a rule, the marriage is not "officially" made; it is neither done in the church nor in the municipality office; rather, it is done within the circle of one's family, kinsmen and friends. The reason for this is the fact that the marriage is made between the adolescents. The regulations concerning the rights and duties in the marriage are based on the patriarchal norms of the common law as well as on the Christian and Islam norms.

Since the young ones that have got married have neither jobs nor their own house they, therefore, have no possibility of starting their *own* home. Thus they are forced to live in the same community with their parents, most often with the husband's family. Thus the family type is that of the expanded family that is characteristic not only for the patriarchal family community but also for the poor social layers as well. In such a kind of family the relationships are governed by the code determined by the head of the household who has the authority to decide upon all the family duties and relationships as well as to solve possible problems. The young couple spend almost the whole of their lives in such an ambience without any opportunity to change it.

The Romany family is an otherwise numerous *big* one comprising four members on average. The family members are primarily facing the existential difficulties, this being the most decisive factor in the in-family relationships. The man-husband has a dominant role while the woman is charged with the role of mother, meaning, she is assigned her biological function and responsibility in bringing up the young. A conspicuous expression of affection for the children is peculiar both for the children and the women, for the old and the young, namely, the children are rarely and mildly punished though this "protective" attitude towards the children lasts for a relatively short period of time. As early as the children are ten years of age, this attitude towards them is changed. They are now expected to grow up. It is also the time when the marriage plans both for the boys and the girls begin to be made.

The marriage stability largely depends on the material conditions in which the family lives. Those families having more stable incomes, that is, that are financially better off also have a more stable marriage.

The Romany family is, therefore, exposed to those influences that are related to the material living conditions. Since these conditions are persistently reflected in the lives of generations, the Romany family still remains patriarchal, resistant to all the challenges imposed by the times and the ongoing changes.

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## KARAKTERISTIKE ROMSKE POPULACIJE

**Aleksandra Mitrović**

*U radu se iz sociološkog ugla i na sažet način analiziraju osnovne karakteristike romske populacije, imajući u vidu i njene specifičnosti na balkanskim i srpskim prostorima. Nakon detaljnije diskusije etnogeneze i demografskih obeležja Roma, autor precizno ocrtava njihovu kulturu, staništa i školovanje, zanimanja i način sticanja sredstava za život, kao i bračne i porodične odnose.*

Ključne reči: *etnogeneza Roma, demografska obeležja Roma, obeležja kulture Roma, romska staništa, školovanje Roma, zanimanje Roma, brak i porodični odnosi Roma*