



Traditional socio-organisation

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The traditional socio-structures described below, are only now intact within a few groups. The Holocaust destroyed the original socio-structure of many, mainly central-European Roma and Sinti groups. Due to the traumatisation of the survivors, it became almost impossible to re-establish a new Roma identity along the former socio-cultural line. In the former Eastern block countries, the forced assimilation, and the involvement in the kolkhoz work had significant consequences, especially for those groups whose socio-organisation was closely linked to their nomadic way of life.

Already in previous centuries, the different historical and socio-cultural developments, had led to a broad spectrum of socio-organisations within the Roma society. The Roma and Sinti do not represent a homogeneous community. There are numerous different groups, which can be subdivided into sub-groups. There is an intra-group collective consciousness that characterises comparable ethnic groups only in a very reduced way. Primarily, the Roma and Sinti feel their belonging to their extended family and to their group.

Due to this heterogeneity it is only possible to indicate intra-group common ground and to describe in detail only group-specific socio-organisations. [Subgroups of Roma] The consciousness of being Roma, the desire to be independent and to disassociate oneself from the *Gadže*, as well as the ability to adapt to the relative conditions to the extent of surviving without endangering ethnic identity, are characteristic features of all Roma and Sinti groups. The socio-structure defines the us-feeling (collective consciousness) by determining the borders towards the *Gadže*, but also to other Roma and Sinti groups. In the following I want to go into the socio-organisation of two Valch groups and of one Balkan Roma group. [Classification] Milena Hübschmannová describes in detail the traditional socio structures and family structures of the *Servika-Roma* – a central group.

The traditional socio-organisation of the Kalderaš and the Lovara

The largest social unit within the traditional socio-organisation of the *Kalderaš* is the *natia* or *řasa* ("tribe"). Within the *natia* or *řasa* there is no fixed order to be followed by all the members. It is a variable model, which follows the continuously changing needs of the people. The *natia* / *řasa* consists of the *vici* (Sg. *vica* / Pl. *vici*) ("kinship groups").

The *vica* denotes a community of the different extended families of one common ancestor. A *vica* can be composed of dozens but also of hundreds of members spread over different countries. Nevertheless, the *vica* offers a higher potential for identification than the *natia* because of its manageable size and structure. *Vici* have mostly got their own *Romani* names, often they derive from the founder or the progenitor (e.g. *Frinkuleshti* – named after Frinkulo Michailovitch).

It is preferred to marry within one *vica* even if also marriages of friend *vici* are possible. The marriage can be carried out in a patri-linear¹ as well as in a matri-linear² way; it depends on whether the Rom feels more related to the kinship group of the father or to the one of the mother. [*Fajta*]

1 If the marriage is carried out in a patri-linear way the children take the surname of the father, the domicile of the family is in the father's home, or with the family of the father, and the succession is realised following the father's line.

2 The mother's line determines the name of the children, the domicile as well as the succession.



It is part of the duties of a vica-member to help those members of the kinship group who need help, to participate in the *pomana* (death meal) held for important members of the kinship group, and to accept the decisions made by traditional jurisdiction – *kris* .

Before, the following unit within the socio-organisation of the *Kalderaš* was named *cera* and corresponded to our notion of extended family. *Cera* means "tent" and indicates the traditional, nomadic way of life of the *Kalderaš*, as well as the related living communities in huge tents. Nowadays, the *Kalderaš* who are leading a settled life call a household of three-generations *familija* . If only two generations are living together in one household, the term *čeledo* is commonly used.

The traditional socio-organisation of the *Lovara* differs from that of the *Kalderaš* only in the sense that *nipo* corresponds to the *Kalderaš*-term *vica*. A two-generation-household is called *čaládo*.

The traditional socio-organisation of the Prileper Arlije

In its basic structure the traditional socio-organisation of the *Arlije* is the same as the one of the *Kalderaš* or the *Lovara*. The relevant difference is that the *Arlije* have brought in line their socio-organisation to the needs of their group, who have been leading a settled life for centuries. The *Arlije* calls an extended family of a common ancestor *prekari*. *Prekari* corresponds to the *Kalderaš*-definition *vica*.

Amen sinam sare Roma vo Prilep, sare sinam jek anav jek nacija, jek običaj kharas. Živoinasas amen pojčke pala ko gava. I amen sare o Roma maškar amende na pindžarasas amen. Oti o phure, so vakerena o phure lengere dadengere dada, živoinasas pala ko gava. Katar o gava iznašle, ale peske ki dis. Amende si, te phenas, deš anava čingarol pe Kadri. I tu, ako man rodes ma vo Prilep. Kaj bešel o Kadrija? Koga Kadrija? Zato treba te džanes mo prekari, o Kadrija katar o Kiramovci. Togas celo Prilep man džanol ma.

"We are all Roma in Prilep. We have all got one name, we are one nation, we have a custom. (Before) we lived in the villages. We, all Roma, did not know each other. Because, as the elders told us, our great-grandfathers lived in villages. From the villages they all escaped to town. We have got twelve names, for example *Kadri*. If now you are looking for me in Prilep, – "Where is *Kadrija* living? – Which *Kadrija*?" That's why it is necessary that you know my *Prekari*, *Kadrija* of the *Kiramovi*'s. Then, all Prilep will know me."

The different *prekari*-definitions derive from the founder or the progenitor, as within the *Kalderaš*.

The traditional socio-organisation of the Sinti and the Manouche

Similarly, the traditional socio-structure of the *Sinti* or the *Manouche* can be classified in three central units. The smallest unit is the *familija*, which is increased to extended family in a patri-linear way.

Two or three friend *familii* form the next level in terms of size; the mostly endogamous³ clan – the *Manouche* in Alsace call it *i mensché*. The heads of the families (Sg. *phuro* / Pl. *phure*) who in the ideal case are related to each other as mutual fathers-in-law together, are the leaders of the clan. Similar to the *natia* or the *rasa* for the *Vlach* Roma the largest social unit of the *Sinti* – *unsre Leute* (the tribe)

³ Endogamy means that a marriage within the respective group is carried out. In contrast to this concept, the *familii* represent an exogamy community because the marriage partners are looked for outside the group.



– is composed of all clans. The French *Manouches* and all further tribes (e.g. Sinti *piémontais*) together form the group of the *Sinti* and the *Manouches*.

Family Structure

At the centre of every traditionally living Roma and Sinti group there is the family, which is organised in a strictly patriarchal way. The man represents the head of the family, and is the one responsible for its material survival, the woman has to subordinate. It is her general responsibility to care for the education of the children and to look after the elder or ill members of the family; furthermore she is responsible for the household, for the cooking. Beside this she must be able to contribute to the family income (e.g. selling the products produced by the man). This is the reason why the women are the decisive connecting link between the societies of the Roma and the *Gadže*. They are continuously in contact with the non-Roma and for the non-Roma they are the real representatives of the Roma's culture.

The central requirements for a future bride or for a daughter-in-law (*bori*) are virginity, industry (*harniko*) and the fulfilment of the ritual cleanliness rules. [*Mahrime*] The controlling organ is the *kris*, which is formed exclusively by men. It is true that the cleanliness rules attach to the women a certain power and protect their private lives; if, however, a *Romni* offends these principles, the worst consequence could be expulsion from the group.

Economic Level

The central economic unit within the socio-organisation of the *Kalderaš* is the *kumpania*, which is the union of more *cerha* / *vici* or of the members of different *cerha* / *vici* in order to form an economic community. A *kumpania* does not follow a strict order but represents a loose association, which can be extended or reduced permanently, depending on the requirements of the present connections. There are unions similar to a *kumpania* also within the *Sinti*.

Also in the southern Balkan area and especially in Kosovo, a further form of economic community could develop due to the comparably Roma-friendly policy and society. The Roma in Prizren (e.g. *Arlije*⁴) who had already been leading a settled life by the 12th century, founded, at that time, trade associations which are comparable to the craftsmen guilds in central and western Europe. Beside their economic relevance they also fulfilled an important social function. For the non-Roma they considerably contributed to the standing of the group. The annual guild celebrations represented a part of the celebration tradition and influenced the ethnic identity of the group. Every guild had its own flag and a patron (*o biri* – patron of the blacksmith's guild). This tradition remained for centuries until the Kosovo war (1999). Nowadays it is present only in fragments.

⁴ The name *Arlije* refers to the former settled life of the group. It can be traced back to the Turkish *yer* (place). In Turkish *Yerli* means "native".



Sources

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