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Paradoxes of Gender and Ritual in Turkish Romani: An Ethnographic Analysis

This ethnographic study explores the complex interplay between gender roles and rituals within Turkish Romani marriage practices. The research investigates how Romani girls are socialized into womanhood, emphasizing the cultural expectations and responsibilities placed upon them from a young age. The study highlights the separation of girls from boys as they approach adolescence, signifying their preparation for future marriages. It examines the restrictions placed upon young women, including limited mobility and social interaction with men outside the family unit. Paradoxically, the study reveals how Romani women, despite their restricted social roles, play a crucial economic role in the family. They contribute significantly through various occupations like daily labor, cleaning, fortune-telling, and flower selling. However, the patriarchal structure of the family deems them subordinate, viewing them as property acquired through monetary transactions. The ability to bear sons holds significant weight, as it is seen as a defining aspect of womanhood within the Romani community. The study delves into the importance of childbirth and motherhood, emphasizing the centrality of the “puri dai” rituals, signifying a woman's commitment to upholding traditional practices. By examining these gendered rituals and expectations within Romani marriage customs, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of women in Turkish Romani society.

Keywords: Ethnography, gender, ritual, paradoxes, patriarchy, Turkish Romani.

Introduction

This ethnographic study delves into the intriguing phenomenon of the gender paradox within Turkish Romani communities. We aim to unpack this complexity by examining two key aspects: family structure and associated rituals. By analyzing these interconnected elements, we can gain a deeper understanding of the roles and status of Romani women.

Family as the Locus of Socialization: The Romani family serves as the cornerstone of social life. Often referred to as the “school of life”, it is the primary setting for transmitting cultural traditions and practices across generations [1]. Within this “tribal context”, strong filial relationships are paramount, forming the foundation for authority and power dynamics. The presence of children holds immense significance, with childlessness viewed as a source of misfortune and a potential justification for divorce [2]. Romani families are typically large and extended, encompassing parents, children, grandparents, and sometimes even more distant relatives.

The Paradoxical Position of Romani Women: Romani women occupy a space fraught with contradictions. They shoulder a significant burden in maintaining the social fabric of the community and contribute substantially to the family's economic well-being. Yet, despite these vital contributions, they often struggle to achieve a social status commensurate with their responsibilities. From a young age, girls are meticulously socialized into the roles of ideal wives and devoted mothers. Furthermore, they are expected to develop skills that enable them to contribute financially to the household. This presentation draws upon the rich data collected during a fourteen-years ethnographic field study conducted within Turkish Romani communities. By analyzing family structure and associated rituals, we aim to shed light on the complex interplay between gender roles and cultural practices, ultimately revealing the nuances of the gender paradox within this fascinating social group.

1. Family Structure and the Gender Paradox in Turkish Romani Society

Turkish Romani families are characterized by a complex interplay between extended kinship structures and a patriarchal social order. Extended families, encompassing multiple generations living under one roof, are the norm. This close-knit structure provides a strong sense of community and social support for its members. However, this patriarchal framework also presents a fascinating paradox regarding gender roles.

Paradoxical Power Dynamics: Despite the seemingly subordinate status of Romani women in broader Turkish society, they wield significant power and influence within the family unit. Romani women often act

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as the de facto heads of households, managing finances, making crucial decisions, and overseeing the upbringing of children. Their role in preserving cultural heritage and traditions is central, and they are highly respected for their wisdom and knowledge.

The Duality of Power and Constraint: This power dynamic within the family coexists with limitations faced by Romani women. They are often subjected to gender-based violence and societal discrimination. Educational and employment opportunities outside the domestic sphere remain limited. Understanding this paradox requires a nuanced analysis of historical, cultural, and social factors that have shaped Romani social norms.

Significance of the Paradox: Examining the gender paradox within Turkish Romani families is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote gender equality and empower Romani women. By acknowledging the complexities of power dynamics within the family unit, we can create more targeted interventions that address both societal limitations and leverage the existing power Romani women hold within their communities.

The gender paradox observed within Turkish Romani families presents a multifaceted challenge with deep roots in Roma history, cultural practices, and established social norms. Understanding this paradox is critical for developing effective strategies that promote gender equality and empower Romani women.

1.1. The Importance of Children: Roles and Responsibilities in Turkish Roma Families

For Roman families, children are the essence, target, and center of life for Gypsies. Children have salient roles and functions within family [1; 79]. In Türkiye, boys usually act as companion to their mothers children of mothers doing “bundling” (*bohçacılık*). Moreover, the supervision and control of adult sisters are their tasks. As for maiden, they are occupied with doing cleaning, cooking, dishwashing, and water-carrying at home, or in tent.

In Gypsyish families, children participate in the sustenance of family, as well. Children of sedentary Romans contribute to family economy by shining shoes, selling pretzels, and, sometimes begging [3]. Hence, having so many children does not impose too much of a burden to them. Gypsies in Türkiye to a great extent, uphold the structure of families with many children.

1.2. Gender Segregation and the Restricted Lives of Young Roma Girls in Turkey

Till the period of adolescence, the Gypsyish girls and boys play with each other, wander through wilderness, and feel free to get shower in creeks. Yet from the moment they reached the age of puberty, the societal path of young girls and boys are separated. Well then, they begin to engage in feminine and masculine roles; and especially prepare for their future marriage. Young girls are taken to a strict protection till marriage. They alone will not be sent to anywhere, cannot work, and cannot talk to foreign men [1; 81]. However, under the supervision of her brother, or other close relatives, they may work, perform belly-dance, beg, or sell flowers. So the controlling eyes of the whole family and relatives are over their young girls; thereby, for them, they are protected.

The most distinctive features of Roman women, separating them from other women, are their mode and form of clothing. Apparel of Gypsies, especially of Gypsyish women, is particularly featured with vivid colors [2; 23]. In their clothing, they considerably prefer pink color, known as “Gypsyish Pink” (*Çingene Pembesi*). What is more, red color has an important place in the life of Gypsies in that it is an auspicious color for Gypsies. And still other eye-catching bright colors adorn Gypsyish clothes. Gypsyish women especially prefer skirts with flowers, spotted, and rose motif. Besides red-green color, green is also of great importance, for it is regarded as an indicator of real Gypsiness [4]. Refraining from revealing their legs, elderly women wear long skirt or baggy trousers. As for young girls, they today choose ready-made clothes appropriate to their economic capability. Young girls wear in particular very eye-catching wearing at weddings.

At the head of the job performed, Gypsyish girls prefer belly-dance; so far as they get money for this in the wedding and entertainment of indigenous people. At nearly every home, they present in the evenings a feast of music and dance, called *devriye* (“rounded [music and dance]”) for costumers in Sulukule, Istanbul. Musicians in these houses are composed of usually father, brother, sister, and close relatives; while belly-dancer is usually the daughter of house [5].

1.3. The Duality of Women's Roles in Turkish Roma Society: Burden Bearers and Cultural Guardians

Women are the vanguard of the Gypsy families. In addition to their household duties, they take the livelihood of their families upon themselves. Gypsies in Türkiye carry considerably the burden of household economy by doing such jobs as bundling, charring, begging, fortune telling, witchcraft, florist, and the like. Although women perform many functional tasks, they are regarded as negligible beings owing to patriarchal

family structure. Since purchasable with money in their customs, women are considered to be a kind of property [2; 21]. Even before giving birth to a baby boy, women may not be able to be elevated to the status of “feminine” (*romni*) [6]. Therefore, the most important role of woman in family is to be mother and to bring many children to the world. The Importance of motherhood in the Gypsy families is described as follows: (Mother) who look after everything, and is a “Puri dai”, who is remain connected to the old sacred sexual rituals. She give birth, children, especially male children, to her husband, and carry the burden of the group [6; 131].

It should be state here that Gypsy women in Türkiye have shown great loyalty to their husband. Their loyalty toward their husbands is really spectacular. In the aim to help, expedite the needs and necessities of their husbands, they endure many hardships; get through accidents, miseries, and troubles (Mérinée, 1936; 84) [7]. In many parts of Türkiye, we have detected this situation clearly. For instance, among the Gypsies living in Zonguldak, Türkiye, the day when a bride married, she promises that she will take very good care of her husband. This practice is carried out as follows: Immediately after the wedding the groom is put into a sack; and the bride comes next to the sack, and swears that she will take good care of her husband in front of witnesses.

Gypsies in various regions of Türkiye practice usually soothsaying, such as palmistry, fortune telling by throwing bean, and coffee. Fortunetelling is implemented only by women; namely Gypsyish men cannot practice it. Regarding this issue, Western sources lay bare that Gypsies came to Paris in 1427, and practiced fortunetelling, witchcraft, and palmistry to make their livelihood. This shows that they practiced their profession vividly since their arrival in Europe [8]. According to researchers in this arena, the Gypsy women get certain knowledge against natural forces, and have conscious heritage of that kind of knowledge for centuries [9; 24].

The elderly who are the protector of tradition and experience have very special position, and has high respect in all Gypsy groups. Especially, the oldest woman of the group has a great importance in preserving customs and traditions. Such motifs as “Gypsy Mother” and “Gypsy Queen” show how Gypsies pay reverence to experienced and older women in their traditions. At the same time, elderly women are the guards for moral values of young Gypsy girls [10].

In Türkiye, the elderly, be they men, or women, are esteemed highly without discrimination among both nomadic and sedentary Gypsies. On the other hand, the elderly men have a great importance for the whole group, while the importance of the elderly women, to a great extent, can be observed among women. In addition, grandparents are highly esteemed within families.

1.4. Leading the Family: Authority, Livelihood, and the Roles of Roma Men in Turkey

Life in a Gypsy family is determined by moral and traditional norms. Within the framework of these norms, men assume their roles. Accordingly, they are the head of family, and promoters of livelihood. In the family, the greatest authority is based on father. Other family members depend on the absolute authority of father. Among nomadic Gypsies, the duty of men as follows: accommodation, housing, ascertaining the time and direction of immigration, supplying food, beverages, and practicing jobs that are in accordance with the spirit of immigration. However among sedentary Gypsies, men are engaged in doing music, portering, shoe shining, selling pretzels, and peddling.

Though very simple and unsophisticated, nomadic Gypsies have roughly a division of labor between man and woman. The manufacturers of this economy are men, its sellers and distributors are women. A Gypsy man spent the day manufacturing in his tent, while a Gypsy woman sells available products. This situation continues today in the same way as in the past [11]. However, this division of labor is not always so. Heavy duties usually fall to women, whereas men spend their times in coffee houses, or in tents doing nothing. Among some of the nomadic Gypsy groups, men are not engaged in any manufacturing jobs, just stay where they are earning money by fighting cock in coffeehouses in their quartering places. Especially, the male members of the group, called “*Malikli*”, or “*Melikan tribe*”, give great importance to cockfighting, and make sums of money from this practice.

Among semi-nomadic Gypsies, one can see a clear division of labor between men and women. In general, greater part of duties falls upon women, too. However, the male members of the group collect scraps, and exchanging them with plastic bins and baskets, and sell them.

2. Negotiating Identity: Romani Traditions, Gender, and Change in Turkish Communities

Tradition is the foundation of Gypsyish life. From birth to death, all crevices of Gypsy life are determined by tradition. Therefore, they are bound tightly to their traditions and culture. In other words, Gypsies

succeeded in maintaining, by and large, their traditions and cultures. In this juncture, the tradition of gendered paradox will be discussed [12].

Romani people, also known as Roma or Gypsies, are an ethnic group with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Despite centuries of marginalization and discrimination, Romani traditions have persisted and continue to play an important role in the lives of Romani people around the world. This ethnographic study explores the preservation of Romani cultural heritage through a focus on Romani traditions.

The study draws on data collected from Romani communities in Türkiye over a period of 1996–2010. Through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups, the study investigates how Romani traditions are transmitted, practiced, and adapted in the face of contemporary challenges.

2.1. Endogamy and Exchange: Marriage Practices and Social Cohesion Among Turkish Roma

Despite their historical mobility, Turkish Roma communities have exhibited remarkable resilience in maintaining a distinct cultural identity. One crucial factor contributing to this persistence is the practice of endogamy, or marriage within the group [13]. This phenomenon, observed across Roma populations worldwide, prioritizes marital unions between close or distant relatives, often at a young age (Sutherland, 1990).

Traditionally, marriages within Turkish Roma communities are often arranged. These arrangements, historically referred to as “purchasing”, “exchanging”, or even “abducting” brides, typically occur at a young age. On average, females marry between 13 and 17 years old, while males marry between 15 and 19 (reference source needed). While the terminology used can vary, these practices can be understood as a form of arranged marriage with an economic exchange component.

A significant aspect of these arrangements is the bride price, a payment made by the groom's family to the bride's family. The amount varies depending on location and the socioeconomic status of the families involved. Current estimates suggest that the average bride price in Turkey now exceeds \$100,000, a substantial increase from reports of \$5,000 in the United States in 1975 [6, 2, 14]. Disagreements over the bride price can reportedly lead to the dissolution of the marriage, with the bride's family reclaiming her. Similarly, in cases of bride abduction for marriage (a practice of disputed prevalence), the bride's family may demand compensation (*drahoma*) from the groom's side.

Turkish Roma society adheres to a patriarchal structure, evident in post-marital residence patterns. In this system, the groom traditionally does not reside with the bride's family. Such an arrangement is considered unacceptable and carries significant social stigma. Men who reside with their wives' families are reportedly denied the title “rom” (man) and may even be referred to as “house gypsy” [15]. This practice underscores the importance of patrilocality (residence with the husband's family) within Turkish Roma traditions, even if it contradicts claims of flexibility in other aspects [13; 463].

Our research suggests that polygamy may be present to some extent among Turkish Roma communities. We encountered instances of men with multiple wives, some with as many as seven or eleven. The reasons for this practice are complex and likely multifaceted. One potential factor is the patriarchal structure of Roma society, which traditionally grants men greater authority within marriage. Additionally, the absence of formal marriage registration, particularly among nomadic Roma groups, may contribute to the practice. Furthermore, the concept of bride price might influence polygamy. Since the economic burden falls primarily on the first marriage, subsequent marriages may not be as financially prohibitive for wealthier men [13; 464].

Polygamy finds justification in some societies, potentially due to the concept of male privilege ingrained through religious and traditional structures. This emphasis on masculinity might lead to overlooking shortcomings in men while undervaluing women's strengths, even though women often carry significant economic burdens within the household. This creates an inconsistency between perceived gender roles and economic realities, suggesting an unequal distribution of power and value. In the context of Romani communities [16], the practice of a husband taking additional wives despite his existing wife's sacrifices could be interpreted as reinforcing a patriarchal system that prioritizes male desires over female contributions.

The presence of polygamy in some Turkish Roma communities might be *طبترم* (*murtabit*, meaning “associated with”) both patriarchal social structures and economic considerations. Within a patriarchal system, men traditionally hold greater power within the family, which could be a contributing factor. Additionally, the economic burden of the household might be distributed differently in polygamous marriages. Some argue that having multiple wives could potentially increase a family's overall economic output, particularly in nomadic communities where family size can be advantageous for certain tasks [13; 465]. It is important to note, however, that this perspective is not universally accepted and the potential downsides of a larger family structure should also be considered.

The process of dissolving a marriage within Turkish Roma communities differs from the legal procedures of mainstream society. Due to the absence of formal marriage contracts, dissolutions may occur outside of official channels. One common practice involves the husband leaving his wife at her family's home. However, this can be a risky situation for the husband, who may fear retaliation from the wife's family [12; 91].

It's important to note that women may not have the same level of agency in divorce as men. While unhappy wives may face social isolation if they attempt to leave their husbands, husbands who send their wives away may lose them permanently. The example cited from Çorlu, where a wife was allegedly sold to another man by her father after being sent back home, highlights the potential vulnerability of women in such situations [12; 91].

Further research is needed to explore the power dynamics and social norms surrounding divorce within Turkish Roma communities. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of both men and women in navigating marital dissolution.

2.1.1. The Daro System: Bride Price in Turkish Roma Culture

As previously mentioned, marriage arrangements in Turkish Roma communities involve a negotiation process centered around the bride price, traditionally referred to as “daro”. This sum varies significantly by region, with reported figures ranging from \$5,000 in Marmara and Aegean regions to \$100,000 in Osmaniye (Ozkan, 2000). Negotiations can be lengthy, with the bride's family initially requesting a high amount that is then reduced to a level the groom's family can afford. In situations where multiple suitors compete for the same bride, the one offering the highest price typically prevails.

Similar practices of bride price negotiation, albeit with different starting figures, have been documented among Roma communities in Germany. Völklein (1981) reports opening bids as high as one million marks, which are ultimately brought down to a more manageable amount through bargaining [17, 18].

Similar to Roma communities across Europe and America [6], wedding celebrations in Turkish Roma communities hold significant importance, alongside the selection of the bride. Our research, encompassing Roma groups from Iğdır to Edirne, indicates that these ceremonies traditionally last for three days. The festivities typically begin on Friday and culminate on Sunday evening, when the bride arrives at the groom's house. Interestingly, across various Roma groups, Sundays are the designated day for the bride (bori) to formally enter the groom's household.

The three-day ceremony follows a specific structure. The first two days are typically celebrated at the bride's house, while the final day shifts to the groom's residence. In Aegean and Marmara regions, a unique custom takes place on the second day. Here, the bride sits on her mother-in-law's lap for at least five minutes. This practice is believed to symbolize the bride's future fertility and productivity, mirroring the qualities of her mother-in-law [13; 465].

Wedding celebrations in Turkish Roma communities involve the exchange of gifts, traditionally categorized as “kırkim” (presented at the bride's house) and “şaba” (presented at the groom's house). In the Thrace region specifically, these gifts and ornaments are often displayed prominently outside the homes for all to see.

Reflecting their love for entertainment and celebration, Turkish Roma communities put considerable emphasis on festivities during weddings. Drinking plays a significant role in these celebrations, and can even be considered the most substantial expense associated with the ceremony [12; 92].

Traditional wedding ceremonies in Turkish Roma communities often involve a custom centered on virginity. The bride (bori) wears a red dress and veil, with red symbolizing virginity and good fortune. Following the consummation of the marriage, a cloth is inspected for signs of virginity. It's important to acknowledge that this practice is not unique to Roma communities and has historical precedents in Turkish society as well.

The bride's mother traditionally displays the cloth to those gathered outside, signifying the bride's virginity. The success or failure of this test can significantly impact the families involved. If the virginity test is not passed, the bride's family may face shame and potentially be pressured to return the bride price. In some instances, the groom's family might accept the situation and allow the bride to stay.

It's important to recognize the potential social and emotional consequences of virginity testing for young women. This practice can be a source of anxiety and pressure, and it does not necessarily provide an accurate measure of sexual history. Further research is needed to explore the evolving attitudes towards this tradition within Turkish Roma communities

The practice of displaying a blood-stained cloth as proof of virginity isn't unique to Roma culture, but extends across many Asian societies. This tradition aims to curb premarital relationships seen as immoral. While outsiders may find it strange or even dehumanizing, for those within the culture, it's a social norm. Every bride anticipates the public display of the bedsheets, acting as both a social pressure and a tangible consequence for defying virginity expectations. This practice significantly discourages premarital intimacy.

In Turkish Roma culture, premarital intercourse is strictly forbidden due to a confluence of factors. Nomadic life fosters a strong emphasis on lineage clarity, making virginity a prerequisite for establishing a stable family unit within the community. Loyalty is paramount, and premarital relations are seen as a potential indicator of future infidelity. The return of a non-virgin bride means a significant loss of dignity for the family, not just due to the broken tradition, but also due to the social stigma spread throughout the Roma community. This stigma translates into economic consequences: a lower bride price for the “defective” girl and potential difficulty finding suitable matches for her sisters. Therefore, the prevention of premarital sex is driven by a complex interplay of traditions, religious beliefs, moral values, and the socio-economic realities of nomadic life [13; 466].

Within some European Roma communities, particularly among the Kalderash and Lovari subgroups, traditional wedding ceremonies have been preserved. These ceremonies incorporate a symbolic act of unity. The bride and groom stand facing each other, with the groom on his left leg and the bride on her right. A trusted friend of the groom then places a piece of bread on their intertwined knees and sprinkles salt on it. As they share the bread, their friends sing a song invoking prosperity and harmony. This ritual, with its focus on bread and salt as essential elements, signifies the couple's commitment to build a life together filled with shared resources and enduring happiness, even in the face of potential challenges (Tomašević & Djurić, 1989; 23).

Among settled Turkish Roma communities in western Türkiye, a unique wedding custom takes place. To bestow good luck and happiness on the groom, milk is poured over him, followed by a sprinkling of flour. This symbolic washing with milk and flour precedes the groom taking a bath for thorough cleansing. It's important to note that this tradition appears to be more prevalent in Roma groups that have adopted a more sedentary lifestyle.

2.1.2. Exchange Marriage (“Kampicokali”) in Turkish Roma Communities

Some Turkish Roma communities practice a form of exchange marriage known as “kampicokali” (daughter exchange). This system eliminates the need for bride price payments. Families with marriageable daughters and sons essentially “exchange” their children. Both families benefit from the economic advantage of avoiding bride price expenditures, while still solidifying social ties through marital unions.

Within Turkish Roma communities, a specific type of exchange marriage, known as “kampicokali” (daughter exchange), is prevalent, particularly among close relatives. This practice is often favored due to its economic advantages. Brothers with marriageable children can arrange reciprocal marriages between their offspring. This eliminates the need for bride price payments, a potentially significant financial burden for Roma families. Consequently, daughters may become brides to their paternal or maternal uncles' sons, and sons may marry their paternal or maternal aunts' daughters. This practice underscores the importance of inter-familial solidarity, as traditional bride price customs can be quite expensive. Thus, “kampicokali” marriages offer a more economical alternative for establishing marital alliances and strengthening kinship bonds within the community [13; 466].

Within Turkish Roma communities, a prevalent practice known as “kampicokali” (daughter exchange) facilitates cousin marriage, particularly among fathers with multiple sons nearing marriageable age. This economic strategy involves arranging reciprocal marriages between their children and the children of another man with both sons and daughters of marriageable age. “Kampicokali” marriages eliminate bride price payments, a significant financial burden for many Roma families. Consequently, daughters may marry their paternal or maternal uncles' sons, and sons may marry their paternal or maternal aunts' daughters. This practice strengthens kinship bonds within the community and offers a cost-effective alternative for establishing marital alliances [12; 94-95]

Exchange marriages (“kampicokali”) in Turkish Roma communities possess a unique characteristic that discourages divorce. In the event of a marital dispute leading to divorce on one side, the other family has the reciprocal right to dissolve the marriage of their daughter in return. This creates a system of mutual obligation, effectively pressuring both parties to uphold marital vows. Unlike other marriage types within the community where men might hold more unilateral power in initiating divorce, “kampicokali” marriages in-

centivize compromise and reconciliation. Therefore, this practice serves to minimize arbitrary divorces and promote marital stability.

Exchange marriages, known as “değiş tokuş” [19] or “berdel” in Anatolia and “Şigâr” in Arabic, are a rare tradition. While Islamic Law prohibits them, some communities, particularly Roma groups, continue the practice. A defining characteristic is the reciprocal nature of the union. If a divorce occurs in one marriage, the other marriage within the exchange is also dissolved, regardless of the happiness or presence of children in the second couple. This tradition prioritizes upholding customary obligations over individual circumstances. Notably, unlike the Turkish practice of “değiş tokuş” which can occur between non-relatives, Roma communities often utilize exchange marriage to solidify kinship bonds through cousin marriage. In close-knit societies, marrying relatives offers a sense of security and familiarity to the families involved [13; 667].

2.1.3. Marriage by Elopement and Reconciliation Processes

Marriage by elopement (abduction) is practiced to some extent within both Turkish and European Roma communities, albeit with variations. In Turkey, if the couple is apprehended within three months, the perpetrator's family is expected to pay a reduced bride price. If reconciliation hasn't occurred after six months, tribal leaders intervene to mediate a peaceful resolution. Similarities exist between Turkish and European Roma traditions. Spending a night together outside of marriage is considered a binding union. A woman's refusal of a man's advances can be viewed as an insult, potentially leading to retaliation in the form of a similar act [4; 126]. However, key differences emerge in the post-elopement reconciliation process. Spanish Gitanos typically remain separated until the birth of a son, returning to seek forgiveness from their families [10; 249-250, 18; 34-35]. In contrast, Roma subgroups like Sinti, Roma, Manush, and Kalderash usually reunite within a few weeks. The young husband seeks forgiveness through symbolic gestures like kissing his father-in-law's hand, and may receive a mild reprimand following tradition [4; 126].

These variations in elopement practices highlight the cultural diversity within the broader Roma community.

Turkish Roma marriages are characterized by distinct gender roles and traditions for the bride. She is expected to fulfill all assigned duties and demonstrate successful adaptation within her new family. Notably, childbirth plays a significant role in status elevation. The birth of a son grants the bride the esteemed “romni” status, signifying respect within the community. Furthermore, the father achieves “rom” status, a position of greater respect, upon becoming a father to a son. This elevated status also grants him voting rights in the community tribunal, the “kris romani” [6; 228].

In contrast, the birth of daughters carries different implications. While daughters contribute to the household by assisting with chores and potentially supplementing the family income through arranged marriage later in life, they are not seen as directly contributing to the lineage's continuation. Despite this, the value placed on daughters within Turkish Roma communities shouldn't be underestimated. Their future roles as wives and dedicated family members are seen as crucial to the family's well-being and happiness. Therefore, the birth of a daughter is still viewed positively, with families recognizing the important responsibilities and future contributions these girls will make.

2.1.4. Pregnancy and Childbirth Traditions among Turkish Roma

The forms and rules of conduct among Gypsies are handed down via tradition. From the cradle to the grave, they carry their traditions. According to their traditions, pregnant women are regarded as prenationally “unclean” (*murdar*). Though varied according to antenatal and postnatal periods of women in different groups, women's phase of uncleanness is six weeks. Laundry of woman is separated from those of other members of the family. When washed, her laundries are separately washed from other members of the family. Pregnant women cannot touch cooking utensils, and foodstuffs. This practice is maintained in the same way among Gypsies in Europe.

When a child is born, and cut his/her umbilical cord, she/he is introduced to the world. In the first process, a red cap is put on her/his head. After then, red wool is wrapped around her/his arms, and, lastly a red amulet is worn to the baby. All of these practices aim at guaranteeing a lucky childhood to the new-born child. According to the Gypsy beliefs, the Goddess of Fate / “Grandma” (*Urme*) determines the child's fate seven days later following the birth. That night, mother should be vigilant in order for the child's fate not to sleep.

In the Gypsies groups engaged in music, when a girl is born, four cymbals are put near her ears in the hope that she will be a belly-dancer when grown.

3. Purity and Pollution: The Concepts of “Clean” and “Dirty” in Turkish Roma Culture

The whole system of beliefs and traditions of Gypsies is based on two concepts: “Clean” (*Ouzo*) and “Dirty” (*Márimé*) These two concepts separate, on the one hand, the dead from the alive, on the other hand, the “other” from themselves, forming an invisible bond. The term *Márimé* (“Dirty”) comes from the word *mar*, which means “dead”, and “killing”. As such, this concept is an indication of Gypsyish conception regarding human, animal, cosmos, and nature [2; 24].

It is obvious that the notion of hygiene plays a major role in experimental values in earlier eras. In this study, we want to analyze minutely with respect to the notions of cleanness and dirtiness among Gypsies, ranging from cleaning from infectious diseases to post-death cleansing due to the fear of dead spirit; from avoiding from meats of certain animals to abstaining from sexual relations for a certain period of time during menstruation and postpartum.

For the time being, it is not clear whether the orders of ritual cleansing among some Gypsy groups are based on ancient Indian sources, or a historical root shaped with the interaction with Jewish, or Christian groups. In this respect, the effects of certain Gnostic sects, such as Manichaeism, and Athinganoi in Anatolia, are taken into consideration. During the great exodus of the Gypsy groups, some groups accrued different conceptions and beliefs.

For the sake of generalization, the traditional “Taboo System” of the Gypsy groups is based on these elements: Female bogy and organism, gender segregation according to age levels, discrimination of non-Gypsies, diets, and beliefs associated with death. Here, we will try to evaluate all but the first three.

3.1. Gender and Cleanliness: Taboos Surrounding Birth, Menstruation, and the Female Body

After the birth, the Gypsy woman is regarded unclean. If a woman gives birth to a boy, she is considered to be unclean for seven days, so is her menstruation period. However, she is supposed to stay in tent, or home for 33 days for clearing her blood. Thence, she cannot touch holy things for 40 days ($33 + 7 = 40$ days). If she gives birth to a girl, then she is regarded unclean for two weeks; and besides this, she is supposed to stay in tent, or at home for 66 days. That is to say, she stays 80 ($14 + 66$) days in her home, or tent [10; 245]. The practices of Gypsies in Europe are similar to those of Gypsies living in Turkiye.

The woman who recently gives s birth is regarded taboo, just as bloody patients. Her bed is separated from other family members. Since woman is considered unclean during these days, she is supposed to stay away from other family members let this dirtiness not infect them. During this time, woman is prevented from cooking, and from taking, based on superstitions, hands cleaner in her hand. This is because when she cooks, her dirtiness may infect those who eat this food, or when she cleans house, dirtiness spread to home. Hence, adult daughters, or other wives of husband cook, and clean house. Gypsies in Turkiye name this dirtiness “*márimé*”. This understanding is prevalent among Gypsies in Germany, *Sintis*, who use the term *prasto* for dirtiness.

Just as her/his mother is regarded unclean, a newborn child is regarded so; thus the father of the baby cannot touch her/him for three days. In some cases, the uncleanness time of newborn even takes five or fifteen days. As noted before, woman who gives birth, woman and girl who is in menstruation period, also the wounded patients and the dead are considered dirty; thus they are seen as taboo; and therefore one should carefully avoid touching. This situation is like the customs of primitive societies, which believe that dead, newborn child, menstruating women, and bloody things are taboo [10; 245, 18; 89–95, 20; 58].

In the Bible, ritual dirtiness is described as a contagious disease spreading from one another. One can see that Gypsies use different symbols for purity, impurity, and interdiction from group. Hence, the word *malelo* means “dirty”, “unclean”, “filthy”; the word *uzo* denotes “clean”, “pure”, so on. However, for “ritual dirtiness” they use the term *márimé* [21].

For Gypsies, upper waist of woman is considered clean; whereas lower waist is unclean. There is a logical distinction between upper and lower waist. The upper regions are considered to be clean; while the lower regions are dirty, for in the bottom of the female body, especially the genital regions are related to the mysteries of birth and blood; thence, this region is the source of ritual dirtiness, which is called “*márimé*”. For this reason, the things used for the upper part of waist, such as soap, towels, shaving instruments, combs, cleaning dishes, pillows, table cloths, food containers, and food itself, should not be left in contact with the lower waist of the female body, or with the clothes under belt. If things or persons intentionally or unintentionally touch those unclean parts of woman body, or her skirt, then the thing, the person touching will be considered as *márimé* [22]. The taboo system based on the concept of cleanness and dirtiness is prevalent among the Gypsies in Turkiye and Europe, and so is among those of the Americas, according to the reports.

3.2. Age and Ritual Impurity: How Cleanliness Rules Change Over a Lifetime in Turkish Roma Culture

For Gypsies, the possibilities of “contamination” are related to one’s age level. These levels separate each groups from one another; namely, spouted infants, children, youth, young people after marriage, and the elderly.

Just like her/his mother in the traditional Gypsy families, breast-fed infants are considered unclean (*márimé*) due to her/his relation with the mother [10; 247]. This state of dirtiness of breast-fed infants among Gypsies in Europe continues till baptized, or till a public explanation by the chieftain of the group; as for those in Türkiye this filthiness continues for eight days. Baby boys in some regions are circumcised on the eighth day; thence he is saved from this situation of uncleanness.

Just as other Gypsies in the world, the Gypsyish boys in Türkiye is named *çav / çavo*; as for girls as *çay*. Young girls and boys in this age can get shower without segregation. However, after childhood, when family start searching for his son girls to marry, this young male is called *çavbaro*, i.e., “teenager”. After the initiation of menstruation, girl is called *çaybari*. From now on, young girls and young men are supposed to comply with the principles of *márimé*, and those of strict gender rules. Due to embarrassment, *çaybari* wears long skirts, and wash her laundry separately of their mothers and other older sisters. Complying with the principles of cleanliness and with that of gender relations, she may clean home during her menstruation period.

Gender segregation is preserved in connection with the rules of *márimé*. In the traditions of the Gypsy groups in Europe, such as Kaldaraş, Lovara, Sinti and a few relative groups, just as those in Türkiye, the lower waist of woman is potentially considered as *márimé* [23].

In the preparation of food, one should follow the principles of *márimé*. In fact, no human food essentially is put in the bowls in which laundry and human are washed. Women must be aware of this. Woman cannot touch cooking pots with their skirts. The following situations make foods and drinks unclean; hence cannot be eaten. These are: Woman unintentionally touches food or food containers, touch fruits with her skirt, passes over upstream river, and the like. Thence, all the Gypsy families completely segregate what is clean and dirty. Depending on these rules, a Gypsy must not touch anything dirty/*márimé* [23; 161]. The same rule applies for the European Gypsies. Since illness is considered as uncleanness, the food supplies used by the patient are kept apart from those who are healthy. When a sick person gets healed, she/he throws away the supplies during her/his sickness [18; 89].

3.3. Maintaining Boundaries: “Gacé” (Outsiders) and the Preservation of Roma Culture in Türkiye

Gypsies separates themselves from *gaco* (“non-Gypsies”). There are several reasons for this separation. One of the reasons for this is the preservation of Gypsy culture and tradition. They practice endogamy (consanguineous marriage). If a girl marries with a non-Gypsies (*gaco*) man, she is excluded from the community on the grounds that the principles of family group are denied. Gypsies in principle regards non-Gypsies as “dirty” (*márimé*). Hence, marrying with a *gaco* man makes Gypsy girl “dirty” (*márimé*). On the other hand, the opposite situations —namely, a Gypsy man may marry with a non-Gypsy girl is welcome on the condition that the would-be bride should fully comply with the cultural values of Gypsies. The same thing applies to the *gaco* who wants to accept the values of being Gypsy. In Türkiye, we did empirical research, during which we have come across that both Gypsy male and non-Gypsy female get married, and also though being *gaco*, man who get married with Gypsy woman, become gradually *romanized*. Based on personal researches, Gypsies in Europe are stick to these strict rules.

What is more, related to the taboo system prevail among Gypsies, they do not bath in the river, or stream in which *gaco* bathed before. This is because they consider that the *gacos* are “dirty”; hence, they may infect the river, or stream. In the same way, according to their belief, Gypsies do not bath in the creeks, or streams in which woman, and *goca* bathed before, or the lower waist of woman is immersed in water. Gypsy men often get bath in rivers in the skylight nights, for at nights neither women, not *gacos* may enter the river; hence it is considered as clean.

4. Discussion and Analytical Modalities

This study reveals the gender paradox and ritual codes of Gypsies in Türkiye. In line with understanding stemming from the Gypsy traditions, woman in this culture is overlooked and treated as second-class citizens. Since their childhood, women are trained in accord with prescribed roles, namely motherhood; thence, they are expected to consent with their destiny. Despite carrying the burden of all the family, they are sold like a commodity, and even unless gives birth to a baby-boy, they do not reach to the stage of motherhood. That is to say, without giving birth to a baby-boy, they cannot solidify their position at home. Under these

circumstances, the Gypsy women are, by and large, forced to live in a centuries back ethos. What the tradition predestines the role for women, they are supposed to play that role without hesitation.

From an outside view, despite all unfavorable conditions from which they suffer, Gypsy women know how to be happy and not erase their smiling faces manifesting the joy of living. And one can see that happiness in their songs, dances, and entertainments. They perform salient tasks in both their noteworthy roles in the family, and their role of preserving and transmitting of cultural heritage of the bygone eras. I recommend to everyone that all get acquainted with these beautiful people laden with joy of life.

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A.P. Өзкан

Түрік сығандарындағы гендерлік парадокстар мен рәсімдер: этнографиялық талдау

Бұл этнографиялық зерттеу түрік сығандарының неке тәжірибесіндегі гендерлік рөлдер мен рәсімдер арасындағы күрделі байланысты зерттейді. Мақалада сыған қыздарының бойжетіп, үй болуға қалай дайындалатыны туралы айтылған, оларға жас кезінен бастап берілетін міндеттерді атап көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар жасөспірім жасқа жақындаған кезде қыздар мен ұлдардың бөлінуіне баса назар аударады, бұл олардың болашақ некеге дайындығын көрсетеді. Онда жас әйелдерге қойылған шектеулер, соның ішінде жинақылық және отбасынан тыс ер адамдармен әлеуметтік қарым-қатынас

қарастырылады. Парадоксальды түрде, бірақ зерттеу көрсеткендей, сығандар әйелдері шектеулі әлеуметтік рөлдеріне қарамастан, отбасында маңызды экономикалық рөл атқарады. Олар күнделікті жұмыс, тазалау, сәуегейлік және гүл сату сияқты әртүрлі кәсіптердің арқасында отбасының дамуына айтарлықтай үлес қосады. Алайда, отбасының патриархалдық құрылымы оларды ақшалай операциялардан алынған меншік ретінде қарастыра отырып, бағынышты жағдайға қояды. Ұл туу қабілеті үлкен маңызға ие, өйткені ол сығандар қауымдастығындағы әйелдіктің анықтаушы аспектісі болып саналады. Зерттеу бала туу мен ана болудың маңыздылығын зерделеген, әйелдің дәстүрлі тәжірибені ұстануын білдіретін «пури дай» рәсімдерінің орталық рөлін көрсетеді. Сығандардың неке әдет-ғұрыптары аясында осы гендерлік рәсімдер мен үміттерді талдай отырып, зерттеу түрік сығандар қоғамындағы әйелдердің көп қырлы рөлін тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді.

Кілт сөздер: этнография, гендер, рәсім, парадокс, патриархат, түрік сығандары.

А.Р. Озкан

Гендерные парадоксы и ритуалы у турецких цыган: этнографический анализ

Данное этнографическое исследование подчеркивает сложную взаимосвязь между гендерными ролями и ритуалами в брачных практиках турецких цыган. В статье показано, как цыганские девушки социализируются и становятся женщинами, при этом сохраняя культурные ожидания и обязанности, возлагаемые на них с раннего возраста. Кроме того, подчеркивается разделение девочек и мальчиков по мере приближения к подростковому возрасту, что свидетельствует об их подготовке к будущему браку. В частности, рассмотрены ограничения, налагаемые на молодых женщин, включая ограниченную мобильность и социальное взаимодействие с мужчинами вне семьи. Парадоксально, но исследование показывает, что цыганские женщины, несмотря на свои ограниченные социальные роли, играют важную экономическую роль в семье. Они вносят значительный вклад в развитие семьи благодаря различным профессиям, таким как ежедневный труд, уборка, гадание и продажа цветов. Однако патриархальная структура семьи ставит их в подчиненное положение, рассматривая как собственность, приобретенную в результате денежных операций. Способность рожать сыновей имеет большое значение, поскольку считается определяющим аспектом женственности в цыганской общине. В исследовании рассмотрена важность деторождения и материнства, подчеркивается центральная роль ритуалов «пури дай», символизирующих приверженность женщины соблюдению традиционных практик. Анализируя эти гендерные ритуалы и ожидания в рамках цыганских брачных обычаев, исследование способствует более глубокому пониманию многогранной роли женщин в турецком цыганском обществе.

Ключевые слова: этнография, гендер, ритуал, парадоксы, патриархат, турецкие цыгане.

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