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(EDITORS)**

**PRESERVING THE ROMANI MEMORIES**

Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Adam Bartosz

**Munich**

**Lincom**

**2020**

**“Roma” Series**  
**Series Editors: Hristo Kyuchukov and Ian Hancock**  
**№ 7**

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ISBN

# THE ‘GYPSIES’ (DOM – LOM – ROM) IN SOUTHERN CAUCASUS (GEORGIA, ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN)

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For many years in Romani Studies dominated the perception that modern Turkey is the only country in the world, on whose territory live representatives of the three main divisions of the so called ‘Gypsies’ (Dom – Lom – Rom). The presentation is based on our field researches in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, where live representatives of these three main divisions. We will present the baseline data on the status and conditions of the three communities (Dom/Domlar/Garachiler, Lom/Lomavtik/Bosha and Roma/Цыгане) in present-day in region of South Caucasus – estimated number of the communities, spatial distribution, mapping of the major settlements, way of life, housing, basic occupations and labour activities, ethno-cultural and ethno-social characteristics, language/dialect, etc. Special attention will be paid to the various manifestations of their identities (on community and national level), and relationships (or lack thereof) between representatives of the three ‘Gypsy’ divisions.

**Key words:** Dom, Lom, Rom, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan

## Introduction

For long time, it was considered that after leaving the Indian subcontinent the ancestors of today’s so-called ‘Gypsies’ split into three different migration waves, the Dom, the Lom, and the Rom (Sampson 1923: 156–169). These communities get different names from their surrounding population, which will be discussed below. As an umbrella term for all of them different appellations in different languages are used (e.g. ‘Цыгане’ in Russian, ‘Çingeneler’ in Turkish, etc.), which is translated (though this translation is not quite adequate) into English with the word ‘Gypsies’.

Some authors believe that the Lom separated from the Dom and the Rom several centuries earlier (Дьячок 2002); according to others the Lom left India later than the Rom (Lesný 1916; Kutlík-Garudo 1993); a third group have expressed doubts about the Dom–Lom–Rom link (Kenrick 2004: 6; Hancock 2002: 6); and, most recently, it has been argued that the differences between the Dom and Rom had appeared before they left India (Matras 2012). In any case, whenever this fundamental delimitation actually occurred, the three main Gypsy divisions of Dom, Lom, and Rom are present today in the Southern Caucasus (today’s Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with three republics partially recognised: Republic of Abkhazia; Republic of Southern Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh Republic).

## **I. Borders and Identities**

### ***1.1. The Dom***

The Dom belong to the populations known collectively in the literature as Middle Eastern Gypsies (Matras 2012: 27), their branch in the Caucasus area is designated as part of the local Gypsies. They use the self-appellation of Dom but are referred to by their neighbors as Garachi (Qaraçiler in Azerbaijani). They are more or less related to the Qarachi in Iranian Azerbaijan (in the region of Tabriz) and the Suzmani in Iranian Kurdistan, and also to the Karaçi, Mıtrıp and Dom (or Domlar) in southeastern Turkey (Патканов 1887; Patkanoff 1907-1908, 1909; Knapp 1909; Benninghaus 1991; Восканян 1998; Matthee 2000; Özkan 2000: 21-43; Kolukırık 2008: 145-153).

In Azerbaijan they live: in the capital city of Baku and in some villages of the Absheron Peninsula; in the cities and surroundings of Gazakh, Aghstafa, Ganja, Barda, Agdash, Goychay, Yevlakh, Shamakhi, Aghsu, Shamakhi, Qobustan, Zaqatala, Balakan, Qakh, Quba, Khachmaz, and Khudat; in the villages of Gyullyuk (Qakh district), Chobankël (Zaqatala district), Shambulbina, Gyulyuzanbina, Melik-zade, Saribulak, Kazma, and Chanlibel/Chardakhlu (Balakan district); a small number of Garachi lived in Shusha/Shushi, Jabrayil/Jrakan, and Agdam/Akna up until the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1992–1994, after which they migrated from there to other regions (cf. Исақызы 2001; ERRC 2004; Азербайджанские 2005; Али 2006; 2008; The ethnic 2011; Хапизов 2013; Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

In Georgia, individual families of Dom live among the Azerbaijani population in the Marneuli, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi municipalities in the historic province of Borchali, part of the present day, region of Kvemo Kartli. Following the collapse of the USSR small parts of this community migrate for shorter or longer periods of time (with a tendency to stay permanently) in the capital city of Tbilisi or in Kutaisi (Markowska-Manista 2015; Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

Individual Dom families live in the Russian Federation (e.g. in Belorechensk, Northern Caucasus), and even in Central Asia (e.g. in Tashkent, Uzbekistan).

The Dom language is known as Domari and is generally considered an endangered, moribund language (cf. Matras 2012). The level of preservation of Domari dialects in the Caucasus is not being researched by linguists till now. Dom in Southern Caucasus are multilingual, to different extents and in different combinations of Azerbaijani, Farsi (Persian), Kurmannji (Kurdish) and Russian.

The Dom identity is complex, multidimensional and contextual. On leading position is usually the preferred and publicly demonstrated Kurdish

ethnic identity, which however does not conflict with their awareness of a separate Dom identity.

The Garachi community, living in the Qakh, Zaqatala, and Balakan districts, deserves special attention. Their language is colloquially linked to Persian and their public self-designation is Farsi (meaning Persians/Iranians). According to some hypotheses their ancestors were resettled in this region by Shah Abbas I (1588–1629), together with other Iranian populations (The ethnic 2011). Additional, in particular linguistic, research is needed to specify to what extent the Farsi are a territorially confined division of the scattered Dom community in Azerbaijan (as they are according to the locals) or whether they are another, separate branch of Dom.

Exogamic marriages are an unusual among the Dom, as such marriages as a rule do not happen with ethnic Azerbaijanis, and only exceptionally with representatives of other nationalities. This is because of the inadmissibility of such marriages according to the norms of the Dom community, and the low social prestige of the community as a whole in the eyes of the majority population.

Descriptions of the Dom's traditional occupations in Caucasus in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are quite limited (Патканов 1887). In the Caucasus, 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 main sources of livelihood were: begging (often combined with fortune telling) by the women; producing sieves from horsehair by men; and busking with dancing bears and snakes. Men were also known as musicians (including at weddings), and women have been 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 any one Tatar [i.e. Azerbaijani – author's note] wedding. (Патканов 1887: 74-75).

## ***1.2. The Lom***

This division is represented in the Caucasus by the community with self-appellation Lom (or Lomavtik, with the Armenian suffix for plural). The Lom are also known by the names given them by the surrounding Armenian population. In the past (until the nineteenth century) such a designation was Gnchu (in Western Armenian dialect) or Knchu (in Eastern Armenian dialect). Since then they are referred to as Bosha in Armenia and Georgia, and Posha in Turkey. In Georgia, because the Georgian language does not have a word for 'Gypsy', they use the loan blended term Boshebi.

In Armenia, the Boshas live in several towns and villages: in the capital city of Yerevan (in the old Armenian neighborhood of Kond since the Middle Ages, and also in the Sari-Tagh, Kanaker and Nork-Marash neighborhoods) and the nearby village of Nor Adzhin. In the village of Nor Kharberd, near to Yerevan, live the descendants of Boshas who – under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which regulated the exchange of Muslim and Christian populations between Turkey and Greece – moved from Asia Minor to Greece, and were expelled from there together with the Armenians to Armenia in 1947. Boshas also live in the cities of Gyumri, Akhtala, Nor Hachen, Vanadzor, and Artashat; in the villages of Gyulagarak (Lori province) and Jraber (Kotayk Province), formerly known as “Bosha village” (cf. Kalika 1985; Hofmann 1987; Marutyan et al. 1999; Markossian 2002; Marutyan 2011; Хачатарян 2003; Восканян 2011a; Агаларян 2011; Шуваева-Петросян 2013; 2015; Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

In Georgia, the Boshas/Boshebi live mainly in the cities of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe (in Samtskhe-Javakheti region, bordering Armenia, with a majority Armenian population), and also in the cities of Tsalka, Shulaveri, and Marneuli (in Kvemo Kartli region), in the villages of Dilipi (Ninotsminda municipality) and Khizilkilisa/Ghzhkilisa (Tsalka municipality), and in the capital city of Tbilisi, in the old Armenian neighbourhood of Avlabari (ibid.).

In Azerbaijan, the Boshas lived in the disputed region of Shahumyan, bordering the former Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. According to the stories we were told by our Lom interlocutors, they had relatives who had lived in different cities (mainly in Baku and Sumqayıt) and in the countryside of Azerbaijan. Most of them had emigrated to Armenia after the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1992-94, and currently in Azerbaijan only single cases of Loms remain, living in mixed marriages.

In the nineteenth century, in the then Ottoman Empire, the Loms lived scattered in different regions of Asia Minor. Most in the vilayet of Sivas: about 6,000 Boshas lived in the city of Boyabat; and in other cities Merzifon (481 houses), Vezirköprü (280 houses), Bafra (290 houses), Zile (92 houses); in Erzurum and surrounding villages there were about 300 Lom houses; with others in Kars, Sarıkamış, Oltu, and other places (Paspati 1870; Папазян 1901: 110-111; Black 1913: 327-330).

Nowadays in Turkey the Boshas live in small communities in the provinces of Kars, Artvin, Ağrı, Van, Erzurum, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, Erzincan, Sinop, Samsun, Sivas, Çankırı, Kastamonu, and Ankara (Lehmann-Haupt 1913; 1928; Veradzin 1931; Benninghaus 1991; Erkul 1998; Özkan 2000: 21-43; Seropyan 2000; Bozkurt 2004; 2006; Kolukırcık 2008: 145-153; Üzüm 2012; Çetin 2014; Öncül 2015; Demir and Üzüm 2014; 2017; 2018). During the active nomadic season, some bivouacs near the Asian side of

Istanbul city. In Istanbul, in the old Armenian neighbourhood in the Kurtuluş district, live a small number of Posha families (Hadjian 2012).

The Lom in Armenia and Georgia (and also in Turkey) speak their ‘own’ language of Lomavren (Патканов 1887; Papaziants 1899; Папазян 1901; Finck 1905, 1907ab; Patkanoff 1907-1908, 1909; Lehmann-Haupt 1913; 1928; Dowsett 1973–1974; Voskanian 2002; Восканян 2011b; Scala 2014). It is an endangered language that functions as a secret language (Voskanian 2002). The very first recordings of Lomavren from the region of Erzurum were made in 1846 (Sargisyan 1864); the next recordings were made by the teacher Ioakimov in Tsalka (also from Lom from the region of Erzurum, who resettled in the Russian Empire in 1829). They were included in a manuscript, prepared by Yevgeny Weidenbaum (renowned historian and ethnographer of the Caucasus region), which was used by Kerope Patkanov in his reference study of Lomavren (Патканов 1887: 76-81).

The identity of the Lom is multidimensional lead by the preferred Armenian ethnic identity, which does not conflict with their awareness of a separate Lom identity. The fact that the preferred Armenian community has its own national state adds a new dimension to the identity of Lom and their preferred (ethnic and national) identity overlap. They self-identify and are perceived by others as a community included in the composition of the Armenian nation (in Armenia) or as part of the Armenian national minority (in Georgia). Mixed marriages of Lom with Armenians are generally acceptable, but not desirable. They prefer marriages with Armenian girls to incorporate them into the Lom community.

Traditional occupations of the Lom were determined by their seminomadic lifestyle (with rented winter dwellings in the villages and an active nomadic season). Their main source of livelihood was horsehair sieves (produced by men and sold by women in the homes of the local population). There are several folk legends, “explaining” this main traditional occupation. According to one legend (recorded in the region of Tsalka, Georgia, from Bosha, refugees from the region of Erzurum) Jesus Christ once found many impurities in a loaf of bread and became angry. He plucked a few hairs from his head and gave them to one of his disciples who did not know what to do with them, but Jesus blessed those hairs and his disciple learned to make sieves from them. So, the disciple became the founder of the sieve-makers guild of the Bosha, and since then the Bosha call themselves Makhagordz (sieve-makers in Armenian) (Патканов 1887: 80–81). This legend is still recounted, as seen from the remarks of one Lom from Akhalkalaki:

If there were no Bosha, you would have to eat mouse droppings. Bosha were clean people they produced sieves, so that people can sift flour and are not eating mouse droppings. (Агаларян 2011).

According to another legend (recorded in the region of Tokat in Turkey from local Posha, whose ancestors came from Persia) it was the biblical Job who taught them to make sieves (Paspati 1870: 17). Some Lom were famous for their male orchestras performing traditional Armenian music at weddings and other feasts.

The main occupation of Lom women was begging. For this they toured the homes of the local population begging for food. Among the Armenian population is a widespread narrative that at a wedding the Boshia groom hides in a 'tonir' (Asian clay oven) and the bride promises him: "Get out of there, my dear, and I will go around the world to nurture you", and only after this pledge does the bridegroom come out and they get married (Ванциан 1901: 58); in other versions, the bridegroom hides in a bag, a chest or a cupboard (Папазян 1901: 132). Today, however, the Lom deny having such a custom.

### ***1.3. The Rom***

This division is represented in the Caucasus by communities with the self-appellation Roma, designated by all their surrounding populations with the Russian term Цыгане. The main Roma groups in Southern Caucasus are Krymurja, Vlaxi, dispersed family aggregations of Ruska Roma, a small group of Plaščuny, and some mixed families with partners from Ruska Roma, Servi, Kišinjovci, or Lingurari (Деметер et al. 2000; Marushiakova and Popov 2003; Sordia 2009; Смирнова-Сеславинская 2014).

In the Southern Caucasus the Roma live: in Georgia in the capital city of Tbilisi and in the cities of Kutaisi, Batumi, and Telavi, and in the villages of Gachiani (Kvemo Kartli region) and Choeti (Kakheti region); in the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia in the capital city of Sukhumi (cf. Чихладзе 2008; Szakonyi 2008; Sordia 2009; Markowska-Manista 2015; Hansen 2016; Veloy Mateu 2017); in Azerbaijan, they live in the capital city of Baku (Nasimi и Surakhani neighborhoods) and in the nearby city of Sumqayit; in Armenia after the collapse of the USSR only a few Roma people remain from mixed families in Yerevan (Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

In the post-Soviet space and elsewhere, Roma identity is multidimensional, however, on leading position is their Roma community identity. The endonym Roma is considered a full synonym of the exonym Цыгане (in Russian), both terms are used simultaneously and indiscriminately. The phenomenon of a preferred identity is almost entirely absent among Roma in the Caucasus, the only exception being a community in Tbilisi with the self-appellation Moldovani (Moldavians).

Another phenomenon has been observed, the adoption by the Roma of an awareness of belonging to a supra-ethnic identity. In the USSR, the concept of the Soviet people as a civil supranational identity was introduced in the 1960s. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the proclamation of new



independent states this concept was preserved among a large number of Roma. They often express this with the words: “We are the last Soviet people”. Nowadays, this level of civic identity is gradually giving way to the old-new supra-ethnic identity of Россияне (i.e. the all peoples belonging to Russia, all Russian citizens; not to be confused with Русские, the ethnic Russians) (Marushiakova and Popov 2003; 2016a).

The Roma also have a very strong group identity (at the level of separate endogamous groups), therefore the ban on mixed marriages applies almost equally with regard to both Gadže (non-Roma) and other Roma groups.

Roma traditional occupations were also determined by their past seminomadic lifestyle and were differentiated according to the group they belonged to. The main source of livelihood for Krymurja and Vlaxi was mobile blacksmith work and for Ruska Roma it was horse trading. The women’s main occupation in all groups was fortune telling and begging.

#### ***1.4. Distinction of Dom – Lom – Rom Communities***

After the Russian Empire annexed the Southern Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Dom and Lom living in these lands were placed in the Цыгане [Gypsies] category. The justification for linking Dom (called Karachi by local Shia and Myutryub/Myutryup by local Sunni Muslims) and Lom (called Bosha by local Armenians) into one category with European Gypsies (Roma) was not their similar nomadic lifestyles and traditional occupations, but their common Indian origin (Шопен 1852; Патканов 1887; Patkanoff 1907-1908, 1909).

Placing Dom and Lom into one common category of Gypsies does not mean denying their differences between the various units, on the contrary, after the reference work of Керопе Патканов (Патканов 1887) a whole Armenian academic school was formed, the main focus of which was to distinguish Armenian Gypsies (Lom/Bosha) from European Gypsies (Roma) and to show that Bosha are not only different, but “better” (Папазян 1899; Папазян 1901: 111-123).

Somewhat curious is the case of the Transcaucasian Dom, who seem to be an overlooked community. Even Patkanov, author of the reference work about Dom (1887) never met a Domari speaker. The background data he used in his book were taken from a manuscript titled ‘Materials for learning the language of Asian Gypsies (dialect Karachi)’, written by Usubback Melik-Ahnazarov, a teacher in Elizavetopolsk (today Ganja). Since then Karachi has never been directly studied, and all following works use the data first published by Patkanov.

The borders between the three main divisions of Gypsies (Dom, Lom, and Rom) in Southern Caucasus (Transcaucasia), where they (at least theoretically) could be in contact, are clearly delineated. Although they know

that in the eyes of outsiders they are often perceived as one whole and in relations with surrounding populations to some extent some mutual solidarity can be observed, in everyday life they avoid any interaction. Dom and Lom deny their affiliation with Gypsies on the basis of their preferred identity. Roma in contrast, consider that only they are “true Gypsies” and refuse to accept Dom and Lom as their equals; the best they can agree to is that they are Gypsies, but assimilated, not true ones (so at least on an abstract level a consciousness exists of some kind of unity). Usually Roma refer to Dom as Kurds and to Lom as Armenians. Mixed marriages among these three divisions are considered unacceptable. We came across only of one case of intermarriage between Dom and Roma, which was pointed out to us as an inadmissible exception.

## **II. History of Dom – Lom – Rom Communities**

Historical evidence of settlements and the presence of the Gypsies (Dom, Lom and Roma) in Southern Caucasus are relatively few and mostly quite fragmented.

### ***II.1. Dom***

Based on the approximate dates of the migration of Gypsies from the Indian subcontinent to Europe, it can be assumed that Dom had settled in the land of the Southern Caucasus in the tenth to twelfth centuries, but there is no written evidence for them before the nineteenth century, when Karachi in the city of Tabriz in Iranian Azerbaijan were described (Ouseley 1823: 400–401). With a huge dose of confidence, it may be assumed that this community is related to Karachi living within the Russian Empire, described by Patkanov, as there are no significant differences in the language of both communities (Патканов 1887: 101–137).

The above-mentioned manuscript prepared by Yevgeny Weidenbaum, which was also used by Kerop Patkanov, contains a number of data about Dom. According to which, in 1829–1832 in the region of Nakhichevan, Yerevan gubernia, lived 43 Karachi families (217 people) and 14 Myutryup families, all nomads. By the mid nineteenth century in Quba uyezd (present Azerbaijan) of Baku gubernia a Karachi village existed, in which lived 21 Gypsy families, migrants from Persia or Shirvan (a historical province in modern Azerbaijan), who were called Karachi by the local population. In Shirvan lived 200 (according other data 500) Karachi “tents” (i.e. families), who migrated from Persia and settled in Goychay uyezd. The total number of Karachi in Baku and Yerevan governorates (the territories of modern Azerbaijan and Armenia) in the mid nineteenth century, according to Yevgeny Weidenbaum’s calculations, was 2,399 persons (Патканов 1887: 70-72).

After the establishment of the Soviet Union in the Southern Caucasus, the majority of Qarachi inhabited the Azerbaijani SSR. Although perceived by the Soviet state as ‘цыгане’ they were not covered by Gypsy policies of the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1926, the Department of Nationalities at All-Union Central Executive Committee, through which the Soviet state’s Gypsy policy was coordinated, circulated to all Soviet territorial-administrative units a letter requesting a report on the implementation of the Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union from November 1, 1926 ‘On measures to support the transition of nomadic Gypsies to a sedentary working life’. In response to this request, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Central Executive Committee on 17 March 1927 declared that:

[...] due to the absence of nomadic Gypsies on the territory of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) and lack of requests, even from those accidentally entering the ASSR for land allocation, applying of any urgent measures in this direction at this time ... is dropped; in case of any applications from them, they will be satisfied with priority. (ГАРФ: 50).

All subsequent circular letters with similar inquiries from the Department of Nationalities at All-Union Central Executive Committee were no longer answered by the ASSR authorities. The reason for this de facto refusal to pursue a specific Gypsy policy in the ASSR was probably the relatively small number of Dom and the indifference of local authorities in regard of this issue.

One highly questionable piece of information (not confirmed by any other sources) is found in the literature about Hasan Kyamal Ogly Niyazov, who was a Dom, an Islamic clergyman and a teacher (born in 1881), who published a primer, *Mektubi*, in 1939 for the education of Dom children, written in Domari, in Latin script. The primer was supposedly used until 1942, when the author was arrested and expelled to Iran (Kalinin 2000: 145-146).

In contrast to some other Gypsy communities in the USSR, who were only rarely victims of political repression in the 1930s and 1940s (Marushiakova and Popov 2008), the Dom in the Southern Caucasus became subject to targeted repressive actions of the Soviet state. As a result of the Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR Nr. 2123-420ss of December 17, 1936, “persons repressed in the past for counterrevolutionary crimes, smugglers, bandits and members of their families” were deported from Azerbaijan and Armenia to the Kazakh SSR. It is unclear what proportion of those deported were Dom, because the documents speak about Armenians and Turks (568 families) and Kurds (553 families), but it was especially noted that part of the displaced:

Turks (the Turkic Gypsies) and Kurds settle poorly, do not acquire cattle, work badly ... shirk from jobs ... most of escapes are done by them. (Поболь & Полян 2005: 77-79).

In 1944 two train coaches (about 40 to 60 families) with цыгане (palpable Dom) were deported from Tbilisi (1995a: 175) under the Resolution of the State Defense Committee Nr. 6279ss of July 31, 1944 “on the resettlement from the border zone of the Georgian SSR of Meskhetian Turks, Kurds and Hemshin peoples [Armenian Muslims]” from Samtskhe-Javakheti region on border with Turkey to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Бугай 1995b). Also in 1944 the capital city of Tbilisi was purified from “wilfully settled Turks and Kurds” (palpable among them were also Dom) who were “not engaged with socially useful work” and they were deported to rural areas (Поболь & Полян 2005: 77-79).

According Dom oral history, after deportation they lived mainly in Kazakhstan (in regions of Alma-Ata and Southern Kazakhstan) and a few in Uzbekistan. The Deportation Resolutions were revoked by 1956 (Полян 2001), but the Dom returned to Azerbaijan (regardless of where they had lived before) in 1963 (Садыгов 2008). The authorities settled them in Yevlakh, in a separate neighborhood informally called Garachylar mahallasi. Only a few Dom families remain in Central Asia to this day.

## ***II.2. Lom***

As in the case of the Dom, it can be assumed that Lom penetrated the lands of the Southern Caucasus probably in the tenth to twelfth centuries. Their presence there is subsequently confirmed by various historical sources, which clearly indicate that their historic destiny has been closely linked with the Armenian people. Under the Ottoman Empire the rights of non-Muslim communities were regulated by the Millet System, aggregating the population into various confessional millets, with a certain degree of autonomy, some also including an ethnic dimension (Inalcık 1973; Braude 1982; Mentzel 2000). From preserved documents, it is clear that Lom were included in the Armenian millet (adhering to the Armenian Apostolic Church). That the Armenians accepted this inclusion is evidenced by an informal note written in the late 1870s by the Katholikos (the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church) and applied to documents at the Berlin Conference in 1878, in which he states that “Kinchors” (i.e. Lom) should not be separated in any way from other Armenians (Karpat 1985: 192).

The historical evidence attests that Lom fought side by side with Armenians against the Ottoman Turks. The famous Armenian Anonymous Chronicle 1722–1736 describes how, during the siege of Yerevan by the Ottoman army in 1724, a hundred families of “rich Christian Gypsies” from

the Armenian Quarter Kond organized a defensive unit of 200 people led by Gazarosa Baturyana, Kylduza, Davida, Bayrama, and Petros; they were joined by another 300 Gypsies from other districts of the city, and all fought bravely in defense of the city with the Armenians (Армянская 1988).

After the Russo-Turkish War (1828-29) and the peace treaty of Adrianople of 1829, Archbishop Karapet Bagratuni handed a memorandum to the Chief of the Caucasian Corps of the Russian Army, General Ivan Paskevich. The agreement provided for about 50,000 Armenians (7,298 families) from the vilayet of Erzurum and the surrounding villages to move into territories within the Russian Empire. They settled in the regions of the cities of Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Tsalka (present day Georgia), and Aleksandropol (present-day Gyumri, Armenia). Among them were Lom, who had previously lived with the Armenians (Патканов 1887; Папазиантс 1899; Папазян 1901; Ванциян 1901). The Russian Empire repeatedly gave a number of privileges (provision of land, loans, release of tax expenses, etc.) to all new settlers (Армянская 2007). In the new territories 25 families of Boshas settled in Akhaltsikhe, 16 families in Akhalkalaki, 40 families in Alexandropol (Gyumri), 8 families in the village Akhtala, and 54 adult males in the villages of Mugaresh and Zagilii (Akhalkalaki uyezd), 4 families in the village of Khizilkilisa/Ghzhkilisa (Tsalka uyezd), and 20 families in the village of Damala (today in Aspindza municipality in Georgia). After the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, some re-settled in the regions of Batumi and Kars (Патканов 1887: 69; Ванциян 1901: 45). Boshas also lived in Shamakhi, in the then Baku Governorate, and in Kars, in the village of Zaim (called Boshas-Zaim) in the Kars region (Папазян 1901: 111).

In the then Erivan (Yerevan) Governorate (which largely coincides with today's Armenia) in 1829–1832 lived 46 “Armenian Boshas” families (195 people) and 4 “Tatar Boshas” families (17 people) (Шопен 1852: 539). “Tatar Boshas” in this case is understood as Boshas Muslims. The process of conversion to Islam by some Loms had already occurred in the Ottoman Empire, where in 1868 some Boshas in the region of Tokat (modern Turkey) became Muslims (Патканов 1887: 81).

Some Loms who used to live in the Ottoman Empire and were Christians fled from the Armenian Genocide (1915) together with their Armenian neighbours in the Russian Empire. Memories of these events are still preserved in the family histories of Loms living in Armenia.

In frames of USSR a majority of the Loms lived in the Armenian SSR and the Georgian SSR. Although perceived as ‘цыгане’ (Gypsies) by the surrounding population, similarly to Doms, they were not covered by the Soviet state policies towards Gypsies in the 1920s and 1930s.

The only exception to this is seen in the reply of the Secretary-General of the Central Executive Committee of the Armenian Socialist Soviet

Republic, Ayrapet Tatian, of March 1, 1927, to the aforementioned request from the Department of Nationalities at All-Union Central Executive Committee, which stated:

[...] nomadic Gypsies in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia are endowed with land in Novo-Nikolaevka, Chatkran and Saghmosavan. (ГАРФ: 36).

From now on, the authorities in Armenia take the same position as in Azerbaijan - to all inquiries from the Department of Nationalities at the All-Union Central Executive Committee either they do not respond at all or they respond stereotypically that there are no Gypsy nomads in the Republic. This is probably because of their relatively small number of Lom and especially the reluctance of local authorities to separate them from the Armenian people.

### ***II.3. Rom***

Historical sources do not provide full information about Roma groups, the first settlers in the region of the Northern Caucasus. Among Roma settlers coming from Bessarabia and Novorossiia the sources explicitly mention Lingurari, Ursari, Lasgii (probably a misspelling of Laeši), and also the special category of ‘Gypsies of the Crown’ (Бондарь 1990). The 1860 sources also note a presence of “Romanian Gypsies” (likely Vlaxi) (Кирей 2010: 18). The first Krymurja settled in the region of Kuban in the 1920s and 1930s (Marushiakova and Popov 2003). From Northern Caucasus Rom gradually resettled also in South Caucasus.

There is no exact date when Roma for the first time settled in the South Caucasus. It is likely that small groups of Roma entered Georgia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the time of the Russian Empire without having long held there (or at least it is no historical information about their settlements there).

Similarly to Azerbaijan and Armenia, in Georgia no specific policy was implemented in the 1920s and 1930s in regard to local Gypsies (mostly Loma at that time). In response to the above request of the Department of Nationalities at All-Union Central Executive Committee, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (with center Tbilisi), in a letter dated June 9, 1927 reported:

In the territory of Georgia, there were no registered nomadic Gypsies who wish to switch to a sedentary working lifestyle. Individuals living in Georgia are artisanal Gypsies who did not make a request for land allotment, that is why the decree ... on measures to facilitate the transition of nomadic Gypsies to a sedentary lifestyle was noted by the

From this point on what follows is repeating the well-known story - all inquiries by the Department of Nationalities at the All-Union Central Executive Committee are either not answered at all, or are answered uniformly that there are no Gypsy nomads in the Republic wishing to adopt a sedentary way of life. The reasons for this position are probably the same as in Azerbaijan and Armenia - the insignificant number of Gypsies in the republic and the corresponding consideration of this issue as very insignificant and not deserving of special attention, especially against the background of the ongoing huge social and political changes.

In the 1930s the first migration of nomadic Krimurja began southward to Georgia. The first wave occurs in 1933 due to famine in the Kuban region. The second wave was that of the population who escaped before the advancing German army in 1942. The third wave was caused by the famine in 1946–1947. The Krimurja settled initially in Sukhumi, creating a settlement, called Staryi, near the railway station; later they gradually resettled and built new houses in Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Kobuleti, and Ochamchira (Торопов 2004: 12).

After the Second World War, small Roma groups (mainly Krimurja, Vlaxi and Plaščuny coming from the North Caucasus region) settled in different periods of time in the Soviet republics of the South Caucasus - Georgia (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and others places in the country), Azerbaijan (mainly Baku) and Armenia (Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

### **III. Demography of Dom – Lom – Rom Communities**

It is difficult to accurately estimate the numbers of ‘Gypsies’ (Dom, Lom and Roma) in the Southern Caucasus in the past, and it is still a difficult task for various reasons, including the methodology of the census.

In 1862 the number of Gypsies in the Russian Empire was approximately 50,000, of which 3,000 were classified as “Bosha and Karachi” living in the Southern Caucasus (Pauli 1862: 148–149; Святский: 4). From the 1897 census, in the Southern Caucasus it was indicated there were 212 Gypsies (Crowe 1994: 170), although it is not clear whether they were Dom and Lom, or Roma migrants.

The subsuming of Dom and Lom in the ‘Gypsy’ category from Russian empire continued in the USSR censuses. Similarly, with Central Asian Gypsies, sometimes the state gave more options for self-determination through a list of subcategories incorporated into the larger categories. In this way, it became possible for Dom and Lom to have their identities (ethnicities) recorded in the censuses.

The 1937 glossary of nationalities for elaboration of the All-Union Census, published just before this census, the options of Dom and of Gypsies with Armenian mother tongue were included in the category of Gypsies; and in the category of Armenians together with other variants were included Bosha, Armenian Gypsies, Gnchu, Karachi and Lom (Словарь 1937). In the new 1939 glossary of nationalities the variants under the category Gypsies were: Roma and Rom; and among its distinct divisions were Caucasian Gypsies, Armenian (Transcaucasian) Gypsies, Azerbaijanian Gypsies, Lom, Bosha, Ginchu, and Karachi (Dom) (Всесоюзная 1939).

This approach to Gypsies was maintained in the subsequent Soviet censuses, while irregular changes in the listed names occur. In the 1959 glossary of nationalities and languages, under the heading Gypsies were listed Rom, Roma, Lom, Bosha, Karachi, Mazang, Jughi, Lyuli, Dom; and as their languages were given the variants Gypsy and Bosha (Словари 1959).

In the 1988 glossary, the general category of Gypsies was split into several distinct divisions. Gypsies in the Southern Caucasus were divided into two entries, in one were included Lom and Bosha, with Gypsy and Bosha languages, and in the second were included Dom and Karachi, with the Gypsy language (Словари 1988).

In spite of the glossaries, in sum, the results published show mostly only the number of ‘Gypsies’ in the Southern Caucasus in the USSR without pointing out the internal divisions. According to the censuses the number of ‘Gypsies’ was as follows:

- In 1926: 405 Gypsies in the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (which split into the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics in 1936); 31 self-declared as Bosha;
- In 1939: 7 Gypsies in the Armenian SSR, 400 in Azerbaijan SSR, and 727 in Georgian SSR;
- In 1959: 18 Gypsies in Armenian SSR, 577 in Azerbaijan SSR, and 1,024 in Georgian SSR;
- In 1970: 12 Gypsies in Armenian SSR, 843 in Azerbaijan SSR and 1,224 in Georgian SSR;
- In 1979: 59 Gypsies in Armenian SSR, 121 in Azerbaijan SSR, and 1,223 in Georgian SSR;
- In 1989: 48 Gypsies in Armenian SSR, 145 in Azerbaijan SSR, 1,774 in Georgian SSR (Переписи 2012).

After the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the newly independent states in Southern Caucasus, censuses in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been irregular and incomplete, making it impossible to determine the



overall number of Gypsies, and the relative share of Dom, Lom and Roma. The Armenian censuses of 2001 and 2011, and Azerbaijan censuses in 1999 and 2009, did not include any such categories, so their members either self-declared as members of the titular nation (Armenian or Azeri respectively) or were included in the category ‘others’ (Юнусов 2001; Armenia 2001; Нурн 2004).

The only exception was Georgia, where in 1989, according to a letter from the Georgian State Department 1,744 ‘Gypsies’ (refer to Roma as Lom publicly were declared ‘Armenians’) were counted: 53 lived in Tbilisi; 412 in Abkhazia; 126 in the autonomous republic of Adjara; 251 in Kutaisi; and 32 in Rustavi (HRIDC 2003: 4; Elibegova 2009: 9). The 2002 census included a separate column, in which 472 people are listed, using for them the local name in Georgian for Bosha (this term is used in census forms). A new census was conducted in 2014, with 604 people counted in this column (Bespyatov 2008-2019), we consider that again only Roma are reported here, as Lom continues to publicly demonstrate an Armenian identity.

Presumably the actual number of Gypsies (Dom, Lom and Roma) is significantly higher than the official figures. The data from the population censuses can be considered only as an indicator, because Dom often declare their preferred ethnic identity (Kurds) or their civic identity (Azeris) in the censuses, and for the Lom their ethnic and national identities overlap (in Armenia, they register as part of the titular nation and in Georgia as part of the Armenian minority). In fact, only Roma have no reason not to declare their ‘true’ identity (except for the general negative public image of the community that often causes them to hide their ethnic belonging), thus the census data in their case are nearest to the actual state.

Departing from available data, expert assessments, and field research observations it is possible to guesstimate the size of Dom, Lom, and Roma populations. For Dom, it can be said that their number is between 3,000 and 6,000, up to a maximum of 10,000; the number of Lom can be determined as 5,000 to 6,000 in Armenia, and 2,000 to 3,000 in Georgia, in total a maximum of 10,000 to 12,000; the maximum number of Roma is 2,000 to 3,000 in Georgia, up to 1,000 in Azerbaijan.

#### **IV. Dom – Lom – Rom Communities in Contemporary South Caucasus**

##### ***IV.1. Dom***

In Azerbaijan, the Dom live in their own more or less detached aggregations in towns and villages. The biggest and most well-known Dom settlement is in the city of Yevlakh. There is a whole separate neighbourhood the local population call Garachylar mehellesi. The quality of their accommodation differs according their location and level of isolation, which is high in some

places, as for example in case of Yevlakh Garachylar mehellesi, which (at least according to the locals) is hardly ever visited by non-Doms. This neighbourhood according to some (obviously inflated) guesstimates is inhabited by 2,500 Dom (ЕВЛАХ 2012), and has an extremely poor infrastructure (e.g. there is only one shop), and housing is poor and without yards. In other cases, especially in rural areas, the Dom houses are not much worse than those of the surrounding population.

Attempts to create a permanent settlement of Dom from Azerbaijan in Georgia began after the collapse of the Soviet Union and has become more intense over the past decade. First, they attempted to settle in Batumi, but were driven out by local authorities and moved to Kutaisi. For more than three years, five families (about 70 people, including 30 children) lived near the Chavchadze bridge on the river Rioni, in shacks, without water and electricity (Szakonyi 2008: 8). Currently about 100 Dom live in Kutaisi, settled in the abandoned, almost demolished houses in the neighbourhood of Avangard in the northern part of the city, and several families live in the nearby railway junction city of Samtredia. The first 17 families of Dom settled in Tbilisi around 2000 in the Navtlugi neighbourhood, where currently about 30–40 families (about 200 people) are living. Their number is not permanent, as some families travel seasonally or at certain intervals to their domicile in Azerbaijan (mostly to the city of Gazakh near the border). Some of them have lived and others continue to live in abandoned wagons in the urban railway station, others succeed in renting regular accommodation the city.

In Soviet times the Dom were guaranteed permanent jobs as the village inhabitants in collective farms, while urban residents were mostly employed as low-skilled workers. After the dissolution of the USSR and the collapse of the socialist economy, the main, and often only, occupation of Dom in Azerbaijan and Georgia became begging (Stoltz 2014). Women beg, often holding infants, together with little girls and boys, rarely with adult women or men. If men or boys are begging they show alleged or actual signs of disabilities of varying degrees. Usually they have their ‘own’ places for begging, for example, in central Tbilisi it is Shota Rustaveli Avenue; at major junctions in the city, where they beg from passing cars; and urban markets. In Azerbaijan, in the capital city of 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 city.

In Azerbaijan, the Dom sometimes work as peddlers with household items, dresses, and carpets. They also collect scrap and take various unqualified seasonal jobs. In fact, in contrast to the mass stereotypes about fantastic revenues from begging, their living standard is actually lower than that of the surrounding population.

Many Dom, both in Azerbaijan and Georgia, 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 the majority of access to medical care and social security. Azerbaijan has not adopted any state policy towards the Dom. The only actions by authorities are the “cleaning” of the capital city from begging Dom (Али 2006; 2008), who arrive in Baku from the regions of Yevlakh, Agsu, Agdash, Shamakhi, and Qobustan. Since there are no legal provisions for sanctioning begging, the begging Dom are detained, given an educational talk and then released (Ибрагимхалилова 2010ab).

The Georgian state is in a difficult political and economic situation and is not paying any attention to the Dom and their problems, and the Dom are satisfied with this state of affairs. So far, several attempts have been made by non-governmental organizations (including Roma organizations) to contact them with project initiatives, but the Dom categorically reject such proposals, preferring not to be exposed in a public space.

In Azerbaijan, there are also no Dom NGOs and up until now the Dom demonstrated no real interest in civic society activities, however they started to attract the attention of non-Dom organizations. 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 NGO integration to solve these problems. A project for international donors was prepared, but it has not been supported so far. The participants to the round table told us that no Dom representative was present at the meeting.

To a large extent the Dom public image is negative, with high levels of ethnic stereotypes and social hostility towards them, both in Azerbaijan and Georgia (Zakharov and Law 2017: 119-122). As for Georgia, it is stated that the hostility towards Dom is even higher than to the Roma (Джавахишвили 2005: 107-112). According to the outsiders’ point of view they have no serious problems with the law enforcement authorities, who do not limit and persecute them, which 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 Gypsy beggars elsewhere: about kidnapping children and making them beg; intentionally breaking their arms and legs; their exploitation by rich bosses; an inherited inclination for begging. With regard to the Dom, the local population in Azerbaijan believe the same story as in Central Asia concerning the Mughat (so called Lyuli/Jughi) – that Dom brides on their wedding day publicly promise that they will beg to ensure a livelihood for their family (Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

The local population in Georgia (not only ethnic Georgians, but also Roma) is firmly convinced that the Dom are Kurds, and usually call them that. The Dom usually identify themselves publicly as Kurds, and sometimes also as Azeri, but within their community their identity is that of Dom, and they distinguished themselves from Kurds, including in their language. They repeatedly said to us: “We are not the same”, “Our language is more pure”, and they self-identified as Dom-Kurds (Курдские Дом in Russian or Kürd domlar in Azerbaijani). No less categorically they distinguish themselves from Roma: “They are different”, “They speak another language”, “We do not want to have anything to do with them”. In Georgia they do not want to be identified either as ‘цыгане’ (this Russian term is for them the equivalent of Roma) nor to be approached by the Azerbaijani term Garachi. Accordingly, local Roma do not consider them Gypsies, because they do not speak their language (Romanes) but Kurmanji, and avoid any contact with them; even Roma consider Dom to be “wild and dangerous”, especially when it comes to competition for begging (some of the local Roma also beg).

Despite the clear demarcation of Dom from other Gypsies, and particularly from Roma (and vice versa) with whom they share the territory in some cities (Baku, Tbilisi, Kutaisi), attempts have been made in recent years to integrate Dom in common regional NGO projects targeting Roma. Such was the case with project Southern Caucasus Network of Roma from the NGO Centre for Democracy and Civil Integration, presented at the regional conference in Tbilisi, April 8, 2014 (Dosta! 2014). This network should (at least according to the project description) also include Dom, who are considered to be Roma (as an umbrella term imposed by Europe). Despite all efforts, however, not a single Dom willing to work in the network was found. Nevertheless, as announced by the conference organizers, the Southern Caucasus Roma Network is still willing to host one Dom delegate, who will represent the Dom in Roma-related projects in Europe.

The Dom prefer to marry endogamously, but because their community is scattered in different countries marriages are often concluded locally between more or less distant cousins. Sometimes the media claim that Dom are matrilocal, and that after the wedding the young couple live in the woman’s home (Азербайджанские 2005). Such cases do happen and are not rare, but this is not a firmly established rule, and depends on the specific situation.

In the Southern Caucasus, the population generally believe that all Kurds are Yazidis (an ethno-religious Kurdish-speaking community in the Middle East) by religion, so in many cases both the name of this community and the name of the religion are interconnected (Kurds-Yazidis) and overlap. Therefore, Dom in each of our conversations first emphasized their distinction from Kurds with regard to religion. They self-determined as “real Muslims,

not Yazidis”, and stressed repeatedly that they go to the mosque, observe Ramadan, celebrate Kurban Bayram (Eid) and main Muslim (or those they consider to be Muslim) holidays, such as Navruz and Hederlez. Nominally they belong to Shia Islam, however, not one of our interlocutors was able to make any distinction between Shia and Sunni Islam.

#### *IV.2. Lom*

The Lom continue to live mainly in territories inhabited by ethnic Armenians, not only in present-day Armenia but also in neighbouring Georgia. In the past there used to be separate Boshha(nnu) maylla but now the tendency is to move out of them. Today, even in the capital city of Yerevan (where over 200 families live, mostly in their own houses, but some in flats), and also in smaller towns and villages Lom mostly live dispersed among Armenians. Home for the, relatively, largest community of Lom (over 100 families) is Gyumri and Akhalkalaki, where they live in a neighbourhood which preserves the old name Boshha maylla (cf. Хачатрян 2003; Marutyan 2011). Elsewhere (for example in Akhaltsikhe) parts of the old neighbourhoods are still preserved, but are already included in new mixed neighbourhoods, but in most villages, the Boshha maylla is only a memory.

Lom living conditions do not particularly differ from those of ethnic Armenians and Georgians. Their neighbourhoods do not differ visually from adjacent ones, are not separated, and strangers would not know at a first glance that Gypsies live there. Furnishing of the houses and the overall standard of living are also more or less on the same level as their neighbours, higher in cities and lower in villages.

Present-day Lom in the Southern Caucasus no longer continue their semi-nomadic lifestyle, and they do not differ from other Armenians either in appearance or clothing, nor in their occupations. Occasionally Lom proudly said that some of Armenia’s most famous musicians belong to their community but did not disclose their names, as they hide their origin from the surrounding population.

The main occupation of Lom everywhere is currently trading. A typical example is the city of Akhalkalaki, where in the city market the majority of permanent employees are Lom, often defined by the local population as “Lords of the market”. Many of them also travel frequently throughout the region and beyond, buying agricultural produce from farmers and various consumer goods from major markets and then reselling them at the market or in remote villages. A relatively small number of Lom have their own workshops in the market, producing and selling tin products (including a modern version of traditional sieves), leather hats, shoes, and other goods.

A large number of Lom in Georgia have recently become involved in cross-border trade. Following the introduction of visa-free travel (up to 90

days) for the citizens of Georgia (such are also the Bosha from Akhalkalaki) to Turkey, some Lom travel to the markets of neighbouring provinces (Artvin and Rize) in Turkey, where they purchase various products for mass use at local markets. The goods are sold both in Georgia, at the market in Akhalkalaki and in villages, and also in Armenia, mainly in the cities of Gyumri and Yerevan.

The Lom in the Southern Caucasus today differ in nothing from local Armenians. They confess the same religion, are citizens of their countries, have similar levels of well-being, literacy, education and social standing. Because of their almost full inclusion into Armenian society (or into the Armenian minority in Georgia) they do not feel a need to establish their own civic organizations. Even proposals for inclusion in projects targeting Roma, received from representatives of the NGO-sector (e.g. Caucasus Regional Office of European Centre for Minority Issues in Georgia), which presupposed a certain financial support from the community, were categorically rejected by them. In Armenia, where Lom comprise less than one per cent of the overall population, they are generally so indiscernible that their very existence is overlooked. Most ethnic Armenians sincerely believe that there are no Bosha living in their country today. Armenian scholars are unanimous in the view that, while there were Bosha in the country in the past, they voluntarily assimilated into the Armenian nation; they are now entirely integrated and can be described only as an ethnographic or subethnic group of the Armenian people (Marutyan et al. 1999; Григорьян 2002; Khachataryan 2003; Marutyan 2011). This approach is also evident in the reports of various NGOs and human rights organizations (Asatryan and Arakelova 2002), and according the statement given in a personal conversation with us by the chairman of the Armenian Helsinki Committee, Avetik Ishkhanyan:

If people do not want to declare themselves as a separate community, do not want to be called Bosha, because it is very offensive, and when the society does not segregate them, then there is no need to work in this direction.

For similar reasons, academic research on Lom was conducted mostly in Georgia rather than in Armenia proper (Marutyan et al. 1999; Marutyan 2011). In some cases, even research on Lom done in Armenia is not published (for example, the full doctoral thesis of Armenak Khachatryan, *Bosha: An Historical-Ethnographic Study*), with the explanation that it would be wrong to attract public attention to the Bosha.

In colloquial Armenian speech, Bosha is a pejorative term with different, more or less negative, connotations. This is the rationale why in some cases an ethnic neutral term is used, in order not to offend the community (Petrosian 2003), as is the case with using the designations ‘Махагорцы’ (in

Russian) or ‘Maghagorts’ (in English) meaning sieve-makers in Armenian, in an edited volume of articles devoted to the Lom (National minorities 2005) that was also not published (at least not yet).

The attitude of the ‘others’ to Bosha in Armenia is ambiguous. In informal conversations, the opinions of Armenians can vary between two extremes – “They are Bosha, but Armenians” and “They are Armenians, but Bosha” – the latter has a slightly pejorative meaning, but both recognize a certain level of unity between Lom and ‘other’ Armenians.

The attitude of the ‘others’ to Bosha in Georgia is also quite complicated, and aggravated by strained attitudes between Armenians and Georgians in the ethnically mixed region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, where the Armenian minority predominated. The local Georgians do not separate Lom from the Armenians, on the contrary, it is often said “all Armenians are Bosha” (a pejorative saying which pointed to their low standing). Local Armenians however never publicly separate themselves from Bosha and a publicly acceptable statement is: “They are part of us”. This became especially strong in the 1990s when the Armenians struggled for their minority and linguistic rights in an independent Georgia.

The identity of the Lom is multidimensional and contextual. They (as all other Gypsy communities worldwide) exist in at least in two dimensions, or in two co-ordinated plans. This fundamental principle is based on the juxtaposition of ‘community – society’, as relations between two simultaneously existing typological phenomena intertwine into one inseparable unity (Marushiakova and Popov 2016b). In this case, the community means the Lom as an ethnic community, and the society means the Lom as part of the Armenian nation state, of which they are citizens and an ethnically-based integral part (and they have been part of an Armenian nation for centuries). The specific feature of Lom identity is that it passed from national to ethnic, but the ethnic part is not disappearing. Their identity is of a separate ethnic community or a subethnic community of Armenians. In fact, their identity exists on two levels – nation and community – and which of them will lead depends on the specific situational context.

On the one hand, the Lom always publicly declare and actually really consider themselves to be part of the Armenians. As our interlocutors put it:

I am Bosha, but my passport says ‘I am Armenian’ on the nationality line, so I am Armenian”; “Our grandparents were Bosha, but now we are all Armenians”; “We are not traveling, we are not misers, thus we are not Bosha, we are Armenians”.

Lom belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church and their customs and rituals are the same as those of Armenians. And something more, often Lom are stricter about traditional Armenian customs and rituals than the majority of

Armenians. That is why they often say: “We are more Armenian than the Armenians”; or “Only we are the real Armenians – only we keep the old Armenian names and customs”.

Even in Georgia they often identify themselves often as ‘true’ or ‘first’ Armenians (Marutyan 2011: 300-301). In this way, the Lom self-perception seems to gel with the “official” attitude towards Bosha in contemporary Armenian society.

On the other hand, however, the Lom also set themselves apart from other Armenians. Usually they reject the designation Bosha and prefer to be called Armenians, but in response to direct questioning, and after showing insider competence by using their own designation “Lom’ es?” (Are you Lom, in Lomavren), one would receive the confirmation, “Lom’ en” (I am Lom, in Lomavren). Lom often compare (and in this way, also delimit) themselves from Armenians. They have a special designation for Armenians in Lomavren, in the past it was Klarav/Kalarav or Gachut (Папазьян 1901: 116; Ванциан 1901: 60), and today it is Kachut (Marutyan 2011: 116) or Kagut (Petrosian 2002: 19). These terms however designate only ethnic Armenians, and not all non-Lom, as is wrongly considered by some authors (van Rheezen 2015), since for other nations they have different names, such as Psu for Turks and Tatars and Sisorov for Russians (Папазьян 1901: 116).

Lom repeatedly say about Armenians: “We’re not like them”, “We are different”, “We have our language” (in fact, for them it is definitely difficult to determine whether they speak a separate language or dialect of the Armenian language, with some “own” words – author’s note), “We are honest people and we are supporting each other” (in contrast to Armenians – author’s note), “We have our own customs” (illustrated by: more respect for adults; extended families; mass visiting the graves of deceased relatives; etc. – author’s note).

In any case, the Lom strongly distanced themselves from the Roma, of whom they say: “We have a different language”, “We have a different religion” (Bosha belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and Roma can be Orthodox Christian or Muslim – author’s note), “We are from a different origin” (but without a clear idea of the origin of the community – author’s note).

The Lom still show an interest in their ethnic peculiarity and origin, however exclusively only in their own surroundings. They have preserved etiological legends, some of them are new replicas of old patterns (e.g. many legends tell about a Pasha, or as a variant, a village Armenian apostolic priest, who gave their ancestors corn to sow, but they cooked and ate it, and were therefore doomed to be nomadic), others are influenced by modern scientific knowledge on Gypsies and derive the origin of Bosha from India (including statements such as: “I like watching Indian movies, I understand everything



they say”, while others highlight links with the Armenian people, expressed in assertions like “Ours is actually the oldest Armenian language”.

The most pervasive way in which Lom’s ethnic boundaries are preserved is in their preference for marrying within their community, even when there is a need to search for a marriage partner in distant places. Mixed marriages are still rare and selective; in such cases, it is preferable to take Armenian girls (mostly from poorer families and from the countryside) and incorporate them into the community. They avoid giving Lom girls to Armenian families.

Our Lom interlocutors categorically denied having problems with their ethnicity. Only some of them recalled encountering ethnic prejudices in the past, when they were bullied at school, but today, as they insisted, the situation is different. Currently all of them have passports as Armenian (or Georgian) citizens, and at the censuses they self-declare as Armenians. In Georgia, they vote for representatives of the Armenian minority, their children go to Armenian schools, and if they sometimes feel negative attitudes (e.g. when crossing the border with Turkey during shopping tours), it is not because of their Gypsy origin, but because of their Armenian names. Along with this, some Lom in Armenia and Georgia told us that they feel offended by the fact that in a show on Armenian TV (which is also watched in Georgia) sometimes the designation Bosha is used with negative connotations. By contrast, however, the song “Gnchu” of the famous Armenian star Lilit Hovhannisyan (2013) is perceived very positively, although the TV clip is built entirely on stereotyped romantic notions about Gypsies (and more specially about Roma) and has nothing to do with the image of the Lom. This confirms that the idea of one community with other Gypsies in the world still exists in the Lom.

Notwithstanding, at first glance it seems like the Lom are publicly invisible, but they have not fully assimilated into the surrounding population, nor have they disappeared as a community. In fact, the community is not completely invisible everywhere in Armenia and Georgia. In their places of living their close neighbours know who is Bosha and who not, though they are reluctant to talk about it. As a rule, the Lom prefer not to be mentioned in the mass media, not to be studied, not to be photographed and not to talk about their Bosha past at all. In spite of this general attitude, as an exception there are some socially active people who do not publicly deny their Lom identity, but, on the contrary, try to show their community as an integral part of the Armenian nation, emphasizing their historical links with the Armenian people and that it was their own choice to integrate into modern Armenian society. The most well-known example of such an approach are the messages widely distributed on YouTube video-movies, signed by Zohrab, the Armenian Gypsy (2012).

It is worth noting that these video-movies start against the backdrop of a collage of the Armenian and Roma national flags. There are serious discrepancies between the Russian and English language version titles, which are “Мы армяне” (We are Armenians) for the former and Who are Armenian Gypsies? Boshha, for the latter. However, the content and main message are identical: Boshha are Gypsies by origin, who voluntarily assimilated into the Armenian nation. Whether the mysterious Zohrab is truly a Lom (something we are not convinced of) or whether it is a hoax, is not so important. In this case, something else is significant; Zohrab’s videos show the real situation for the ethnic identity of the Lom, who do not see any contradiction between their preferred Armenian and Lom identities, and perceive them as two sides of one inseparable whole.

More than a century ago Vartan Papazian wrote:

And in the present circumstances – it will not pass even 50 years and there will be neither trace of their [Lom’s] identity, nor even of their language. It will be suppressed by the conditions of life that are stronger than it. It will not merge, no, but it will disappear, leaving only a trace in history, only an ethnographic term. (Папазян 1901: 144).

From today’s perspective, this forecast is not quite accurate, either with regard to the language (which is still preserved, albeit with very limited vocabulary and with strong Armenian influences) nor in terms of the Lom’s existence as a distinct community.

Currently Lom are almost completely socially and culturally integrated into the Armenian nation, and their ethnic identity is on the level of a subethnic or ethnographic group in the composition of the Armenian people.

This does not exclude an awareness of filiation and a common origin with other Gypsies in the world, and does not predetermine their disappearance as a separate, clearly defined community. Lom represent a unique case of voluntary partial (or incomplete) assimilation of one Gypsy community in the composition of another population, which could be called “token assimilation”.

Cases of preferred ethnic identity are something common for other Gypsy communities, and especially for some Roma in Eastern Europe (Marushiakova and Popov 2015b). The unique thing in this case is that, unlike other nations, who are preferred by Roma (such as Turks, Romanians, Hungarians, etc.), and who refuse to accept them as their integral part, the Armenians (probably due to shared common tragic historical destiny and common contemporary issues) accept Lom as part (detached, but still part) of the Armenian people. Such an approach by Armenians towards “their

Gypsies” gives a completely different dimension to the process of Lom integration when compared to other Gypsies.

### ***IV.3. Roma***

In contrast to the northern Caucasus, the number of Roma settlements and their inhabitants in Southern Caucasus were reduced drastically after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In Georgia, the capital city of Tbilisi with its relatively better economic conditions, attracts Roma from the countryside and that is why it hosts, in aggregate probably the largest Roma community in the country (Szakonyi 2008; Sordia 2009). About 250 to 300 Roma live mostly in rented dwellings (mainly houses) in the Samgori neighborhood, near the Navtlughi farmers market. Some of them are refugees from Abkhazia, and others settled there after migrating from Kutaisi in the 1980s. Some of them (mainly those coming from Kutaisi) live there only seasonally or for a short period of time. In Tbilisi, there is also another little temporary settlement, called Lilo, which is located near the airport, where mostly seasonal or short duration Roma families live, who come from Abkhazia, Kutaisi, and other regions.

In one specific case about 300 to 350 persons are perceived as Gypsies, who live in the Svaneti district of Tbilisi, in the so-called Gypsy neighbourhood, on the street Imeni Lotkina. They strongly deny their Roma origin (similar behaviour is typical for communities of Lingurari and Vlaxija in the present-day Republic of Moldova) and in the censuses, they declare as Moldovani (Moldavians). Their native language is Moldavian, and they publicly demonstrate Moldavian identity. Some of them claim they are migrants from the region of Tiraspol in the 1930s, others date their arrival from 1946 to 1948, and according to a third it was in the 1970s. In Kutaisi, in the Avangard district, in their own houses in two separate settlements and old flats live about 100 to 150 Roma. Their number is unstable because many of them live seasonally or for shorter periods of time in Tbilisi or Batumi.

In the former Adjarian Republic, which is now experiencing rapid economic development, in Batumi, several Roma families live permanently on Besiki street, and at least a dozen Roma families lodge during the summer season in Kutaisi and Tbilisi and in Kobuleti about 100 to 120 Roma live in a separate settlement in their own houses and shacks. According to them, they settled there during World War II, coming from the Krasnodar region in southern Russia.

On the outskirts of the city of Rustavi, in the province of Kvemo Kartli, situated a short distance from the capital Tbilisi, outside the bounds of the city and close to the railway station is situated the Roma settlement of Gachiani, with about 120 to 150 Roma in their own houses and shacks. According to their oral stories, the settlement originated from around 1963-1965. Until then

about 100 Roma families had lived in another settlement near Rustavi, in Tavaryarhi, but after a big internal quarrel and fighting the settlement fell apart and some Roma living there moved to Gachiani and others settled elsewhere in Georgia and in other Soviet republics.

In the village Choeti (old name Leninovka) in Dedoplistsqaro municipality, in the region of Kakheti, eastern Georgia, live about 120 to 150 Roma. According to local Roma, in the Soviet times they lived in the nearby cities of Gurjaani and Tsnori, but in 1993 they were expelled from there by Georgians, supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia (the former President), who plundered their property and destroyed their homes. In the Soviet times in Leninovka ethnic Russians, belonging to religious movement Molokani (and called by the local population Old Believers) lived. After the Soviet Union collapsed the Molokani fled to the Russian Federation, and Roma settled in their abandoned homes. Currently, the village is predominantly inhabited by Roma, and six Russian and two Georgian families; all of them live in deep poverty.

Similar is the story of the Roma who lived in the time of the USSR in the settlement of Mukuzani (Gurjaani Municipality), which was then the largest Roma settlement in Georgia. It was plundered and partially destroyed during the already mentioned civil war, and the last Roma left Mukuzani in 2008. Some emigrated to the Russian Federation, others to Leninovka, Gachiani, and several families now live in the city of Telavi. Besides these compact Roma settlements, scattered among the surrounding population also live a small number of Roma, in mixed marriages with non-Roma, or descendants of ethnically mixed families.

Almost all Roma from Abkhazia (about 800 people) left the area after the war from 1992–1993 and the 1994 declaration of independence. Most of them emigrated to the Russian Federation, mainly in Krasnodar krai, but others (about 200 people), along with ethnic Georgian refugees turned to Georgia and lived mainly in Tbilisi (Samgori district) and now they again migrated from Georgia. The Roma refugees in the Russian Federation faced problems because of their ambiguous legal status, denials by local authorities to provide them with Russian passports, and anti-Gypsy sentiments on the ground, and so some of them (about 500) returned after 2002 to Abkhazia, to their former homes in the northern part of the capital city of Sukhumi (Чихладзе 2008: 7; Szakonyi 2008: 16; Sordia 2009: 4–5).

The housing situation of the Roma in Georgia is ambiguous. In some cases (Kutaisi, Kobuleti) they live a long time in one and the same place, mostly in their own houses, in other cases they live in rented accommodation (Tbilisi, Sukhumi, some residents in Batumi). In Gachiani settlement the houses of the Roma were built illegally but are partially legalized by the supply of water and electricity (although with intermittent supply and often

disconnected). The situation is similar in Leninovka where some Roma moved to abandoned houses and de facto became their owners (although this is not legalized). In some places, such as Lilo, Roma homes (like shacks and temporary barracks) are totally illegal and devoid of all kind of utilities. Problems with utilities (electricity and water) are everywhere, in all Roma settlements. In general, the living conditions of Roma in Georgia are extremely hard and Roma settlements are visually distinguishable from those of the surrounding population.

Generally, in today's independent Georgia the financial and economic situation is bad, but it is more severe for the Roma. After the breakdown of socialism, the situation has radically changed and Roma not only lost their regular jobs, but more importantly, in a free market economy they were driven out by the surrounding population from their main economic niches. Some Roma still live off the retail trade; buying goods for daily use from the big wholesale market in Lilo, located near Tbilisi, and selling at local markets or on the streets in cities (street trading is not prohibited), or are carried by cars to remote villages to be sold there. Competition in this area is huge, however, many Roma still receive enough money from this trade for physical survival. Traditional occupations (mostly mobile blacksmithing by Vlaxi and Krimurja) are no longer suitable in the modern era. The majority of Krimurja women keep trying to feed their families by fortune telling on the streets of major cities (notably in Tbilisi). However, the main occupation of Roma in Georgia today is begging (usually done by women, accompanied by their small children).

These basic ways to make a living (plus searching for other casual earnings) explain why, in practice, Roma settlements have more permanent residents than are registered. During our visits to Leninovka and Gachiani only three or four families were there, all the others had gone to Tbilisi (and some to Azerbaijan), some for a few days, others for a few weeks, and some even for months.

The main problem for the majority of Roma in Georgia are personal documents (HRIDC 2003; Szakonyi 2008; Sordia 2009; Elibegova 2009). Formally, all Roma living in Georgia have the right to (and should) obtain Georgian citizenship and IDs, but in practice they face a number of difficulties in this bureaucratic procedure. Some of them are without permanent address registration or have changed their residence, most of them have not enough social literacy, do not know how to deal with administrative requirements and do not speak and write enough good Georgian to fill out the necessary documents. The reluctance of local authorities to commit efforts to solving the problem should also not be overlooked.

The problems with personal documents entail a number of other issues, the main one being the impossibility of obtaining a pension or child welfare,

no matter how minor they are. Moreover, even when all required documents are obtained, there are quite a few cases when local authorities refuse to pay welfare to Roma under various pretexts. Lack of documents deprives many Roma from free access to medical care, including pregnant women, and a mass phenomenon in last two decades became giving birth at home. Children born in such conditions are also not officially registered and are not enrolled into the education system, so the problems continue to multiply. The lack of a passport also does not allow many Roma to seek an alternative livelihood abroad, which is a solution for many others.

Under these conditions it is obvious, that the educational level of the Roma in Georgia is at a very low level. During the decades after the changes a new generation has grown up with low literacy or completely illiterate, and the older generation, educated in socialist times, display quite a low level of functional literacy. This is a common problem for the countries of the former Socialist camp, but is especially severe in independent Georgia, where the only official language is Georgian, but many Roma were taught in Russian schools and have no literacy skills in Georgian. Indeed, it is exactly these low social skills, which are one of the main factors that prevent Roma from Georgia from emigrating, and in fact retain a large number of the Roma in Georgia. On the whole, the situation of the Roma in present-day Georgia can be assessed, without exaggeration, as extremely severe, even in comparison with the problems of the Roma in the whole of eastern Europe.

In this situation, the lack of active Roma community organizations in Georgia is palpable, and as far as there are any attempts to create them, they are driven by non-Roma. The first such attempt was in 2002, when the Human Rights Information and Documentation Center, with a grant from the World Bank launched a project for a Protection Center for Roma Community in Georgia, which envisaged the creation of a Georgian Roma NGO (reported as established in 2008, but in fact only on paper, without exercising any activity). In Georgia, currently, are three official Roma organizations: the Kakheti Gypsy organization “Roma” headed by Venera Martkoplshvili (a non-Roma woman) in Dedoplistskaro; and the Adjarian Gypsy organization “Roma” in Kobuleti, headed by Nargiz Dzhincharadzi (also a non-Roma woman); the Kobuleti Roma Youth, headed by Jumberi Alimov and Marishka Aslanova. All organizations had projects to support the Roma in gaining their passports; similar projects created several other non-Roma organizations in Georgia, but their effect was negligible. Among the organizations involved in Roma issues until recently was the Caucasus Regional Office of ECMI in Tbilisi with more diverse activities. All NGO-activities however are severely limited by the lack of funding opportunities. The Georgian state does not deny the existence of numerous Roma problems and the need to work to overcome them, but in

practice, in a current difficult situation, neither state nor local governments are able to target Roma issues (and often are reluctant to do it).

Another alternative for some Roma in Georgia are the new evangelical churches (a picture well known in central and South-Eastern Europe). The only one such church mission working among Roma in Georgia is the Swedish Light for the People, which helped to establish a Roma church in Kobuleti, with a Roma pastor, Roman Aslanov. This church is evangelizing among the Roma, attempts were made to extend the missions to Batumi, but in general its overall activity is limited and highly controversial (Chitanava 2013), thus social effects from it are still insignificant.

In independent Georgia, in conditions of civil war and armed conflicts, with interethnic relations exacerbated, Georgian nationalism was directed against 'others', including against the Roma. In the wake of the country's nationalist mobilization, militias swept through some of the small Roma settlements in the 1990s, razing houses to the ground and indiscriminately seizing property (e.g. the above mentioned case of Mukuzani; cf. Szakonyi 2008: 9).

Today, on the whole the attitude of Georgian society towards Roma and their problems are slowly re returning to the old, traditional frames. The public image of the Roma continues to be influenced by a high level of ethnic stereotypes, negative attitudes, and social distance (Djavakhishvili 2005: 107-112), but now the situation is calmer, and there are even attempts by some media to pay attention to the Roma issue (in a number of articles in the press and documentaries) and to put samples of their culture (songs and dances) in popular television shows.

The leading level of identity of Roma in Georgia is still based on their group belonging. Internal divisions in the Roma community in Georgia includes two main groups, Vlaxi and Krimurja. Territorial demarcation between them is clearly expressed. Krimurja live in west Georgia, in Kutaisi, Kobuleti (where there are also several Vlaxi families) and in Batumi (also several Vlaxi families live there seasonally) and in Sukhumi in Abkhazia. Vlaxi (together with some Plaščuny families) are living in Gachiani, Leninovka, and Telavi. The contact area between the two main groups is the capital of Tbilisi. In spite of the chance of entering into contact with each other, however, there is no tendency observed of building a common identity of Georgian Roma.

Endogamy is still important for Roma in Georgia and mixed marriages between members of different Roma groups are relatively few, more so among the Vlaxi and Plaščuny, and also, but to a lesser extent of Vlaxi with Ruska Roma. The distinction between Vlaxi and Krimurja remains. They avoid entering into closer contact and intermarriage between the two groups is almost non-existent. An additional separating factor is different religions, as

Vlaxi are Orthodox Christians and Krimurja are Muslims. Within both groups the 'Gypsy court' (Marushiakova and Popov 2007: 67-101) ceased to exist. The memory of its existence is preserved among the Vlaxi (they call it here *sendo*) and among the Krymurja (they call it *davia*), but they admit that, in practice for at least two decades, there was no single case to convene a court hearing for either within each group, much less between the two. The main reason for this situation is the lack of respectable adults, following the departures to the Russian Federation of a majority of Roma from Georgia, due to high male mortality in recent decades, and the lack of financial means to invite participation in court sessions by people "from outside" (i.e. respected Roma living in Russia).

The links between Roma in Georgia and their closer or more distant relatives abroad (mostly in the Russian Federation and Ukraine) were terminated as a result of the country's isolation and low living standards. The trans-border in-group marriages are currently non-existent, and now Roma in Georgia exist as a small community, in practice almost entirely isolated within the national borders.

Relations between Roma in Georgia and other communities, perceived all together as Gypsies (that is Lom and Dom) by the surrounding population, are virtually completely missing. Lom inhabit mainly regions where Roma do not live and where Dom do not go, so the three communities are deprived of the possibility of direct contact. The Dom from Azerbaijan living in Tbilisi and Kutaisi have many occasion, to meet Roma, particularly given their common petty trade and begging occupations, but in spite of this the Roma avoid any contact with them. So, at least at this stage, the construction of any kind of unity or achieving at least some form of co-operation and sense of common belonging between the three divisions seems impossible.

In Azerbaijan, there is no vital Roma community nowadays, only some families (mainly Plaščuny, Vlaxi, Ruska Roma, and Lovari) live scattered among the local population. Some of them lived in Baku and Sumqayit from the time of the USSR and have preserved until now links (including marital relations) with their own groups, whose members live in the Russian Federation, others are labour migrants there. Although individual groups are frequently in contact with each other, no tendency was observed to build a common identity of Azerbaijan Roma. The main occupation of the local Roma in Azerbaijan is trade in various commodities in the markets, combined in many cases with work in semi-professional Gypsy music and dance groups, serving weddings and other celebrations of the surrounding population. Their housing conditions and living standards are good according to local standards and do not differ from those of the local population. Their desire is not to be publicly visible, so attempts to include Roma in NGO projects are still without success.



#### ***IV.4. Distinction of Dom – Lom – Rom Communities***

Nowadays, the relationships between the three communities, that are united by the surrounding population under the label ‘Gypsies’, continue to exist in the traditional frameworks enduring centuries - each of them denies any connection with the others – even though the new social and political factors exert influence on these relationships.

Especially in recent years, in the South Caucasus region, the influence of some European institutions has stepped up, pursuing a consistent policy of trying to bring under a common label ‘Roma’ all communities around the world, designated ‘Gypsies’ (in different languages) in past (Marushiakova and Popov 2018) In the South Caucasus region, this policy is only supported in Georgia on state-level, because of country’s ambitions for European integration, while Armenia and Azerbaijan remain indifferent to this issue and de facto not discuss it (and the new, considered politically correct name ‘Roma’ is almost not used at all). This is clearly evident from the materials of the regular meetings of the Council of Europe ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveler Issues (CAHROM), in which all three countries of the region (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) have delegated their permanent representatives (CAHROM 2019).

Much more important to us in this case is the attitude of the three communities concerned (Roma, Lom and Dom) to these attempts. While Roma (particularly Roma NGOs) unconditionally accept this approach, on the contrary, as already mentioned in Burn, Lom and Dom categorically reject it. The last (for now) example of this is from thematic visit in Georgia, carried out by representatives of CAHROM in cooperation with European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) between 21 and 23 June 2017 devoted to “the situation of eastern Roma groups (Roma, Lom/Bosha/Posha, Dom/Garachi/Karachi, Abdal, etc.) and possible policy response” (Roma in Georgia 2017). During this visit, a number of meetings were held with representatives of both state institutions and Roma NGOs, but there was no one meeting with representatives of Lom and Dom who continued to reject any possibility of being approached under the label ‘Roma’.

#### **V. Trans-Border Migration**

For the so called ‘Gypsies’ in the Caucasus, migration is not essential and is quite limited. In fact, out of the three communities whose homes are on the Caucasus (Dom, Lom, and Roma) only among the Dom is there a sustainable model of cross-border migration in the post-Soviet space. Migration of Dom from Azerbaijan to Georgia, which could be defined as a specific form of cross-border labour mobility, is only part of their movements in the whole

post-Soviet space. The migration of Dom, however, has a much broader scope. Our interlocutors told us about their trips to different cities in the Russian Federation: Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Krasnodar, Grozny (the capital of Chechnya) and other major cities (primarily in southern Russia). Some of them even went begging in Eastern Turkey, but were not satisfied with the conditions and amount of money earned and the strong competition in begging from local Domlar. The Dom from Caucasus mostly visited the city of Diyarbakır, where they established contacts with local Kurdish speaking Dom. Basically, Dom from Azerbaijan perceived Dom in Turkey as part of their community (and vice versa) with whom marital relations are fully acceptable, but in practice the links between the two communities do not deepen and develop, and they remain detached one from another.

At the time of the USSR in Georgia lived representatives of other Roma groups: Ruska Roma, Servi, Kišinjovci, and at least temporarily Kelderari. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost all of them have emigrated. Roma migration from Southern Caucasus started soon after the proclamation of Georgia as an independent state in 1991. The main reason for this was the situation in Georgia after the declaration of independence: the short rule of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia; the nationalist “Georgia for the Georgians” hysteria launched by the followers of Gamsakhurdia; the civil war and armed conflicts in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia in the first half of the 1990s. In these conditions, combined with a severe economic crisis and a plummeting standard of living, the majority of Roma from Georgia managed to emigrate to the Russian Federation, mainly in the Krasnodar region, Rostov and Volga regions, and only some families returned back after the situation in Georgia calmed down. Those who didn’t emigrate in the early years of independence, were confined to Georgian territory with limited chances to migrate due to a lack of personal documents. After the military clashes in Southern Ossetia in 2008 an imposed visa regime with the Russian Federation limited further the opportunities for migration, and practically the only country where Roma from Georgia can migrate for interim earnings or trade is Azerbaijan.

We did not come across any information about contemporary migration of Lom to other countries neither in the literature nor the media. In our talks with Lom in Armenia and Georgia only isolated cases of migration in the Russian Federation were mentioned as part of general labour migration from modern Armenia. We can conclude that apart from some individual cases we cannot speak about migration of Lom from Armenian localities.

## **Conclusion**

The case of the Gypsies in the Caucasus (Dom and Lom) clearly shows that the social integration of different Gypsy communities in different historical

and socio-political environments also runs according to their internal (in terms of the community) logic – and the results achieved are different in each community. The case of Roma and Dom in Transcaucasia shows how rapid can process a marginalization of previously integrated communities in unfavourable social and political conditions. The example of the Lom, however, reveals a high level of social and ethnic integration unknown among other Gypsy communities worldwide. It also shows that fears of Gypsy assimilation as a result of social integration are unfounded, because – despite their partial voluntary, ethnic assimilation (without being subject to special policies) – their existence as a specific ethnic community is not threatened.

### ***Acknowledgment***

*This article is based on our field researches in countries of former USSR during past 2 decades. Significant part of the collected research materials was included in our book *Gypsies of Central Asia and Caucasus* (Palgrave 2016). The present form (revisions and added data from our recent archival research on Interwar period of time) the article received in frames of the research project 'RomaInterbellum. Roma Civic Emancipation between the Two World Wars' which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 694656). It reflects only the authors view and the agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.*

**Note:** *The terms in Romani language are given in Romani language spelling, all other are written according the rules of English transcription. Cyrillic is preserved in specific terms and bibliography.*

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