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SOCIAL DISTANCE OF ROMAS OF SOUTHEASTERN AND SOUTHWESTERN SERBIA TOWARDS MEMBERS OF OTHER NATIONS AND NATIONAL MINORITIES*

Introduction

In the sociopsychological research projects dealing with Romas in Serbia, the measurement of the social distance of the majority population towards Romas has mostly suffered from two kinds of shortcomings, namely, a) either the samples were small and with professionally and generation-limited groups (pupils, students) or, b) when the sample was representative, these problems were taken into consideration only marginally. For its comprehensiveness and representativeness of its samples the work done by Bogdan Đurović, "Social and Ethnic Distance towards Romas in Serbia,"¹ stands out. The results of the empirical research have confirmed the author's basic hypothesis that "the greater the assumed social proximity is, the greater social distance is" (2002: 82). Yet, when the attitudes towards Albanians and Macedonians were checked up, it turned out that Romas were not lagging in expressing a relatively high degree of social distance towards other nations.

Are Romas, as undoubtedly marginalized ethnic group, inter-ethnically more tolerant than members of other nations and national minorities? Among other nations the stereotyped view confirms it but is it really like that? We will try to highlight, by a brief analysis of the data from our research, this - so far unduly neglected - domain of the social and ethnic distance.

The determination of the concept of the "social distance"

The concept of the social distance is defined in different ways but it is most often related to E. Bogardus since he in 1925. first constructed the technique whose specific goal

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¹ *Kultura*, 103-104: 77-96, 2002. The paper presents presentation of a part of the research project entitled *SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF THE ROMANIES IN SERBIA IN THE TRANSITION PROCESSES – INTEGRATION, ASSIMILATION OR SEGREGATION?* (1998-2000) financed by the Research *Support Scheme* (Prague, Czech Republic). The research team included: Dragoljub B. Đorđević – team leader (Romas' religiosity), Dragana R. Mašović (Culture and education of Romas) and Bogdan Đurović (Social and ethnic distance towards Romas).

is measurement and comparison of attitudes towards different nations. By the social distance Bogardus assumed the extent of understanding and psychological closeness (that is, detachment) with respect to various individuals or groups. His *scale of social distance* consists of a certain number of assertions chosen *a priori* as appropriate for provoking the answers that would be indicators for the extent of acceptance of any national group on the part of the subject. There follows the list of 7 characteristic attitudes, namely, 1, close kinship through marriage, 2, membership in the same club as an expression of close friendship, 3, living in the same street, 4, employment in the same company, 5, citizenship in the same state, 6 visit to a country and 7, expulsion from the country. The examined should answer with "yes" or "no" and, in this way, they should say whether they are inclined to accept each of these relations with a member of some group.² The scale is in its original or modified form still in use today.

About the Research

The paper presents a part of the results of the three-year long socio-empirical research of the classical religion of Romas that was carried out, under the title of *RELIGIOUS LIFE OF ORTHODOX AND MUSLIM ROMAS IN WESTERN-SOUTHEAST SERBIA* (2000-2002), for the *Research Support Scheme* (Prague, Czeck Republic). The field interviewing was done in July and August, 2001. The research team consisted of Dragoljub B. Đorđević (leader), Jovan Živković, Dragan Todorović and Vladimir Jovanović (researchers).

The sample on which the interviews would be carried out was formed by the statistical analysis of the data from Census 1991 and the secondary analysis of other data and facts to be gathered after field research of the population over the age of 18. According to the quota sampling model, the sample consists of 700 Romanies and 300 non-Romanies (200 Serbs and 100 Muslims), situated proportionally in ten counties. All of the activities mentioned had a contribution in the creation of the *Standardized questionnaire*, which is composed of four parts: individual-social matrix, general set of questions for Romanies and non-Romanies, a number of questions exclusively for Romanies and, finally, a number of questions exclusively for non-Romanies.

Interpretation of the Results

The examined Romas were required to circle one of the offered five answers in order to show which of the offered relations they are ready to accept or refuse with the average member of each of 13 listed national and ethnic groups, namely, Montenegro, Croat, Macedonian, Serb, Bosnian, Slovenian, Roma, Bulgarian, Albanians, Hungarian, Muslim, Romanian and Turk. It should be said that the examined could, apart from a making a firm choice between "yes" and "no", choose the solution "indecisive" which alleviates the strictness of the obtained answers.

² More about it in: Dejvid Kreč, Ričard S. Kračfield, Igerton L. Balaki (1972): *Pojedinac u društvu (Individual in the Society)*, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva; V. Gud and P. Het (1966): *Metodi socijalnog istraživanja (Methods of Social Research)* Belgrade: Vuk Karadžić.

Table 1.

"GET MARRIED TO"	NO
Albanian	72,8
Turk	62,1
Croatian	59,1
Muslim	57,1
Bosnian	52,5
Bulgarian	50,2
Romanian	47,5
Hungarian	47,2
Slovenian	46,8
Macedonian	41,2
Montenegro	37,9
Serb	21,4
Roma	1,8

The majority of Romas, comprising more than a half of them, would never get married to an Albanian, Turk, Croat, Muslim, Bosnian and Bulgarian. Less than a half of Romas - though still high in percentage in the negative sense - would not marry a Romanian (47,5%), Hungarian (47,2%), Slovenian (46,8%) and Macedonian (41,2%). "The most privileged" are Montenegrees (37,9%) and Serbs (21,4%).

Table 2.

"HAVE HIM OR HER AS A FRIEND"	NO
Albanian	51,3
Turk	37,8
Croatian	34,7
Muslim	32,1
Bosnian	27,4
Bulgarian	24,9
Hungarian	23,7
Romanian	23,4
Slovenian	21,9
Montenegro	15,0
Macedonian	15,0
Serb	3,3
Roma	0,9

More than half of Romas would not accept an Albanian even as a friend (51,3%). Any friendship with a Turk or Croat would be rejected by more than a third of Romas, with a Muslim or Bosnian more than a fourth of Romas while with a Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovenian more than a fifth of the examined Romas. The most desirable as friends (15% each) are Montenegrees and Serbs.

Table 3.

"LIVE IN HIS OR HER NEIGHBORHOOD"	NO
Albanian	49,2
Turk	36,4
Croatian	31,9
Muslim	31,2
Bosnian	25,7
Bulgarian	24,7
Romanian	23,7
Hungarian	22,9
Slovenian	20,1
Macedonian	14,0
Montenegro	11,2
Serb	2,4
Roma	1,1

Again, almost half of Romas (49,2%) is unfavorable towards members of Albanian national community - they would not have them as neighbors. More than a third (36,4%) would have a Turk in their neighborhood, more than a fourth a Croat, Muslim and Bosnian while more than a fifth would have a Bulgarian, Romanian, Hungarian and Slovenian. There are considerably fewer Romas who have objections against a Macedonian (14%) and Montenegro (11,2%), while the distance towards Serbs in this case is negligible (2,4%).

Table 4.

"WORK IN THE SAME COMPANY"	NO
Albanian	40,8
Turk	31,6
Croatian	27,4
Muslim	26,0
Bosnian	21,2
Bulgarian	21,0
Romanian	19,4
Hungarian	18,2
Slovenian	17,3
Macedonian	13,0
Montenegro	11,6
Serb	2,1
Roma	1,1

The work in the same company with an Albanian is problematic for 40,8% Romas. About one third of them would not work together with a Turk while more than a fourth with a Croat or Muslim. Less negative percentage relations are evidently related to Macedonians and Montenegrines while the least are related to Serbs.

Table 5.

"HAVE HIM OR HER AS A BOSS"	NO
Albanian	54,0
Turk	42,3
Croatian	38,2
Muslim	37,1
Bulgarian	35,6
Romanian	33,6
Bosnian	33,4
Hungarian	31,3
Slovenian	24,6
Macedonian	22,4
Montenegro	20,3
Serb	3,8
Roma	3,7

To have an Albanian as a boss at work is rejected by 54% Romas, while 42,3% would not like to see a Turk in this position; more than a third of the examined Romas also refuse cooperation with Croats, Muslims, Bulgarians, Romanians and Bosnians. The negative distance does not fall below one fifth in the case of Hungarians, Slovenians, Macedonians and Montenegroes, either while it is almost non-existent with Serbs.

Table 6.

"LIVE IN THE SAME CITY"	NO
Albanian	44,6
Turk	33,0
Muslim	29,4
Croatian	29,2
Bosnian	23,6
Bulgarian	23,2
Hungarian	22,5
Romanian	22,4
Slovenian	19,5
Macedonian	13,2
Montenegro	10,2
Serb	1,7
Roma	1,4

Neither is living in the same town with Albanians desirable for a great majority of Romas (44,6%). About a third of the examined would not accept it in the case of Turks, Muslims and Croats while more than a fifth do not want to have Bosnians, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Romanies as their co-citizens.

Table 7.

"LIVE IN THE SAME STATE"	NO
Albanian	44,6
Turk	34,0
Croatian	29,7
Muslim	29,0
Bulgarian	23,8
Bosnian	23,3
Romanian	22,7
Hungarian	22,6
Slovenian	19,8
Macedonian	13,2
Montenegro	9,9
Serb	2,0
Roma	1,4

Not even the most benign form of social life records any less social distance of Romas towards Albanians, namely, even 44,6% of the examined Romas do not want the members of this national group in the common state. The other percentages correlate with the statements considering living in the same town.

Conclusion

The most prominent social distance the Romas manifest towards Albanians both when it comes to proximity (readiness for making kinship relations through marriage – 72,8%) and when it comes to the lowest form of proximity (life in the common state – 44,6%). In each of the given forms it does not fall beneath forty percent and it can surely be interpreted as an exceptionally high social distance towards other nations. There is an evident xenophobic orientation with an almost unchanged sequence in all the options, namely towards the citizens of Turkish, Croatian, Muslim and Bosnian nationality. In somewhat lower percentage the distance is evident towards Bulgarians, Romanians, Hungarians and Slovenians. Macedonians and Montenegrines are not experienced as a "danger" (except in the cases of marriage and acceptance as one's superior at work, the negative attitude is expressed by less than 15% of the examined). The majority population enjoys an almost limitless confidence of Romany people: even every fifth Roman man or woman would not be married to a Serbian woman or man.

The ethnic distance towards Romas has been written about a lot. The researchers, however, have not questioned the opposite process enough, that is, acceptance or refusal of other national and ethnic groups by the Romany people themselves. Our research has covered the territory of Southeastern and Southwestern Serbia; thus, the interpreted results do not have a universal significance for the overall Romany population in Serbia.

The need for adaptation into the existing dominant social and cultural models of the majority population induced in Romas the desire not to be distinct from the surroundings. Not very rarely it also means silent adherence to the deeply rooted stereotypes with negative implications so as not to induce any doubts about their loyalty. Romas really want to be respected and accepted by the majority, Serbian population as equals regardless of

how the majority population is ready for it or not. The future scientific research would have to deal much more seriously with answering the following questions regarding the *worrying social distance towards members of other nations, except for the majority one, a) a matter of mimicry and avoiding any decisive statement in order to avoid being ascribed the role of the constant guilty party for numerous misfortunes that occurred in the region in the last ten years or 2) a real expression of intolerance of the Romany people.*

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