

ROMANIAN-SPEAKING 'GYPSY' COMMUNITIES AND THEIR IDENTITIES*

The region of Eastern Europe is inhabited by many different and sizeable communities, whose ancestors migrated millennium ago from the Indian subcontinent, who are called with similar names in various countries, such as 'Cikáni' (Czech Republic), 'Cigáni' (Slovakia), 'Cyganie' (Poland), 'Čigonai' (Lithuania), 'Čigāni' (Latvia), 'Cigany' (Hungary), 'Țigani' (Romania, Republic of Moldova), 'Cigani' (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), 'Цигани' (Serbia, Bulgaria, Ukraine), 'Цыгане' (Russian Federation), 'Цыганы' (Belarus), 'Τσιγγάνοι' (Greece). All these names are usually translated into English as 'Gypsies', although this is, in our point of view not adequate translation, because the word 'Gypsies', in the English-speaking world, including in the scholarly jargon is used to signify diverse nomadic communities regardless of their ethnic origins and identity (Hancock 2010: 95-96). Because of lack of more appropriate term in English, we have no other choice, but to use in our text the word 'Gypsies' in inverted commas.

In most cases, these communities identify themselves as *Roma* and speaks their own Romani language, called *Romani čhib* or *Romanes* (Matras 2002). In many other cases, however, their mother tongue cannot be Romanes, but Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, etc. (Marushiakova and Popov 2001a, 2014a; Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004; Kenrick 2007). It is not uncommon (not only in Eastern Europe, but also in many other places around the world) to have communities considered 'Gypsies' (with the corresponding names in local languages used in different countries) by the surrounding population, who have nevertheless chosen an "other" one identity. A change in the language of a community is often, but not always, accompanied by a change in community identity. This gives rise to the phenomenon of a so-called "preferred ethnic identity" (Marushiakova and Popov 1997, 2001a), i.e. publicly declared or really experienced, or even actively constructed nowadays, other, non-Roma ethnic identity (Marushiakova and Popov 2000, 2001b; Marushiakova et al. 2001). Such communities not only declare this new identity publicly, but often identify themselves as an altogether different kind of ethnic community, known by a new ethnonym used by the community concerned. This process should not be confused with

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the development of a civic identity of the respective civic nation of which they are an integral part (Marushiakova 2008; Marushiakova and Popov 2014b).

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A typical example of the complex relationships between the origin, mother tongue and ethnic identity are Romanian-speaking ‘Gypsy’ communities, which are quite numerous and are scattered across many countries in the world, as most of them are in Eastern Europe.

Nowadays in Bulgaria there are communities of Romanian-speaking *Rudari* (or *Ludari*). The older self-appellation, *Aurari*, is also remembered by part of the community. According to their traditional occupations, the community uses other self-appellations too, namely, *Lingurari* [‘spoonmakers’ in Romanian] and *Ursari* [‘bear trainers’ in Romanian], and also *Kopanari* [‘wooden bowls makers’ in Bulgarian], *Fusari* [‘spindles makers’ in Romanian] and *Kašikči* [‘spoon-makers’ in Turkish], etc. (Petulengro 1915-1916; Rațiu 1940; Ёонов 1995; Marushiakova and Popov 1997, 1998). Regional divisions are also maintained within this community, thus, according to the region in which they live, they are divided into *Monteni*, *Intreni*, *Kamčieni*, *Dobrudženi*, *Tracieni*, etc. They live almost entirely in villages and in some small towns (former villages), spread over almost whole Bulgaria in separate (but in most cases not clearly separated) own neighborhoods. They are present in almost all regions without Rhodope mountain areas and only marginally in Pirin Macedonia.

Representatives of this community speak of themselves most often as *Vlasi* [Wallachians] or *Rumâni* [‘Romanians’ in Bulgarian], and even, though reluctantly, as *Rumânski Cigani* [‘Romanian Gypsies’ in Bulgarian] (Marushiakova and Popov 2001b; Marushiakova et al. 2001; Dorondel 2002; Șerban 2002). Over the past few decades *Rudari* community in Bulgaria strove to develop and enrich their identity. They presented themselves as ‘true Walachians’ or ‘the most ancient Rumanians’. One of their popular legends claims that the origin of the *Rudari* lies in their own ancient Balkan kingdom of Dacians. Following its destruction some Dacians crossed the Danube and laid the foundations of the Romanian people, while a smaller segment, the direct ancestors the *Rudari* of today, remained in what later became Bulgaria. (Marushiakova and Popov 2000: 86-87) This identity development of the *Rudari* in Bulgaria is not unidirectional, and they have not always opted for Romanianness. In some cases the *Rudari* try to link their origin to important moments in early Bulgarian history. This tendency is present in the ideology of the political party *Democratic Movement ‘Rodolyubie’* [‘patriotism’ in Bulgarian] registered in 1998. According to its leader Ivan Kostov, it is a party of the *Rudari* community and the ethnonym *Rudari* is not derived from Slavic *ruda*

['ore'], but from Slavic *rod* ['family' or 'clan']. As one of our informants said, 'we are descendants of the first old Bulgarian clans who settled in these lands together with Khan Asparukh at the time when the Bulgarian state was founded'. Another political party of the *Rudari*, called '*Rodolyubie 2000*', led by Yulian Dimitrov, was established in 2001. This party participated in national and local levels elections, and according to its program it defines itself as a 'Party of Wallachians–Rudari', opting for a multidimensional and unspecified identity (Marushiakova and Popov 2014a). In any case, the *Rudari* in Bulgaria, however, in spite of perceptions of the majority society and in spite of the benefits, which could eventually come to them as part of *Roma* minority from different donors, categorically refuse to be connected in any way with *Roma* NGOs and *Roma* political parties. (Marushiakova and Popov 2014a)

The opposite is true of the small community of Romanian-speaking *Rudari* in Greece who are concentrated in Athens (Zefyri neighborhood), Volos, Alexandria, etc. (Marushiakova and Popov 2012, 2014a; Kahl and Nechiti 2012). Their neighbors identify them as 'Gypsies' and the *Rudari* share this perception, though they consider themselves a distinctive subgroup of the 'Gypsy' community in Greece (the so called 'Τσιγγάνοι'), and in recent years some of them cooperate with local *Roma* organizations.

Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities also live in post-Yugoslav states. Their self-appellation is *Rudari* in Eastern Serbia, *Banjaši* in Vojvodina, *Bajaši* in Croatia, *Karavlas* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the recent past were living also in today's Republic of Macedonia (Filipesku 1906, 1907; Pavković 1957; Трифуноски 1973; Вукановић 1983; Ђорђевић 1984; Saramandu 1997; Sikimić 2005; Sikimić and Ašić 2008; Sorescu-Marinković 2011ab; Sorescu-Marinković and Sikimić 2011).

These communities usually opt for Wallachian or Romanian identity. Recently, under the influence of the development of the *Roma* movement in Serbia, individual representatives of this Romanian-speaking community sometimes identify themselves as *Roma*. The situation is different in Croatia where the local *Bajaši* (more rarely known as *Ludari*) clearly identify themselves as a distinctive but inseparable part of the *Roma* community. This is reflected also in the names given to their organizations: *Union of Roma Bajaš*, *Democratic Union of Roma from Croatia Bajaši*, and *Union of Roma Ludari*. All these organization are members of an umbrella association, the *Union of the Roma Associations in Croatia*.

In Hungary the circumstances of the Romanian-speaking *Beaš* (or *Bojaš*) are more complicated. They live mainly in Southwestern Hungary, but also in other parts of the country, and are divided into subgroups named after regions in today's Romania from which they migrated (for instance *Ardelan*, *Muntyan*, etc.). In the past, their identity was unambiguously

Cigany ['Gypsy' in Hungarian], and some of them were even unaware that they speak Romanian and thought it to be the 'true Gypsy language' (Kovalcsik 1996; Bodi 1997). In the post-communist period the politically correct designation for the community, *Roma*, appeared. In 1992 the Gandhi High School was founded in Pecs and today it is supported by the Hungarian state and numerous foreign donors with the aim of establishing a *Roma* intelligentsia (Dezsö 2013). The school recruits students mainly from the local *Beaş* community. As a result, parts of the *Beaş* community have gradually adopted *Roma* identity while others preserve their 'Gypsy' and/or *Beaş* identity. There are also suggestions that the idea of the *Beaş* as a separate, non-Gypsy and non-*Roma* community is making inroads.

In Slovakia there is a small number of Romanian-speaking 'Gypsies'. They inhabit several separate settlements in Eastern Slovakia where the so-called *Korytári* ['wooden-bowl-makers' in Slovak] opted for Romanian identity (Horváthová 1964: 80, 91; Stano 1965). In the southern regions near the border with Hungary, in the Hungarian-speaking areas, a small number of *Bajaši* reside, and they also identify themselves as Romanians (Agocs 2003). In Ostrava in the Czech Republic, the migrants from Eastern Slovakia registered a political party in 1990, Organization of Independent Romanians, but it only survived for a few years.

Sub-Carpathian foothills region was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the First World War, in the period between the two world wars is in the range of Czechoslovakia after World War II joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and now is part of Ukraine. Romanian-speaking 'Gypsies' from Sub-Carpathian foothills region is known as the *Kanaloš* ['spoon-makers', from Hungarian] or *Cygane Voloxi* ['Romanian Gypsies' in Ruthenian]. They live in the region of Velykyi Bereznyi, and had family connections with *Korytári* in Slovakia (Beníšek 2012). They identify themselves most often as Romanians. More recently, influenced by the rise of *Roma* NGOs and even more by 'Gypsy' evangelical churches, some revert to 'Gypsy'/*Roma* identity.

The Romanian-speaking 'Gypsies' are living also in other countries outside the region of Eastern Europe. At present, a small *Ludari* community resides in the vicinity of Barcelona in Spain, while even more *Ludari* (or *Bojaš*) live in Latin America and the USA. They identify themselves as 'Gitanos' (ie 'Gypsies'), but stay away from other 'Gypsy' groups and only a few of them enter *Roma* organizations.

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In order to understand the phenomenon of Romanian-speaking 'Gypsies', we have to see what are their origin and historical migrations. They originate from the Danubian Principalities of

Wallachia and Moldavia where they were slaves until the mid-19th century. There were three main categories of such slaves depending on whether they belonged to the prince (slaves of the crown), Orthodox monasteries, or to 'boyars' [noblemen]. The 'Gypsies' of the prince were mainly nomadic, while the 'Gypsies' of monasteries and boyars were mostly settled. The crown's 'Gypsies' were divided into four categories, namely, *Rudari* [ore-miners] or *Aurari* ['gold prospectors', also called *Beași* in Transylvania], *Ursari* [bear trainers], *Lingurari* [spoon makers], and *Laeși* [itinerant Gypsies]. There were two kinds of monastery and boyar 'Gypsies', namely, *Lăieși*, who were nomads, and *Vatrași* ['domestic servants', from Slavic 'vatra' fireplace], who served in households and tilled their masters' land (Achim 1998: 31-85; Marushiakova and Popov 2009).

Significant segments of the descendants of the nomadic 'Gypsies' from Wallachia and Moldova migrated from the two Principalities during the second half of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, spreading all over Europe, with some reaching the Americas (Fraser 1992: 226-238; Marushiakova and Popov 2006). Many of them are descendants of the *Rudari* (*Aurari/Beași*) and *Lingurari* slave categories, however a significant number of them continue to live in contemporary Romania too.

In Romania today Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities use different self-appellation, but generally speaking, in Oltenia and Muntenia they are known as *Rudari* or *Ludari*, in Moldova as *Lingurari*, and in Transylvania, as *Bâeși* or *Beași* (Chelcea 1944ab, 1968; Calotă 1995; Kovalcsik 2007; Marushiakova and Popov 2012; Alexa-Morkov 2012; Costescu 2012, 2013). They are detached from one another and mostly declare themselves to be Romanians, although some of them participate in *Roma* political parties and NGOs. Besides public declaring a Romanian ethnic identity, *Rudari/Lingurari/Beași* currently also tend to declare themselves to be "the real Romanians", "the oldest Romanians", "descendants of the ancient Dacians", and confirmation for all that they find in their legends. However, the surrounding population continues to perceive *Rudari/Lingurari/Beași* as 'Gypsies', or even, as is more often the case, as a distinct community, which is connected to 'Gypsies' and is similar to them in their social position.

In contemporary Romania are also other Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities, who are descendants of the *Vatrași* slave category. They are known by various names, e.g. *Vatrași*, or *Kherutne Roma* (i.e. those who live in houses), *Kaštale Roma* ['wood Gypsies' in Romanes], or 'Țigani de mătase' ['silk Gypsies' in Romanian] (Burtea 1994; Cherata 1994, 1999; Marushiakova and Popov 2012). They have lost their group distinctions and have become a large metagroup community with partially preserved regional or local features. Most

of them demonstrate a preference for a Romanian identity, but recently, as more attention has been paid to *Roma* issues, many of them "rediscovered" their Roma roots and are actively involved in the Roma political parties and NGO's, and publicly pronounce their *Roma* identity.

Similar processes of identity changes among the Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities can be observed also in those parts of the former Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which are currently within borders of other countries, as well as among some of them, who in recent decades have migrated to other countries and regions.

The historical region of Bukovina was part of the Principality of Moldavia, later it was seized by Austria, and after World War I passed from Austro-Hungarian Empire to Romania. In 1940 the Soviet Union annexed Northern Bukovina which is today located in Ukraine, the Chernivtsi region. The Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities living there demonstrate Romanian identity.

Today's Republic of Moldova in the past was part of the Principality of Moldavia. In 1812 the Russian Empire annexed the eastern section of Moldavia, between the rivers Prut and Dniester, known then as Bessarabia. In order to attract settlers and to colonize the southern steppe regions the Empire provides a number of preferences for them. In such way were established numerous villages there, among them two 'Gypsy' villages Faraonovka and Kair (today Krivaya Balka), established by *Lingurari* (Marushiakova and Popov 2005a). Currently, these two villages are in Ukraine, and the local Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities are with Moldovan identity.

Between the two world wars Bessarabia became part of Romania, but in 1945 it was annexed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and made into the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. When the USSR broke up in 1991, the republic became independent. At present, in Republic of Moldova live two Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities – *Vlaxia* (descendants of *Vatrași* slave category), and *Lingurari* (Marushiakova and Popov 2003; Marushiakova et al. 2008; Duminičă 2007ab). Both communities are with Moldovan identity, and although in recent years, the *Roma* NGO-sector implemented various projects targeted to them, the communities on the whole are not inclined to adopt *Roma* identity (with some exceptions among *Vlaxia*).

In the Soviet times some *Lingurari* migrated from Moldova to other Soviet republics. Currently, e.g. small number of them live in Ukraine in the vicinity of Irpen near Kyiv, and in the Russian Federation in the region of Tver. They stick to their Moldovan identity.

The various interrelations between language and identity of Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities are not only numerous and varied, but in many cases, quite contradictory. Historical events and changing social, political and economic circumstances (including through migration) have also influenced the identity choices of these communities. In most cases, however, although the processes continued for generations and over several centuries, the influence of various 'external' factors (i.e. outside the community, reflecting certain process in the macro-society) suggests that the process may slow down, change direction (even turning back), or even take a completely different direction, as with the case of attempts to creation of new identities.

In Romanian historiography there used to be a popular theory that proclaimed the non-Roma origin of the *Rudari*, whereby the *Rudari/Lingurari/Beași* are descendants of an ancient non-Roma local population who acquired 'Gypsy' ethno-cultural traits (Achim 1998; Chelcea 1944ab, 1968; Calota 1995; Șerban 2002). Genetic studies, conducted in recent years, however, have proved their common Indian origin with other 'Gypsy' communities (Klarić et al. 2008). Therefore presented here trends among 'Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities are actually just a variation of a general patterns, which are found in various non-Romanes speaking communities in Eastern Europe (Marushiakova and Popov 2014a). Thus, because of all these different developments in language and identity change among the various communities from Roma origin, it is extremely difficult, even within the foreseeable future, to anticipate what will be the outcome for different Romanian-speaking 'Gypsy' communities in Eastern Europe in the foreseeable future.

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