Dom/Garachi in Azerbaijan among the Dom Communities in the Middle East and North Africa

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Abstract

The countries of the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), along with Turkey, represent the only region in the world where all three main subdivisions of the heterogeneous community historically referred to as "Gypsies" — Dom, Lom, and Roma — have coexisted (or, until recently, coexisted) in close proximity. In Azerbaijan, two distinct Dom communities are currently present: Iranian Dom and Kurdish Dom. While both acknowledge a shared overarching identity, they maintain clear distinctions in their everyday lives. This article presents findings from two field research studies conducted in Azerbaijan, through which a preliminary understanding was developed regarding the territorial distribution, lifestyles, socio-economic status, and complex identity structures of these two Dom communities, as well as their interactions with the Roma and Lom populations. The Azerbaijani case is further contextualised within broader historical and political frameworks, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the position of Dom communities across the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords
Dom, Lom, Roma, Azerbaijan, South Caucasus, Middle East, North Africa, identities.

Introduction

At the dawn of Romani Studies, the first learned society dedicated to the study of communities then collectively referred to as “Gypsies” was established: the Gypsy Lore Society, founded in Edinburgh in 1888. During its early decades, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, research primarily focused on the collection of primary materials—historical, linguistic, ethnographic, folkloristic, ethnomusicological, and so forth. This emphasis on the communities themselves remained central until the mid-20th century, when scholarly attention gradually began to shift. Researchers increasingly focused on state policies and, more broadly, on societal attitudes towards these communities, eventually giving rise to comprehensive studies of Antigypsyism / Antiziganism.

More recently, a third shift in Romani Studies has become evident. Rather than focusing on the communities or their relationship with broader society, scholars are now often turning their attention to the works of those writing about these communities—frequently through the lenses of so-called Woke Ideology and Cancel Culture. As a result, the direct study of the communities themselves has increasingly faded into the background.

While it remains difficult to assess the long-term implications of these developments, they are undeniably present and merit recognition. We do not question the legitimacy of emerging research paradigms. Nonetheless, the recent dominance of theoretical interpretation has, in our view, overshadowed the foundational importance of primary data collection. It is this concern that has motivated us to write the present article, in which we return to the early research traditions of the Gypsy Lore Society by presenting current knowledge on the Dom communities in Azerbaijan, supplemented by findings from two short-term fieldwork studies conducted in 2013 and 2022.

State of Art

Along with Asia Minor, the South Caucasus is the historical region where live the representatives of the three main subdivisions, namely ‘Dom – Lom – Rom’, of the communities whose ancestors migrated in the Middle Ages from the Indian subcontinent towards the West and which were known in the past by the generalising term ‘Gypsies’ and nowadays are often brought under the umbrella of appellation ‘Roma’ (although there are reasonable doubts how appropriate, ethical and most importantly, how academically justified this term is for communities that do not wish to be labelled as such).

This division, 'Dom – Lom – Rom', has been known in academia for a long time[1], but the studies on the individual subdivisions so far are unevenly distributed. This is understandable and largely natural because the total number of representatives of the 'Lom' and 'Dom' communities is many times lower than those of the 'Rom' subdivision. The vast majority of the research, which is nowadays separated into a multidisciplinary study track, designated as Romani Studies, is dedicated to the communities of the 'Rom' subdivision (primarily Roma, but also Sinti, Manush, Cale, Kaale, Romanichals, etc.), living mainly in Europe (and from there they settled in Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, North and Latin America, Australia).

There are much fewer studies of the 'Lom' subdivision (the self-appellation Lomavtik), called in Armenia and Georgia by the surrounding population Bosha and in Turkey – Posha[2].

The situation is relatively worse with the existing studies of the representatives of the 'Dom' subdivision, who live in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Attempts at more comprehensive, synthesising works on specific topics, e.g. the grammar of Domari (the language of Dom)[3], are exceptions. With a certain amount of convention, we could also add Kristina Richardson's book[4] here, although its content is far from corresponding to its (over)ambitious title. There is also a relatively limited number of fragmentary historical, ethnographic and linguistic materials about these communities, living in different places in the individual countries of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as those devoted to specific topics, e.g. refugees from the war in Syria[5], the vast majority of whom currently live in Turkey, as well as in Jordan and other Arab countries in the Middle East, and only a tiny portion of them have managed to reach the countries of Western Europe.

[1] TURNER, Ralph L.: The position of Romani in Indo-Aryan. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) V, No. 4 (1926), p. 145-189; SAMPSON, John: The Ghagar of Egypt: A Chapter in the History of Gypsy Migration. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society Society* (3rd Series) VIII, No. 2 (1928), p. 78-90.
[2] For an overview of the scientific literature dedicated to Lom (Bosha/Posha), see MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*. London, Palgrave Macmillan 2016. See also ÜZÜM, Melike: Posha. In: BAĞRIAÇIK, Metin – DEMIROK, Ömer – ÖZTÜRK, Balkız (eds.) *Endangered Languages in Turkey.* İstanbul, The Laz Institute 2023, p. 104-116.
[3] MATRAS, Yaron: *A Grammar of Domari.* Berlin & Boston, De Gruyter Mouton 2012.
[4] RICHARDSON, Kristina: *Roma in the Medieval Islamic World: Literacy, Culture, and Migration.* London, I. B. Tauris 2022.
[5] *YILDIZ, Yeşim Yaprak: Nowhere to Turn: The Situation of Dom Refugees from Syria in Turkey. Project Report.* Budapest, European Roma Rights Centre *2015*; [NO AUTHOR]: *Dom Migrants from Syria. Living at the Bottom: On the Road amid Poverty and Discrimination.* Ankara, Development Workshop 2016; TARLAN, Kemal Vural: *Discrimination, Isolation and Social Exclusion: Syrian Dom Asylum Seekers in the Crossfire.* Gaziantep, Kırkayak Kültür Sanat ve Doğa Derneği 2016; TARLAN, Kemal Vural: *Encouraging Integration and Social Cohesion of Syrian Dom Immigrants.* Gaziantep, Kırkayak Kültür 2018.

Generally speaking, from these studies it is clear that various Dom communities live in Iran[6], Türkiye[7], Iraq[8], Syria[9], Lebanon[10], Jordan[11], Israel[12] and Palestine [13]. More

[6] GROOME, Francis Hindes: Persian and Syrian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* I, No. 2 (1889), p. 21-27; SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies. In: *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) I, No. 1 (1908), p. 197-211; KNAPP, William I.: The Soozmanee: Are they Gypsies? In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) II, No. 2 (1909), p. 275-276 (Letter of 1844 to George Borrow); ВОСКАНЯН, Вардан: Цыганский элемент в курдских племенах (некоторые вопросы этногенеза курдов). In: *Iran and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (1998), p. 47-50; AMANOLAHI, Sekandar: The Gypsies of Iran (A Brief Introduction). In: *Iran & the Caucasus*, No. 3-4 (1999-2000), p. 109-118; MATTHEE, Rudi: Prostitutes, courtesans, and dancing girls: Women entertainers in Safavid Iran. In: MATTHEE, Rudi – BARON, Beth (eds.) *Iran & Beyond*: *Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie.* Costa Mesa, Mazda 2000, p. 121-150; HAMZEN'EE, Reza M.: *Zigeunerleben im Orient. Eine vergleichende interdisziplinäre Untersuchung über die Geschichte, Identitätsstruktur und ökonomische Tätigkeit orientalischer Zigeuner.* Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 2002.

[7] BENNINGHAUS, Rüdiger. 1991. Les tsiganes de la Turquie orientale. In: *Etudes tsiganes* XXXVII, No. 3, p. 47-53; *ÖZKAN, Ali Rafet: Türkiye Çingeneleri*. Ankara, T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları *2000*; KOLUKIRIK, Suat: Türkiye'de Rom, Dom ve Lom Gruplarının Görünümü. In: ÖZÖNDER, Cihat (ed.) *Türkiyat Araştırmaları*. Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi 2008, p. 145-154; MARSH, Adrian: A Brief History of Gypsies in Turkey. In: UZPEDER, Ebru et al. (eds.) *We are Here: Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey.* İstanbul: EDROM & ERRC & hCa 2008, p. 5-20; MARSH, Adrian: Ethnicity and Identity: Who are the Gypsies? In: UZPEDER, Ebru et al. (eds.) *We are Here: Discriminatory Exclusion and Struggle for Rights of Roma in Turkey.* İstanbul, EDROM & ERRC & hCa 2008, p. 21-30; MARSH, Adrian and Melike Karlıdağ. 2008. Study of Research Literature Regarding Turkish Gypsies and the Question of Gypsy Identity. *ERRC. Country Reports Series*, No. 17: 143-164; ÖNEN, Selin: Citizenship rights of Gypsies in Turkey: Roma and Dom communities. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* XLIX, No. 4 (2013), p. 608-622; ÖZATEŞLER, Gül: The "Ethnic Identification" of Dom People in Diyarbakir. In: *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* XIII, No. 27 (2013), p. 279-287.

[8] SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies, p. 197-211; FERNEA, Elizabeth Warnock: *"Gypsies" in Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village.* New York, Anchor & Doubleday Book 1965; KAWAKAMI, Yasunori: The Iraqi Gypsies after the Collapse of Hussein's Regime. In: *KURI Journal* II, No. 2 (2005), p. 1-3; ZEIDEL, Ronen: Gypsies and Society in Iraq: Between Marginality, Folklore and Romanticism. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* L, No. 1 (2014), p. 74-85; AL-HASHIMI, Hamied – KHALID, Rojhat Waisi: A Study in a Pattern of Resettlement of Gypsies in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies. Sofia, September 25-27.* Sofia, 2024; AL-SARRAJI, Mohammed: Social Acceptance Attitudes of Iraqi People towards the Two Gypsy Groups "Qarach and Kawiliay": Comparative Study. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies. Sofia, September 25-27.* Sofia, 2024.

[9] GROOME, Francis Hindes: Persian and Syrian Gypsies, p. 21-27; SINCLAIR, Albert Thomas: The Oriental Gypsies, p. 197-211; FATHER ANASTAS: The Nawar or Gypsies of the East. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series) VII, No. 4 (1913-1914), p. 297-319; VIII, No. 2 (1914-1915), p. 140-153; VIII, No. 4 (1914-1915), p. 266-280; WINSTEDT, E. O.: Syrian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXX, No. 1-2 (1951), p. 78-79; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Dom of the Gaza Strip. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 6 (2002), p. 1-4; No. 10 (2004), p. 1-2; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon. In: *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* VIII, No. 4 (2017), p. 61-72; JALO, Daisam: The Dom, a Marginalized Community in the Syrian Music Scene. In: *Music and Minorities*, No. 3 (2024), p. 1-31.

comprehensive summarizing studies are only available for the Dom communities in Egypt[14] and Sudan[15]. At the same time, the situation is much more complicated in the other countries of North Africa. There is only a relatively limited amount of fragmentary information from the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries about the presence of small groups of 'Gypsies' in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and even Chad[16], in some of these cases, it is not clear what communities are being referred to, in others Dom are meant. Also, often, new migrants to the

[10] FATHER ANASTAS: The Nawar or Gypsies of the East, p. 266-280; WILLIAMS, G. A.: The Gypsies of Lebanon. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-4; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon, p. 61-72.

[11] EDITOR [Yates, Dora E.]: The 'Nuar' in Jordan. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXXVI, No. 1-2 (1957), p. 145-147; MOAWWAD, Kamel: *The Linguistic Situation of Gypsies and Turkmans as Ethnic Minorities Living in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Perspective.* M.A. Thesis. Irbid, Yarmouk University 1999; PHILLIIPS, D. J.: An Encounter with the Dom of Jordan. In: *Kuri Journal* I, No. 3 (2000), p. 1-2; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Current Situation of the Dom in Jordan. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions).* London, I. B. Tauris 2006, p. 205-212; ROY, Arpan: A Space of Appearance: Romani Publics and Privates in the Middle East. In: *Anthropological Theory* XXIV, No. 2 (2024), p. 175-200.

[12] MACALISTER, Robert Alexander Stewart: *The Language of the Nawar of Zutt, the Nomad Smiths of Palestine.* London, Edinburgh University Press 1914; REGENSBURGER, Reinhold: Gypsies in the Land of Israel. In: Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (3rd Series) XXXVII, No. 1-2 (1958), p. 69-70; MATRAS, Yaron: Two Domari legends about the origin of the Doms. In: *Romani Studies* (5th Series) X, No. 1 (2000), p. 53-79; SLEEM, Amoun: Domari: The Society of Gypsies in Israel. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-2; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 1 – The Dom Community of Jerusalem. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 2 (2000), p. 1-3; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 2 – Settlement in Jerusalem and the Surrounding Area. *KURI Journal* I, No. 3 (2000), p. 1-3; SLEEM, Amoun: Stories from a Dom (Gypsy) Woman. Part 3 – The Family. *KURI Journal* I, No. 4 (2001), p. 1-4; WILLIAMS, Allen. 2001. *The Dom of Jerusalem: A Gypsy Community Chronicle.* Larnaka: Dom Research Center; NOVOSELSKY, Valery: Roma in Israel. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions).* London, I. B. Tauris 2006, p. 93-96; AUZIAS**,** Claire (ed.): *Tsiganes en Terre d'Israël.* Paris, Indigène Editions 2013**;** SLEEM, Amoun: *A Gypsy Dreaming in Jerusalem.* Jerusalem: Macon GA, Nurturing Faith 2014; SHAMAI, Shmuel et al.: Identity and Sense of Place of Ghajar Residents Living in Border Junction of Syria, Israel and Lebanon, p. 61-72.

[13] MACALISTER, Robert Alexander Stewart: *The Language of the Nawar of Zutt, the Nomad Smiths of Palestine*; REGENSBURGER, Reinhold: Gypsies in the Land of Israel; WINSTEDT, E. O.: Palestinian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd Series) XXXI, No. 1-2 (1952), p. 77-78; WILLIAMS, Allen: The Dom of the Gaza Strip. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 6 (2002), p. 1-4; No. 10 (2004), p. 1-2. AUZIAS**,** Claire (ed.): *Tsiganes en Terre d'Israël*; ROY, Arpan: *Relative Strangers: Romani Kinship and Palestinian Difference.* Toronto, University of Toronto Press 2024.

[14] SAMPSON, John: The Ghagar of Egypt: A Chapter in the History of Gypsy Migration. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society Society* (3rd Series) VIII, No. 2 (1928), p. 78-90; HANNA, Nabil Sohbi: *Die Ghajar: Zigeuner am Nil.* Munchen, Edition Trickster 2002; PARRS, Alexandra: *Gypsies in Contemporary Egypt: On the Peripheries of Society.* Cairo, American University in Cairo Press 2017.

[15] STRECK, Bernhard: *Die Ḥalab: Zigeuner am Nil.* Wuppertal, Trickster 1996.

[16] THOMAS, C. F.: Dom of North Africa: An Overview. In: *KURI Journal* I, No. 1 (2000), p. 1-4.

colonial possessions of both Spain (Cale) and France (Roma and Manush) are meant[17]. After the countries of this region gained independence after World War II, these migrants returned to their metropolises. Nowadays, the fragmentary information about 'Gypsies' in these countries remains largely uncertain (first of all, it is not clear what exactly is meant by this name – Dom or other nomadic communities)[18], so the current situation with Dom communities in them remains unclear. In the past, many authors have assumed speculatively (i.e. without the presence of concrete historical evidence) the migration of Gypsies (who should have been Dom) together with the Arab conquerors in the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century. According to modern research, however, there is no trace whatsoever of the presence of Dom among the ancestors of the contemporary Calo in Spain (Gitanos) and Portugal (Calon)[19].

As for the Dom in the South Caucasus, apart from their sporadic mentions in some texts for the 19th century, there is de facto only one relatively more comprehensive presentation of this community – the book by Kekrope Patkanov Gypsies: A Few Words About the Dialects of the Transcaucasian Gypsies: Bosha and Karachi[20]. Nowadays, the situation has not changed, except for the parts about Dom in the summarising book *Gypsies in Central Asia and the Caucasus*[21] there are only a few reports by human rights NGOs, as well as many publications in the media in Azerbaijan and Georgia, but no other serious academic research.

Historical and Ethnographical Background

Historical information about the presence of the Dom communities in the Southern Caucasus is scarce and fragmentary. Based on the region's history, we can assume that their ancestors settled on these lands in the 16th and 17th centuries, coming from Persia and the Ottoman Empire, during the wars and the transition of these territories from one state to another.

[17] BATAILLARD, Paul: *Notes et questions sur les Bohémiens en Algérie.* Paris, A. Hennuyer 1874.

[18] AL-HASHIMI, Hamied – BRAHIMI, Sihem: Marginalising the Sub-Cultures: A Comparative Study of the Gypsy's Case in Iraq and Algeria. *Paper presented at 2024 Annual Meeting of Gypsy Lore Society and Conference on Romani Studies. Bratislava, September 11-13.* Bratislava, 2014.

[19] TCHERENKOV, Lev – LAEDERICH, Stephane: *The Rroma otherwise known as Gypsies, Gitanos, Γυφτοι, Tsiganes, Ţigani, Çingene, Zigeuner, Bohemiens, Travellers, Fahrende, etc.* Vol. 1-2. Basel, Schwabe, 2004.

[20] ПАТКАНОВ, Керопе: *Цыгане. Несколько слов о наречиях закавказских цыган: Боша и Карачи*. Санкт-Петербург, Императорская Академия наук 1887. Parts of the book have been published in English. – PATKANOFF, K. P.: Some Words on the Dialects of the Transcaucasian Gypsies. In: *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (New Series), No. 1 (1907-1908), p. 229-257; No. 2 (1907-1908), p. 246-266, 325-334.

[21] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*.

In the first decades of the 19th century, the Russian Empire conquered the territory of what is now Azerbaijan and included it in its borders. From that time, we have the first reliable information about the presence of the Dom communities in the Southern Caucasus. According to the famous French-Russian explorer of the Caucasus, Jean-Marie Chopin, in Erivan Province (present-day Armenia and Nakhichevan Autonomous Region in Azerbaijan) in 1852 lived, in addition to the local Lom, called by the surrounding population *Bosha*, who were Christians, also representatives of Dom division, who were Muslims, namely 43 *Karachi* families (217 people) who belonged to the Shi'a denomination of Islam and 14 *Myuthryup* families who were Sunni[22].

According to the famous researcher of Bosha and Karachi dialects in the South Caucasus, Kekrope Patkanov, there is a village of Karachi in Quba province, in which 131 people live; in Goychay district, 1,750 Karachi people lived in circa 200 tents, and 518 Karachi lived in Erivan Governorate; i.e. in total, in the South Caucasus in 1887 there were 2,399 Karachi (of course, these figures are approximate and incomplete but still indicates the Dom presence there)[23].

Descriptions of Dom's traditional occupations in the Caucasus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries literature are limited. For centuries, the Dom were service nomads, and their occupations were linked to their semi-nomadic way of life, with rented winter accommodation in villages and an active nomadic life during the warm season. Their primary sources of livelihood were begging (often combined with fortune telling) by the women, producing sieves from horsehair by men, and giving public performances with dancing bears and tamed snakes. Men were also known as musicians (including at weddings), and women were highly valued as dancers (also young boys who dance dressed in women's clothes). According to Patkanov, "without their [of Dom living on river Goychay in Baku governorate] musicians (*hokkabaz*), good singers (*chengchi*) and dancing boys (*myutrif*) does not go anyone Tatar [i.e. Azerbaijani – authors note] wedding"[24].

Among the surrounding population in the South Caucasus, the narratives are widespread (both in the past and the present day) according to which among Dom, only the women earn a living for the family by begging, and the men stay at home; therefore, at the wedding, the bride swears that she will support her husband for the rest of her life. The same narratives also apply

[22] ШОПЕН, Иван И.: *Состояния Армянской области в эпоху её присоединения Российской империи.* Санкт-Петербург, Императорская Академия наук 1852, p. 539.

[23] ПАТКАНОВ, Керопе: *Цыгане. Несколько слов о наречиях закавказских цыган: Боша и Карачи*, p. 70-72.

[24] Ibid., p. 74-75.

to Lom and the Lyuli/Dzhugi in Central Asia, but of course, they do not correspond to the actual state of affairs in both places.

From the time of the Russian Empire, only a limited number of illustrations probably depict representatives of the Dom Community. We are not sure whether they all depict representatives of the Dom (the captions on the illustrations only noted them as "local Gypsies").

In the early USSR, the affirmative policy of the Soviet state conducted in the 1920s and 1930s concerning the "Gypsies" (this term included not only the Roma but also the Dom and the Lom communities, and also the so-called *Lyuli* or *Dzhugi* in Central Asia) did not encompass the Dom. The reason for this was that the authorities in Azerbaijan, when asked by Moscow about the need to conduct such an affirmative policy, simply answered that there are no Gypsies in the Republic (probably in order not to create additional work for themselves or due to neglecting the topic)[25]. The central authorities were palpable also neglecting Dom despite being clear that they were aware of their existence, as evidenced by the entry of the term 'Dom' in the List of Nationalities included in the Dictionary of Nationalities, prepared for the upcoming Census[26]. Ultimately, however, in the USSR Census conducted in 1939 (as well as in the previous Census of 1926), the Dom were not distinguished as a separate nationality but were included within the general name 'Gypsies', and this situation was preserved in all subsequent Censuses during the existence of the USSR (until 1991).

One important circumstance must be taken into account when it comes to the neglect of Dom as a separate community in the early USSR. All Gypsy activists at that time originated from the Roma division; they were concentrated in Moscow and, in practice, only worked with "their own" people (i.e. with the Roma). In the published two Gypsy journals and dozens of books published in the Romani language, there is almost no mention of the "other" Gypsies. Especially for the Dom community, there is a mention only once when the Romani journal *Nevo Drom* (New Way) published a photo of Gypsy women with children from Azerbaijan predicting the future on a thread.

During the mass repressions in the USSR, members of the Dom community also became their victims. In 1936, Armenians, Turks and Kurds living in Armenia and Azerbaijan were

[25] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Stalin vs Gypsies: Roma and Political Repression in the USSR.* Paderborn, Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh 2024, p. 28-29.

[26] [NO AUTHOR]: *Словарь национальностей. Для разработки Всесоюзной переписи населения 1937 года.* Москва, ЦУНХУ Госплана СССР – Бюро всесоюзной переписи населения 1937).

deported to today's Kazakhstan based on the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR dated December 17, 1936, No. 2123–420ss[27]. Among them, there is an unspecified number of "Turkic Gypsies" (i.e. Dom). The second such deportation was in 1944 when on 31 July 1944, the State Defence Committee adopted Decree No. 6279cc (marked "top secret") for the deportation of all Meskhetian Turks, Meskhetians, Hemshins and Kurds (excluding women who entered into mixed marriages) living in the border strip of the Georgian SSR (Akhaltsikh, Adygen, Aspindz, Bogdanov regions and Adjara ASSR) in Central Asia (Kazakh SSR, Uzbek SSR and Kyrgyz SSR). By 17 November 1941, 25 echelons with 81,324 people were already sent to the east; among them, two wagons with Gypsies, i.e., a maximum of 80 people, based on the NKVD's rules for placing up to 40 deportees in one wagon. It remains unclear from which Gypsy group the deportees originated; Dom were present among them.[28]

In 1963, all those representatives of Dom Community deported to Kazakhstan were allowed to return to their native places. The authorities in Azerbaijan settled them compactly in the city of Yevlakh, in the so-called *Qarachylar mahallasi* (Garachi neighbourhood).

Dom in Azerbaijan gradually moved to a sedentary lifestyle in the conditions of the USSR. Gypsy nomadism was formally banned in 1956, but by that time, most of the Dom had already settled. Thus, it was not perceived as a repressive measure for the community. Most of our elderly interlocutors don't even remember the sedentarisation decree applied towards them.

Territorial Distributions and Identities

Nowadays, the Dom community in Azerbaijan is relatively tiny. Their number is usually not indicated in the Censuses because, due to their small number, they enter the "others" column (including the last Census in 2019). According to approximate estimates, their number is about 2-3 thousand people; in our opinion, it is more likely 3-4 thousand, maximum of up to 5-6 thousand people.

The local population in Azerbaijan collectively call the Dom community 'Garachi' (in the Azerbaijani language) or 'Цыгане' (in Russian) but still distinguishes them from Roma. However, the identity of Dom themselves is much more complex, multidimensional, and contextual, and in different life contexts, its various dimensions may be expressed or publicly demonstrated.

[27] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Stalin vs Gypsies: Roma and Political Repression in the USSR*, p. 112.
[28] Ibid, p. 122.

The situation becomes even more complicated given the fact that the Dom in Azerbaijan are not a single community but are divided into two subdivisions, which is due to the different ways of settlement of their ancestors in the lands of Azerbaijan, and which we can tentatively call "Iranian Dom" and "Kurdish Dom", and which we will present briefly here.

The first is Dom's "Iranian" division, historically associated with Persia (present-day Iran). Farsi heavily influences their mother tongue, and many are fluent in both languages, which they clearly distinguish and can switch from one to the other when necessary. They also speak Azerbaijani (the country's official language) and Russian (the language of international communication in the post-Soviet space). Publicly, they prefer to declare themselves Azerbaijanis or Farsi/Parsi (in the sense of Persians/Iranians). Still, they experience themselves as a separate "Parsi Dom" (Persian Dom) community. They do not accept their designation as 'Garachi' (in the Azerbaijani language) or as 'Цыгане' (in Russian), and they categorically distinguish themselves from Roma (Lom are unknown to them, as they live in other territories outside Azerbaijan).

The second, the "Kurdish" division of Dom, is historically tied to the Ottoman Empire, not the Ottoman Turks, but to its Kurdish population. Publicly, they prefer to declare themselves as Azerbaijanis or, more often, as Kurds (although the Kurds themselves, living in the South Caucasus, categorically distinguish themselves from them). Their mother tongue is strongly influenced by Kurmanji, which almost all are fluent in; when necessary, they switch from one language to another or mix them. They also speak Azerbaijani and Russian, and many master Georgian (those who migrate temporarily or permanently to Georgia). They also categorically reject their designation as 'Garachi' (*Qaraçiler* in Azerbaijani) or as 'Tsygane' (*Цыгане* in Russian) and firmly distinguish themselves from Roma and Lom. Their identity is Dom within their community, and they have distinguished themselves from the Kurds, including in their language. They have repeatedly told us: "We are not the same" and "Our language is purer", and they define themselves as Dom-Kurds (*Курдские Дом* in Russian or *Kürd Domlar* in Azerbaijani). Accordingly, the local Roma in Georgia, with whom the Azerbaijani Dom come into sporadic contact, do not consider them Roma because they do not speak their language (Romani) and avoid any contact with them; the Roma consider the Dom to be "wild and dangerous", especially when it comes to competition for begging (some of the local Roma also beg).

The territorial distribution of the two subdivisions of the Dom, the Iranian Dom and the Kurdish Dom, is practically a mosaic, and their territories often cross. In addition, we have not

visited many regions and settlements in Azerbaijan and cannot be sure which representatives of which sub-division live in them. At this stage, relying mainly on the words of our Dom interlocutors and media reports, the following territorial distribution of Dom in the South Caucasus can be briefly presented.

As their historically "root" territory, the Dom of the Iranian subdivision consider the region of the so-called Zakatal Okrug, which existed as a separate administrative unit in the Russian Empire (today it is three districts – Zagatala, Balakan and Qakh – in Azerbaijan). These are the peripheral border regions with Persia at the foot of the Caucasus, where in the past, during the time of Shah Abbas I (who reigned from 1587 to 1629), a different ethnic and religious population was resettled (a practice that continued in subsequent historical eras). Today, in this region, about 2 thousand Dom live compactly in the village of Gullyuk, Qakh region, which is considered the "Garachi village", as well as in other settlements in the region – Chobankyol in Zagatala Rayon, Qapychay in Qakh rayon and others. Iranian Dom also live in the region of Quba and the city of Khudatin northern border areas, where they were settled in the 16th-17th centuries. After Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, parts of the Iranian Dom (mainly from the Zagatala region) moved to the region of Baku capital, often occupying the homes of the emigrating Armenians and Mountain Jews. Today, most live in Surakhani (a suburb of Baku) and other suburbs of the capital. The neighbourhood of Garachi is challenging to find; there is no road to it, you can't see how big it is, and it is unclear how many families live there. The yards have high fences and look a bit like Central Asia. The dwelling exhibits markedly sparse furnishings: linoleum flooring, a single mattress placed directly on the floor, and two chairs—constituting the entirety of its movable assets.

The Kurdish Dom indicate the city of Yevlakh as their historically "root" territory, even though they were settled there only in 1963 upon their return from deportation to Kazakhstan. Currently, several hundred Dom live there, in the so-called "Garachi neighbourhood", which (at least according to the locals) is almost never visited by outsiders who are not ethnic Dom. According to some (obviously inflated) estimates, this neighbourhood is inhabited by 2500 Dom and has deplorable infrastructure (e.g., only one shop), and the houses are poor and lack yards. From Yevlakh, parts of the Kurdish Dom gradually moved to other regions and settlements of Azerbaijan, such as Gazakh, Mingecevir, Aghdash, Aghdam and others.

Apart from the mentioned settlements, there is a lot of varied and unverified information about other settlements where Dom live in Azerbaijan, e.g. in the regions of Goychay,

Shamakhi, Sumgait, on the outskirts of Baku (Baladzhari, Alatava), in the village of Maraza near the city of Gobustan and others, as well as in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Region (an exclave of Azerbaijan). A small number of Dom lived in Shusha, Dzhabrail and Agdam/Akna in Nagorno-Karabakh until the start of the Armenia-Azerbaijan war of 1992–1994, after which they emigrated from there to other regions of Azerbaijan (and, respectively, the Lom who had been living in Azerbaijan until then emigrated to Armenia). The historical presence of Dom on the territory of present-day Armenia is reflected in the toponymy, more precisely in the names of several villages, such as the Garachili, village in Surmali district. In the historical source, the name of this village was mentioned as "Garachilar Winter Camp"[29].

It is necessary to verify all this information further and specify the subdivision of Dom (Iranian or Kurdish) in individual cases so that the complete picture of the territorial distribution of the Dom Community in Azerbaijan remains open.

The relationship between the Iranian Dom and the Kurdish Dom is complicated and ambiguous. Both divisions accept that they are part of the same community, but at the same time, they clearly distinguish themselves from each other. The Iranian Dom argue that the Kurdish Dom do not work but only beg while they, the Parsi Dom, work, which to some extent reflects the actual situation (although there are also beggars among the Iranian Dom). The Kurdish Dom argue with more standard accusations against the Iranian Dom – they are not real, they do not respect traditions and customs, etc. In Surakhani, alongside the Parsi Dom, one encounters Roma populations; crucially, however, the two groups maintain a distinct ethnic boundary, as captured in the Parsi Dom's remark: "We coexist, but they are fundamentally different." The term *Sigandar* – a local distortion of the Russian *tsigane* – is used by the Parsi Dom to refer to the Roma. Much more sharply and firmly, however, is the distinction from the Kurdish Dom who, according to them, are "actually Garachiler" (in the sense of meeting the negative mass public stereotypes about the community).

A new "Georgian" subdivision of Kurdish Dom has formed in recent decades. In the past, in Georgia, individual families of Dom lived among the Azerbaijani population in the Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi municipalities in the historical province of Borchali, part of the present-day region of Kvemo Kartli[30]. Attempts to settle Dom from Azerbaijan to neighbouring Georgia began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they initially moved to places where a small

[29] BUDAGOV, B. A. – GEYBULLAYEV, G. A.: *Explanatory Dictionary of Azerbaijani Origin Places' Names.* Baku, 2009, p. 326.

[30] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus*, p. 68.

number of Dom already lived (in the municipalities of Marneuli, Bolnisi and Dmanisi). This movement has become more intense in the last decade. Initially, a large part of the Dom tried to settle in Batumi but were expelled by the local authorities and relocated to Kutaisi. For more than three years, five families (about 70 people, including 30 children) lived near the Chavchadze bridge on the Rioni River in shacks without water and electricity (Szakonyi 2008: 8). There are currently about 20 Dom families living in Kutaisi, settling in the abandoned, nearly demolished houses in the Avangard neighbourhood in the northern part of the city, and several families living in the nearby railway junction city of Samtredia. The first 17 families from Dom settled in Tbilisi around 2000 in the Navtlugi district, where about 30–40 families (about 200 people) currently live. Their number is not constant, as some families travel seasonally or at specific intervals to their place of residence in Azerbaijan (mainly to the city of Gazakh near the border). Some of them lived, and others continue to live, in abandoned carriages at the city's railway station, while others managed to rent regular accommodation in the city.

Most of the Dom living in Georgia are Azerbaijani citizens and regularly migrate to their native places (usually during the winter season) and back. In recent years, several families from the Kurdish Dom settled in the city of Belorechensk in the Krasnodar Krai of the Russian Federation.

Some individual families Dom (mostly in mixed marriages) still live also in the place of their former deportation in Central Asia (e.g. Tashkent in Uzbekistan).

This differentiation of the two divisions of the Dom Community is also reflected in their marriage patterns. Both communities are endogamous closed, and if they do accept intermarriage, they prefer to take foreign girls to incorporate into their community. Of course, every rule has its exceptions, and this endogamy (like any other) is not absolute, but in general, intermarriage between Iranian and Kurdish Dom is relatively rare. The same applies to intermarriages with the surrounding population, which occur mainly with ethnic Azerbaijanis and only exceptionally with representatives of other nationalities. This is a direct consequence of the community’s low public prestige. It is sometimes claimed in the media that the Garachi are matrilocal and that after the wedding, the young couple lives in the woman’s home. Such cases may happen, and perhaps they are not so rare, but this is not a firmly established usual rule, and everything depends on a specific situation.

The Dom are generally Muslim and adhere to basic Islamic norms – observing Ramadan, celebrating Eid (Bayram), going to the mosque on certain occasions, and honouring the main Islamic (or what they consider to be Islamic) holidays, such as Nowruz and Hederlez.

Nominally, they belong to Shi'a Islam (as it is throughout Azerbaijan). Still, none of our interlocutors was able to explain the difference between Shi'a and Sunni Islam, and many are not aware at all of the existence of such division. In the South Caucasus, the local population generally believes that all Kurds are Yazidis by religion. In many cases, the name of this community and the name of the religion are interconnected (Kurdish-Yazidi) and overlap. Therefore, the Kurdish Dom always emphasise their distinction from the Kurds in terms of religion and define themselves as "true Muslims, not Yezidis".

Both Dom communities living in Azerbaijan are aware of the existence of other parts of their community living in neighbouring countries – respectively, the Iranian Dom in Iran and the Kurdish Dom in Turkey. Our interlocutors in Baku (living in Yevlakh) even mentioned the sporadic arrival in Azerbaijan of beggars from the Turkish city of Diyarbakir. However, this knowledge remains largely abstract, and in practice, both Dom communities do not establish or maintain ties with representatives of their communities living abroad (more precisely, outside the borders of the former USSR) and do not show any special interest in them.

Current Situation in Post-Soviet Realities

During Soviet times, Dom were guaranteed permanent jobs as rural residents on collective farms, while urban residents were primarily low-skilled workers. After the collapse of the USSR, the creation of the newly independent states and the collapse of the socialist economy, the situation changed radically. In both communities, men (and women in the Iranian Dom) are employed when there is an opportunity for low-skilled labour. These opportunities are few, and mostly, Dom make their living from scrap metal collections, sometimes work as peddlers with household items, dresses, carpets, etc., and take various unqualified seasonal jobs. Among the Kurdish Dom, the primary source of sustenance is the begging of women and children. Therefore, they are much more mobile. Many of them travel to the capital, Baku, from where local authorities regularly deport them to their home places. Other parts of the community settle temporarily or permanently in Georgia. In contrast, begging travels in the Russian Federation (in the North Caucasus region, sometimes also in other areas) are conducted mainly during the main Muslim holidays. Women beg, often holding babies together with little girls and boys, and rarely beg also older women or men. If men or boys beg, they show suspected or actual signs of disability to varying degrees. They usually have their own "own" begging places. In Azerbaijan, in the capital Baku, they beg on central streets, markets, and near train and bus stations, from where they are often chased away by the police, who are trying to eliminate, or

at least limit, begging in the capital. Some time ago in Baku in 2010, in the fight against begging, all the personnel of the patrol police service were engaged.

Beggar detection raids were conducted every day. As noted, most beggars come from Yevlakh (mainly), Agsuin, Agdash districts, Shamakhi, and Merezi and are primarily mothers with 7-8 children. By summer, Dom began to live around the capital. As the agency "Trend" reported, only from April 20 to May 9, 2006, more than 300 beggars were removed from the streets in Baku's Nasiminsky and Binagadinsky districts. They were sent to the place from where they came to Baku – in the Aghdash and Aghdam districts, where they reported it to the police of these districts.

In most cases, however, since there are no legal provisions for sanctioning begging, the begging Dom are detained, given an educational talk and then released[31]. Judging by the fact that there are enough Gypsies in Baku today, they have returned[32]. In Georgia, in the downtown area of Tbilisi, the central begging place is Shota Rustaveli Avenue, and major junctions in the city are where they beg from passing cars and urban markets. In contrast to the mass stereotypes about fantastic revenues from begging, their living standard is lower than that of the surrounding population.

In Azerbaijan, many Dom lack identification papers, and only the elders have old Soviet documents, which were valid long after the collapse of the USSR but no longer. Because of the lack of an ID, many Dom children are not enrolled in school; a lack of documents deprives most of them of access to medical care and social security (even more so when they are abroad, in Georgia). The Azerbaijani state is trying to solve this problem gradually, but acquiring new identity documents has not yet been fully completed.

The Dom public image is largely negative, with high levels of ethnic stereotypes and social hostility towards them, both in Azerbaijan and Georgia. Both in the past and nowadays, they are despised by the surrounding population throughout the South Caucasus as the lowest social stratum. Still, they were generally treated with lenity and even tolerance in the past (except for the inevitable cases of conflict situations). The situation changed after the collapse of the USSR, and not so much in Azerbaijan as in neighbouring Georgia, where the highest

[31] ИБРАГИМХАЛИЛОВА, Рамелла: Евлах – кузница попрошаек. AZERI.RU, 4 марта 2010; ИБРАГИМХАЛИЛОВА, Рамелла: Виртуозы бакинских улиц приносят огромные деньги.

[32] АЛИ, Кямал. 2006. Наши цыганские соседи. Что делают власти для Этого малочисленного народа?; АЛИ, Кямал. 2008. Азербайджанские цыгане: их нет, но они есть; САДЫГОВ, Фарид. 2008. Азербайджанские цыгане не имеют гражданства. Trend News Agency, 8 апреля 2008.

negative public attitudes are towards the Kurds[33]; this is because the local population (including Roma) consider the beggars of the Kurdish Dom to be Kurds. They have no serious problems with the law enforcement authorities, who do not limit and persecute them. This gives grounds to the local population (including the media) to talk about a "mafia of beggars" which corrupts local police. Many other stereotypes are widespread, typical of Roma beggars elsewhere: about kidnapping children and making them beg, intentionally breaking their arms and legs, their exploitation by wealthy "bosses", and an inherited inclination for begging.

Azerbaijan has not adopted a state policy toward the Dom; only individual cases are solved when they reach the respective authorities. The Georgian state is in a complex political and economic situation and does not pay special attention to the Dom and their problems.

The last three decades in the countries of the former so-called socialist camp in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe have been characterised by the rapid development of policies and projects to support Roma and Roma NGOs. After the accession of most of the countries in the region to the European Union, NGO sector activists, with the support of various international organisations and European institutions (primarily the Council of Europe), turned to the encompassing of new territories, including the South Caucasus, where the different communities, once all labelled as 'Gypsies', were identified as a suitable target for their activities.

The first in this regard was Georgia, where a series of reports by human rights organisations were published, dedicated to the human and minority rights situation of the Roma[34], as under this label was also understood the Lom living in the country (called Bosha by the surrounding population), as well as those who migrated from Azerbaijan Dom (declaring themselves as 'Kurds'). Despite the clear demarcation of Dom (as well as representatives of Lom) from other "Gypsies", and particularly from Roma (and vice versa) with whom they share the territory in some cities (Tbilisi, Kutaisi), attempts have been made in to integrate Dom and Lom in common regional NGO projects targeting Roma. Such was the case with the project

[33] ДЖАВАХИШВИЛИ, Нино: Этнорелигиозные стереотипы грузинских студентов. In: *Социологические исследования*, No. 3 (2005), p. 107-112.

[34] HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER: *People without Rights: Roma Rights in Georgia. Report.* Tbilisi, HRIDC 2003; SZAKONYI, David: *No Way Out? Initial steps towards addressing Romani issues in Georgia.* ECMI Working Paper No. 39. Flensburg, European Centre for Minority Issues 2008; SORDIA, Giorgi: *A Way Out? Initial steps towards addressing Romani issues in Georgia.* ECMI Issue Brief No 21. Flensburg, European Centre for Minority Issues 2009; ELIBEGOVA, Dea: Protection or isolation? On Georgia's Policy Choice towards Roma. In: ELIBEGOVA, Dea (ed.) *Georgian Minorities: Roma, Qists, Assyrians, Ezids.* Rangendingen: LIBERTAS (2009), p. 7-26.

Southern Caucasus of Roma from the NGO Center for Democracy and Civil Integration, presented at the regional conference in Tbilisi on April 8, 2014,[35]. Despite all efforts, however, no single Dom (or Lom) was willing to work in the network. The reasons for this state of affairs are many and varied, not the least of which is that both the Dom and Lom do not wish to be associated in any way with the Roma, who are relatively new (from the 20th century) migrants in the South Caucasus from Russia (during the USSR times).

In Azerbaijan, several attempts to involve the Dom under the Roma label in such projects were ultimately unsuccessful because the community refused to be involved in such projects and to send its representatives to the project events. On September 20, 2013, a round table discussion on integration problems of 'Roma' (used as a politically correct umbrella term) in Azerbaijan was conducted at the office of the Azerbaijan Lawyers Confederation, and an intention was announced to establish an NGO integration to solve these problems. A project for international donors was prepared but has not been supported so far. The participants at the round table told us that no a single Dom representative was present at the meeting. Similarly, during the last visit of the delegation of the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to the Council of Europe in 2024, the host was unable to secure the presence of Dom representatives at the meetings. So, the hopes of "pan-Roma unity" and the possible place of the Dom from Azerbaijan and in the South Caucasus region in it remains open, and the future is unclear.

Labelling in Policy and Academia

After the accession of the South Caucasus countries to the Council of Europe (Georgia in 1999, Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2001), a new problem arose related to the Dom living in the region – their labelling as Roma in official documents and the public sphere, and from there in academia[36]. This process of renaming began in the countries of Central, South-eastern and Eastern Europe after the collapse of communist regimes in the region in 1989–1990 and the break-down of the so-called socialist camp. The rejection of old terms and adoption of the designation "Roma" was considered "legitimacy of political correctness"[37] and was perceived

[35] DOSTA!: *Regional Conference of South Caucasus Roma Network in Tbilisi, Georgia. April 8, 2014.* Strasbourg, 2014.

[36] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia. In: *Slovenský národopis* LXVI, No. 4 (2018), p. 385-418.

[37] PETROVA, Dimitrina: The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future. In: *Social Research* LXX, No. 1 (2003), p. 111-161.

as an unavoidable part of the process of democratisation and Euro-integration. The replacement of the old denomination "Gypsies" (in forms used in respective local languages) with the term "Roma" in public and official space ran relatively fast and unproblematically, without big public debates (with only the exception of Romania).

Initially, Dom were not taken into account at all when listing the communities that fall under the label 'Roma', e.g. the Fundamental Rights Agency in 2010 defined:

> The term "Roma" is used as an umbrella term including groups of people who share more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as the Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, and Kalé. These groups also share a history of persistent marginalization in European societies[38].

Respectively, the EU Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies from 2011 postulated:

> The term "Roma" is used – similarly to other political documents of the European Parliament and the European Council – as an umbrella which includes groups of people who have more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Gens du voyage, etc. whether sedentary or not[39].

For the first time, Dom appeared in official European documents in 2012, when the European Commission started the process of implementation of the EU Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies and provided a new definition:

> The term "Roma" is used here, as well as by a number of international organisations and representatives of Roma groups in Europe, to refer to a number of different groups (such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Gypsies, Romanichels, Boyash, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom) and also includes Travellers, without denying the specificities and varieties of lifestyles and situations of these groups[40].

Neither better nor more precise is the definition in the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe, adopted on 1st February 2012, and in *Descriptive Glossary of Terms Relating to Roma Issues*, published by the Council of Europe in the same year. It states:

[38] FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY. *The Fundamental Rights Position of Roma and Travellers in the European Union.* Vienna, 2010.

[39] EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *EU Framework for National Roma Strategies up to 2020.* Brussels, 2011.

[40] EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *National Roma Integration Strategies: A first step in the implementation of the EU Framework.* Brussels, 2012.

The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as "Gypsies"[41].

Attempts to edit and refine the content of the terminology are ongoing, and the latest (so far) such general definitions are as follows:

The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Cale, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies[42].

The reference to "Roma", as an umbrella term, encompasses a wide range of different people of Romani origin such as: Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels and Boyash/Rudari. It also encompasses groups such as Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as traveller populations, including ethnic Travellers or those designated under the administrative term *gens du voyage* and people who identify as Gypsies, Tsiganes or Tziganes, without denying their specificities[43].

The main problem here is that it is not in the content of all these definitions, to which many critical remarks can be made. First, they mix up the criteria to include individual communities under the common denominator 'Roma' – origin, lifestyle (nomadic and sedentary), cultural specifics, social position (marginalisation), etc. Understandably, the Euro-bureaucracy is trying to work with more general concepts, even if they are not entirely accurate and precise from an academic point of view. Also, if not justified, then at least understandable is the adherence to these definitions by some Roma activists and human rights organisations[44]. For us, however, the main problem lies elsewhere – in the first place, from an ethical point of view, we find it problematic to impose appellation on communities that they do not wish to

[41] COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues.* Strasbourg, 2012; COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe. Adopted on 1 February 2012.* Strasbourg, 2012.

[42] COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025).* Strasbourg, 2020.

[43] EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030.* Brussels, 2021.

[44] NOVOSELSKY, Valery: Roma in Israel. In: MARSH, Adrian – STRAND, Elin (eds.) *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities: Contextual, Constructed and Contested (Transactions)*; MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL: *From Crisis to Catastrophe: The Situation of Minorities in Iraq*. London, Minority Rights Group 2014.

accept. On the second place, the fact that political terminology is accepted unconditionally by many representatives of academic circles raises unpleasant thoughts about the 'policy – academia' relationship in the modern world[45].

From this point of view, it is entirely unjustified for us to use the designation 'Roma' in academic texts to refer to the Dom communities in the Middle East and North Africa[46]. This approach, in practice, completely fits into the spirit of the so-called Orientalism[47], when communities defined by their surrounding population as "Gypsies" are given the name 'Roma' without taking into account their self-identification and their attitude towards this appellation [48]. In the case of the Dom communities, it can be said that in general they categorically reject their identification with Roma and the replacement of their public name. The only representative of the Dom communities in the Middle East writing in English to date, Ms. Amoun Sleem, not only never uses the term 'Roma' as a name for her community in her texts (instead, in addition to Dom, she also often uses 'Gypsies'), but in all her public appearances (including in a conversation with us) she has always categorically emphasized that the Dom communities are not Roma, and do not wish to be referred to in this way. The same is the attitude of both Dom communities living in Azerbaijan (and Georgia), and perhaps it is precisely this fear, that by accepting to be defined as Roma, they will lose their identity as a separate community, that is the most important factor that makes them reject any attempts to associate them with Roma in any form.

Conclusion

The lack of sufficient and verified information makes it impossible to create an overall picture of Dom coomunities in Middle East and North Africa in general, including its distribution, internal segmentation, ethnic culture, etc., and we can hardly speak about any common characteristics and specifics. We cannot be sure whether and how the Dom communities from

[45] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia.

[46] EDGCUMBE, Sarah: "We're Real Iraqis": Securing Roma Rights and Integration in Post-conflict Iraq. In: *MERI (Middle East Research Institute)* IV, No. 40 (2020), p. 1-13; EDGCUMBE, Sarah: Roma in Iraq and Syria: On the Margins of IDP Protection. In: *Researching Internal Displacement*. *Working Paper*, No. 9 (2021), p. 1-24; RICHARDSON, Kristina: *Roma in the Medieval Islamic World: Literacy, Culture, and Migration*; ROY, Arpan: *Relative Strangers: Romani Kinship and Palestinian Difference.*

[47] SAID, Edward: *Orientalism*. New York, Pantheon 1978; SAID, Edward: *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth, Penguin 1995.

[48] MARUSHIAKOVA, Elena – POPOV, Vesselin: Orientalism in Romani Studies: The Case of Eastern Europe. In: KYUCHUKOV, Hristo – NEW, William (eds.) *Language of Resistance: Ian Hancock's Contribution to Romani Studies.* Munich, Lincom Academic Publishers 2017, p. 187-237.

different regions related to each other. At this stage of our knowledge, it is only possible to try to make the picture of Dom communities as comprehensively as possible in general, and we need to leave any more extended and detailed descriptions, comparisons and conclusions to a later stage when more interdisciplinary research will be done.

Current scholarship identifies three principal divisions within Dom communities across the Middle East and North Africa, delineated as follows:

The first division includes those Dom who live in an Iranian-speaking environment. These are the Iranian Dom in Azerbaijan and the Dom living in Iran (in the provinces of Azarbaijan and Khorasan), known to their surrounding population as Karachi.

Due to the lack of sufficient research, the question of the Kowli/Kawli/Kawliya (sometimes called Ghorbati), who live in Iraq as well as Iran, remains open, and it seems more likely that these are nomadic communities who are not of Indian origin and do not fit into the 'Dom – Lom – Rom' triad (this also applies to the Lyuli or Dzhughi living in the countries of Central Asia).

The second division includes those Dom who live in Kurdish-speaking (and secondary Turkic-speaking, Arabic-speaking and Iranian-speaking) environments. These are the Kurdish Dom in Azerbaijan and the communities living in South-Eastern and Southern Turkey, known to the surrounding population under various names such as Mıtrıp, Karaci, Domlar, etc., as well as Qarach in Iraqi Kurdistan and Suzmani/Sozmani in Iran (Kurdistan province).

The third, largest division includes those Dom communities that live in Arabic-speaking environments. They live in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Sudan, and probably other countries in North Africa, and are known to their surrounding populations by a variety of names – Gurbati, Nawar, Gajar/Chagar, Halabi, etc.

Along with this, one more extremely important circumstance should be taken into account. Dom (as well as Lom and Roma) are not (and cannot be, due to their way of life, which is inextricably linked to the local population) an isolated socio-cultural phenomenon. They are not "un peuple sans patrie"[49], or "citizens of the world and nowhere"[50]; These are actually mass stereotypes from the era of Romanticism, reflected in modern academia, according to which "Gypsies" are people outside of any social norms and laws, or, in the language of modern social

[49] STEWART, Michael: Un peuple sans patrie. In: *Terrain. Revue d'ethnologie de l'Europe*, 17 (1991), p. 39-52.

[50] GHEORGHE, Nicolae – MIRGA, Andrzej: *The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy paper.* Princeton NJ, Project on Ethnic Relations 1997, p. 54-70.

anthropology, an example of people who master “the art of resistance” and “the art of not being governed”[51]. On the contrary, they are a constituent (albeit ethnically distinct) structure of the societies in which they live, i.e. part of the respective civil nation, in the countries in which they live, and possess (in addition to ethnic identity as a community)[52] also the corresponding civic national identity [53]. It is true that the countries in the region are relatively "new" civil nations (although some of them are heirs to ancient empires), and the processes of nation-building in them have not yet been fully completed, but this does not negate the general direction of development, and accordingly the presence of the Dom communities as an integral part of these processes.

This explains why the process of building a consolidated transborder Dom meta-community, which would include the individual Dom communities living in different countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, remains uncertain. Regarding the dreams of Roma activists from Europe to build a global Roma nation[54], at least for now, there are no signs from the Dom communities throughout the region (including the Dom communities in Azerbaijan) of any aspirations to actively engage as part of this process.

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Illustrations

Persian Gypsy Musicians in Svaneti, Georgia, 1883.

Caucasus Gypsies, 1880s.

Gypsy fortuneteller in Azerbaijan, 1930.

Iranian Dom Family with the authors in Baku, Surakhani rayon, 2022.

Kurdish Dom in Yevlakh, 2013.

Garachi neighbourhood in Yevlakh, 2013.

Garachi in Tbilisi, Georgia, 2013.

From left to right: Elena Marushiakova, Valery Novoselsky, Amoun Sleeem, Vesselin Popov in Jerusalem, 2008.