

Expressions of Women in Lovari Music

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Abstract

Romani people are one of the ethnic groups consisting of many sub-groups differing in descent, occupation and religion, but they have a sense of belonging to “Roma” at various levels such as languages, cultures and customs. There are, of course, also common elements that all Romani people share. For example, their common history of discrimination and persecution by gaje (non Romani people) constitutes the roots of their social structure today, and affects their music as well as their musical environment.

There are also strongly distinguished gender roles deriving from the patriarchy that is the predominant family form of the Romani community. However, the topic of male/female roles is considered taboo since it touches upon gender inequality. In this paper I shall attempt, by giving examples from the Romani groups “Lovara”, to answer the question: How is “woman” expressed and symbolized in their musical creation and performances? Musical samples from the collections of the phonogram archive in Austria, as well as from my fieldwork, will be analyzed.

The Lovara preserved their special musical character which attracts Ethnomusicologist’s attention, for having performed their songs only with their own group for a long time. About the texts of the songs, it is also considered that they reflect the lifestyle of the Roma, the meaning of their community, the role of their own individual, and so on.

Keywords: Music, Minority, Gender, Oral Transmission, Ethnic Identity

1. Gender-oriented perspective in the research of Romani music

This paper starts from the following question, how we can make use of a gender-oriented perspective in the research of Romani music, especially in connection with the oral transmission of their music. In the Romani community, there are strongly distinguished gender roles, which are one of the common elements that almost all Romani people share. This characteristic derives from the patriarchy and also reflects their musical activities.

We can find some literature about Romani music connected with gender aspect. For example Carol

Silverman accounted for how music and dance is gendered in Romani family as well as Romani society in Macedonia (Silverman 2000, 2012). She also explored female musical performances among Muslim Balkan Roma in Macedonia and Bulgaria, focusing on both professional and non-professional contexts in terms of performers, events, space, and instrumentation, repertoire, reputation, and commercial viability (Silverman 2003: 119). Svanibor Pettan pointed to musical activities of Roma in Kosovo, in which he found contactable and complementary associations with adopted gender roles of male, female and homosexuals (Pettan 2003).

However, approaching to Roma on gender is not so easy for outsiders (researchers or participants involved with Roma). If anything, it is even apt to be considered taboo (Eder-Jordan 1996: 171). The most reason was that it comes to reveal gender inequality among them – so emphasizes Mozes Heinschink who is a linguist and has been accepted among Romani society more than 45 years (Heinschink 2005). Romani men do not acknowledge such fact, while Romani women do not have right to raise their voice, either they only put up with it or they accept it as a matter of course¹. In my paper, I shall try to approach of this taboo theme by giving example of one of the Romani groups in Austria *Lovara*, with whom I have been associating since 2002.

2. Object and method of study

The Lovara living in Austria came at two different periods². One came in the middle of 19th century from the regions in today's Hungary and Slovakia. The other came as political refugees in 1956 at the time of the revolt in Hungary (Fennesz-Juhász, Halwachs and Heinschink 1996:78).

The Lovari musical heritage comprises of songs which are divided into two groups: *lokhe gjila*, meaning “slow songs”, and *khelimaske gjila*, meaning “dance songs” (see Kovalcsik 1985:29). They are registered as intangible cultural heritage in Austria in 2011. These songs have also newly composed songs which are named by the Lovara living in Austria “*neve gjila*”, meaning “new songs”. The style of the new songs is verbally based on both slow songs and dance songs, although the words reflect the life of the composers, but is musically influenced by various genres of modern music. The Lovara emphasize that their songs reflect the old lifestyles of the Roma, the meaning of the community and the role of the individual among them³. The editors who worked up Lovari fairy tails, narratives and songs from a mass of recordings into a book also comment that the relationship between genders and the customs, or ethical code appropriate to or contradictory to behaviours (of women) respectively are often picked out as a central theme (Cech/Fennesz-Juhász/Halwachs/Heinschink 2001: 415).

In process of the domestic Romani Movement and ethnomusicologist's interest in their music since the end of the 1980's, Lovara's musical identity and activities has changed in a big way. During of my

fieldwork, I paid attention to that gender inequality in the Lovara seem to be getting tolerant to some extent as compared with another Romani sub-groups and it made me try to compare an image of the women expressed in the songs with their actual situations. In my paper, firstly, I will give an outline of the overall gender-related social structure in the Romani community. Then, I will extract expressions of women from the texts of the songs by means of two large Romani collections (“Heinschink-Collection” and “Hemetek-Collection”) that were recorded at different periods of time and are archived in *the Phonogrammarchiv – Austrian Audiovisual Research Archive – in Austria*, as well as data from my own fieldwork since 2002⁴. In conclusion, I want to consider them from diachronic point of view and point out a similarity, difference and divergence of an image of the women found in the songs and in reality.

3. Gender-related social structure in the Romani community

To gender-related social structure in the Romani community, their patriarchal way molds to a large extent their rules in family and community. Here I will refer three points which are adhered to traditional Romani sub-groups.

- the head of a family, as well as of an entire group, is always a man, and therefore women automatically assume a subordinate position. In a family setting, it is desirable to have a boy as the first child, a male who can then rightfully command the respect of his female siblings. Also, in their musical activities, the tradition is that women are expected to sing or dance when ordered to do so by their fathers and husbands (refer to Hemetek 1994:12).
- there are clearly defined gender roles. Only men are permitted to assume public roles, women are excluded from decision making – like in their private traditional trial practice called *kris* – and they are confined to domestic ones, such as cooking, childcare, and looking after the elderly and the weak. However, when dealing with non-Romani people, quite interestingly, this function is often reversed. The reason for this reversal is that women are required to contribute to the family income more than men, for example, in the past, women ventured outside their community to sell the products produced by men, performed fortunetelling, begging and so on⁵. Women have been the decisive connection between their own society and the outside non-Romani people (Teichmann 2002).
- a hierarchy exists even among women. For example, a woman is required to move to her husband’s household when she gets married, and there, she is addressed with a particular term *bori*, signifying the lowest standing as a woman; lower, of course, than her mother-in-law and her sister-in laws (Eder-Jordan 1996: 173pp.).

Actually, to what extent Roma adhere to such structure is different from family to family, or from

group to group. However, many of their way of thinking and behavior still take root in the patriarchal tradition.

4. “Women” in songs of the Lovara in the Heinschink–Collection

The “Heinschink-Collection” (For convenience I call it *Hei-C* in the following) was recorded by Mozes Heinschink mainly between 1960 and 1995. His interest for Romani language and music urged him to record them, consequently it has amounted to 620 hours. This collection contains approximately 1260 songs sung by 70 members of Lovari and another sub-group members such as *Drzara*, *Poxтана*⁶. Most of them were recorded in 1960s about the Lovara from Hungary, as well as Slovakia, Poland, Austria, former Yugoslavia, France and Romania. About half of the singers are women. It is notable that almost all songs were recorded in private settings.

I tried to group all songs into 4 types as follows⁷:

- Type A “slow songs”
- Type B “dance songs”
- Type C “songs influenced by the country of their settlement”
- Type D “songs influenced by pop music”

Type A and Type B have been transmitted among the Lovara across various countries and account for the majority of the repertoire in the Hei-C. They are considered to be their traditional music because the texts and musical features are characteristic of this group. Type C is songs that have some connection with the country that the particular Lovara inhabit. For example, the Lovara in Hungary sing Hungarian folksongs both in Hungarian and the Romani language. The Lovara in Poland sing songs of another Romani-group living in Poland. They also sing songs that are influenced by Russian folksongs. Type D is those that are strongly influenced by mass media, even though their texts are sometimes sung in the Romani language. Type C and Type D also include “new songs”. Although in every type, we can recognize phrases and symbols concerning women, I will take up Type A to present such examples.

In the slow songs, women are expressed from point of view of man and from point of view of women. They are mostly portrayed as individuals ruled by men as evidenced in their songs texts; a woman can only marry with the permission of men in her family, or she must obey her husband and work for her family⁸:

<i>Jaj</i> kutka tele paša paji,	Down near the water,
<i>ej</i> terni romni kirpi thovel.	A young gipsy girl washes laundry.
<i>Jaj</i> gelas late jek terno Rom:	A young Rom came to her:
"Ke av-tar manca lav tu mange.	"Come with me, I'll take you."
" <i>Ej</i> naštig lav tu guglo phrali,	"I can't take you, my dear,
ke si ma 'g nasul phral mundarel ma." (...)	I have one bad brother, he will kill me." (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 824, recorded in about 1968 in Austria.

Bišadem e romnja ande Amerika,	I sent my wife to America,
t'anel mange love <i>ja</i> , sumnakune love. (...)	in order to bring me money, gold money. (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 2141, recorded in about 1970 in Hungary.

(...) <i>Jaj</i> phendem tuke gažo,	(...) I told you, my husband,
na ža ando birto, <i>hej</i> ke na ža ando birto, na pi	don't go to the bar, don't go to the bar,
mure love. (...)	don't spend my money. (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 890, recorded in about 1968 in Austria.

Interestingly, there are also many portrayals of women violating sexual taboos such as betrayal or adultery against men:

Perel tele, čore, de tji loli papuča.	Take away your red shoes, dear.
<i>Jaj</i> de mir te perel tele, phrala?	Why shall I take them away, brother?
Inke či kamlem tu.	I do not love you yet.
De či kamlem tu, phrala,	I do not love you, brother,
ke numaj diljardem tu.	I just only made fun of you,
<i>Joj</i> anda soste, phrali?	Why did you do so, my brother?
S' anda tjire churde love! (...)	Because of your little money!

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 480, recorded in about 1967 in Austria.

(...) ide xalas ma e kurva,	(...) This whore ruined me,
ine raboske šutas man,	she made a slave of me.
taj xal la aba de e pustija.(...)	the demon should take her. (...)

Heinschink Collection, LH51, recorded in about 1988 in Hungary.

Jaj pe robija simas,
thaj khere avilem *joj* mura sana gaža,
mamoromesa kaj reslem,
jaj de, puške do tu gaži (...)

I was in prison,
and came home, my thin wife,
I found her with a man,
I will shoot you, my wife. (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 1763, recorded in about 1969 in Serbia.

Jaj xoxadas e kurva,
mura phura datar,
xoxajdas ma e kurva
pe vorba inkerdas ma!

This whore cheated,
away from my old mother,
this whore cheated me,
she did not give her words!

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 19, recorded in about 1960 in Austria.

In such cases, women who violated sexual taboo are regarded as “*kurva*,” meaning “whore”. Taking into account their duty of loyalty to men, we can also observe that the Roma place much importance on the virginity of a bride. On the other hand, when a woman becomes a good mother, she is considered to be the most reliable person in the family. In the songs, mothers are always depicted as the person most sought after in various problematic situations.

De opre šute, mamo,
de *le* nasul šingale,
de ratji me te phiro,
mindjar puške den ma. (...)
av-tar, dale, av-tar,
e *de* muri gugli mamo,
phande andre, dale,
muro stungo punro (...)

The evil policemen
decided, mother,
if I take a walk in the evening,
they will shoot me immediately, (...)
come with me, mother, come with me,
my dear mother,
bandage my left foot, mother (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 398, recorded in about 1966 in Austria.

(Romani translation: Cech/Fennesz-Juhas/Halwachs/Heinschink 2001: 362)

Temnicatar mamo avilem
či na čordem, maj ande, mamo, pelem,
rovav, rovav thaj pićan mure asva (...)

I came from prison, mother,
I fall down, although I didn't steal,
I cry, I cry, I shed tears(...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 971, recorded in about 1968 in Austria.

Xučilde ma mamó, le but le ketani,
pre ma marde, de mamó,
de pengó šudró sastro (...)

Mother, many soldiers attacked me,
they hit me, mother,
with their cold iron stick (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 2127, recorded in about 1970 in Hungary.

Nasvali sim, mamó, o ilo dukhal ma,
jaj de si te merav mamó, *hej*,
vadj kamav vodj ničì (...)

I am sick, mother, I have heartache,
I have to die, mother,
whether I will or not (...)

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 394, recorded in about 1965 in Austria.

As I mentioned above, a mother supports her family not only in the domestic realm but also in the economic and psychological realms. She is, so to speak, the breadwinner of the family, in spite of the fact that the official head of the household must always be a man.

Consequently, the special features of women in the slow songs can be divided into three categories:

- Women as victims
- Women as unfaithful
- Women as respected and honorable

For typical example, I will give a song sung by Lovari members living in Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Serbia. This song titled “Phen-ta mage muri bori”, meaning “Tell me my daughter-in law” or “Mimi, Mimi, hireš Mimi”, meaning “Mimi, Mimi, famous Mimi” is one of the most spread and well-known slow songs among the Lovara and whole features of women are contained here:

*Joj phen-ta mange, muri bori,
joj sar trajis tu tje romesa, ja?
Joj marel ma, valatij ma,
joj sar e Devles kinozij ma.*

Tell me, my daughter-in-law,
how do you live with your husband?
Ah, he beats me, interrogates me,
he torments me, like God was tormented.

*Joj šutjos avri, muri bori,
joj sar i patrin ando paji, jo.
Joj šutjos avri, muri bori, jo,
joj te na kames aba avre romes.*

You shall dry up, my daughter-in-law,
like a leaf in the water,
you shall dry up, my daughter-in-law,
so as not to love another man.

*Joj phen-ta mange, muri bori,
jaj kon phirel tuke pi felastra, jo?
Joj či phirel aba khonik, jo,
joj sar e cigni mucicora.*

Tell me, my daughter-in-law,
who comes to you from the window?
Nobody comes,
only a small cat.

*Joj naj č' a mucicora či kolopo,
joj taj či khera ando purno, ja!
Joj naj ča mucicora či kolopo, jo,
joj taj či khera ando punro!*

A small cat doesn't have a hat,
nor boots on foot!
A small cat doesn't have a hat,
nor boots on foot!

*Jaj an-ta šeje, mi šovengi,
jaj dav les puške ando jilo, ja.
Joj dav les puške ando jilo, ja,
joj te na kamel aba javre romes.*

Bring me, girl, my pistol,
I'll shoot him into the heart,
I'll shoot him into the heart,
so as not to love another

*Joj ap-ta khere, muri bori,
joj na dara tu le Romendar.
Joj na dara tu le Romandar, jo,
joj taj či šele ženendar.*

Come home, my daughter-in-law,
don't be afraid of the Roma,
don't be afraid of the Roma,
and of the hundred of persons.

Heinschink Collection, Nr. 396, recorded in around 1967 in Austria.

(Romani translation: Cech/Fennesz-Juhas/Halwachs/Heinschink 2001: 336)

5. “Women” in songs of the Lovara in the Hemetek–Collection: Reproduction of the traditional image of women

The “Hemetek-collection” (For convenience I call it *Hem-C* in the following) recorded between 1990 and 1995 (totally 125 hours) contains about 470 songs sung by 16 Lovari members mostly in Austria. I grouped all songs as follows:

- Type A “slow songs”
- Type B “dance songs”
- Type C “new songs”
- Type D “others”

Type A “slow songs” and Type B “dance songs” are similar to the Hei-C above. Type C is “new songs” that account for one-third of all the songs in Hem-C. Type D “others” are the songs that were influenced by folksongs and pop songs, which seem to have clearly no relation to the Romani heritage. For example, “Wiener Lieder” (Viennese folksongs) or American Christmas songs sung by the Lovara that came in the middle of the 19th century in Austria are contained in this type.

Unlike the Hei-C, Hem-C was specifically made for the purpose of research, because the details of domestic Roma and their music had been left untouched in Austria (Hemetek 1992: 5). The research has just started in time of the rise of the Romani movement. Sympathizing with appeal of ethnomusicologists that traditional songs have of great value and that promoting their music might overcome prejudice against Roma, professional musicians have emerged also among the Lovara and they have started to introduce Lovari songs in public⁹.

Lovari women have contributed greatly to this process. For a large number of the traditional songs from the older generation of Lovara were specifically conserved by women¹⁰. When they present their songs on the stage, men of their family usually accompany with their instruments. I would like to point out that women assume the primary role in the stage performance, and thereby provide an income for their household, corresponds to the Romani social structure in which women play the decisive role of connecting to the outside world of non-Romani people. Of course, the men on stage also take part in them. However, the decision whether women (generally their wives or daughters) go on the stage or not is always in men’s hand and they let women to take initiative in proceeding, although women do not seem to appear to be oppressed in the stage¹¹.

As I grouped their songs above, the images of women in their songs are those of ones oppressed. Furthermore, those stereotypical characteristics are reproduced even in the new songs. For instance, in a song she sung both privately and publicly, one singer announced before each performance that the text is traditional, yet the content reflects contemporary happenings in the Lovara community. Its text

is translated as follows:

Jaj de bičindan ma pe lovende,
pe love l' amerikake,
jaj de bičindan ma strajinonge.
Nas tuke mila dade, misto mande,
nas tuke mila mamo, misto mande.

O you sold me for money,
American money,
You sold me to strangers.
Daddy, you have no pity for me,
Mama, you have no pity for me.

Jaj de si ma jekh rom kon marel ma,
taj o sokro našavel ma,
pe vulici l' amerikake.
Naj lenge mila mamo pala mande,
naj lenje miko dade misto mande.

O I have a husband who beats me,
And a father-in-law who kicks me out
into the streets of America.
Mama, they have no pity for me,
Daddy, they have no pity for me.

Jaj de vi maren ma vi kušen ma,
mamo, pača von či den ma,
jaj de vi ġesenca vi račanda.
Uščav taj da ma tele e asvenca,
Uščav taj da ma tele e asvenca.

O they beat me and abuse me,
Mama, they give me no peace,
every day and every night.
I wake up crying and go to bed in tears,
I wake up crying and go to bed in tears.

Jaj de žutin mamo, žutin dade,
Na muken man te xasajvav!
Aven-tar taj ingren ma.
Taj strajinonge mamo, na muken ma,
taj strajinonge mamo, na muken ma.

O help me Mama, help me Daddy,
don't leave me to die here!
Come and take me away from here.
Don't leave me to die among strangers,
Don't leave me to die among strangers.

Hemetek-Collection, PR 199, recorded in 1993 in Vienna
(Romani/English translation: Hemetek 1994: 91).

Interestingly, there is no record of any other Lovara singing the same song. In fact, Hem-C contains a document to the effect that she sung it on June. 12. 1993 for the first time with a comment that her family member wrote its text.

6. Conclusion

In my paper, I have dealt with the representations and portrayals of women in Lovari songs. In the Hei-C, in which most of the Lovari songs were recorded in 1960s in private settings, women are mainly featured as victims, unfaithful, and a respected and honourable. These features reflect the status of women in the real Romani community. In the community it is taken for granted that woman devotes herself to family: her behaviour is always controlled and judged by man, and the reverse does not happen.

In the Hem-C, the Lovari songs recorded between 1990 and 1995 were sung with new motivation for research and promotion, and with new modes of transmission other than oral, such as overseas public or CDs performances. The Lovari women have actively taken part in the drastic changes of the performance style. Nevertheless their songs retain and reproduce their traditional representations and symbols of women as the stereotypes inherent in their culture even in the new songs.

Woman's rights are now discussed as one of the main topics concerning Roma communities worldwide¹². Accordingly, the situation of the Roma itself is also in the process of changing and Romani women in Austria have also begun to find their own voice little by little within the Romani communities. In Austria, it appears that their social structure seems to allow Lovari women to have more liberties than women in other Romani groups¹³. However, how will the Lovari songs be treated in future Lovari/Romani communities as well as in non-Romani communities, if the emancipation of the Romani women is to progress? Will they hang on to the traditional memories of the Lovara, along with the stereotypes ingrained in their culture, and continue to reproduce them? Or will they begin to make use of their new found liberty through musical expression as a suitable way to protest against gender inequality? Will they ever begin composing new songs that question the inequality, or songs reflecting the present state of Romani communities? Needless to say, my paper is not enough to clarify these questions. More multilateral analysis in various dimensions is needed.

I would like to think of such a gender-oriented perspective is one of the most insightful perspectives in regards to the research in the field of the Romani music. It will shed further light on the study of the transmission of Lovari music, which is so deeply rooted in tradition but evolving perhaps faster than we imagine due to the change of Romani community involved our expanding global society.

Notes

¹ Two first workgroups for women by Romani women have spontaneously arose at the first European Roma-Conference in Mai 1994 in Seville (*Jekh čhib* 1995: 6). However, it is said that they can not lead any activities until now. The reason is, for one thins, lack of understanding of Men (Heinschink 2005).

- ² A great deal of loan words from Hungarian language in their mother tongue *Romanes* shows that Lovara had stayed in the range of Hungarian speaking territories over a long period of time (Pobožniak 1964:18ff).
- ³ Some of them even believe that the texts of loke gijla play a role in passing down the group's history (Takiguchi 2006: 23). They believe this is so because, for one thing, they have performed their music only inside their own group for a long time.
- ⁴ Further particulars about the collections in the Phonogrammarchiv, see Fennesz-Juhasz 2001.
- ⁵ A woman who belongs to *Sinti* comments in the interview that "The woman was man and woman" (Eder-Jordan 1996: 176). In my experience, an early thirties woman who belongs to *Vlach* and has made a living by selling hats at that time also told me that "Do you know what my husband's work is? To smoke!" (Talk held in Dec. 2006 in Vienna.)
- ⁶ This collection arranges materials in 1108 titles together with signature, archived number and recording number. In my paper I picked out 120 titles in which the words "Lovara", "song(s)" contains.
- ⁷ I must admit that the songs are often characterized by mixed types. So, let me add that this division does not always make a clear distinction.
- ⁸ In the following, Romani translation is quoted from the protocol attached in the collection, unless there isn't any reference.
- ⁹ That is the reason why they have composed new songs actively.
- ¹⁰ It would have certainly related with that the domestic leading ethnomusicologists were also women, too.
- ¹¹ Some Romani women have often told me that they **must** sing for their family, means for making money.
- ¹² See the topic "Woman's Right" in ERRC.
- ¹³ For this reason more research and discussion is needed. However, one such example is that in Vienna in January 12. 2006, an about 20-year-old Lovari woman was allowed to take the chair at the public discussion "Please do not help us! – it is just quite enough! – (transl. of *Helfen Sie uns bitte nicht! – allein ist es schon schwer genug! –*)" of several Romani associations.

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ロマ民族ロヴァーラの歌に見られる女性表現

滝 口 幸 子

【要旨】

ロマ民族は、出自、職業そして宗教の異なる様々なサブグループで構成されるエスニック集団である。しかしその一方で、彼らの間には言語、文化、慣習といった様々なレベルにおいて共有する要素が見られ、それが“ロマ民族”としての帰属意識を生み出している。例えば、ガジェ（彼らの言葉で“非ロマの人々”という意味）から受けた差別と迫害の歴史は、今日の彼らの社会構造の根幹をなすと共に、彼らの音楽や音楽環境にまで影響を与えている。

同様に、ロマ民族全体に共通しているのは家父長制である。そのシステムに従い、彼らのジェンダー・ロールは、家族内および集団内において明確に区別されている。しかしながら、彼らの社会のジェンダー・ロールを論じることはジェンダーの不平等に触れるものであるため、ラポール構築の観点からも一種のタブーとされている。本論文は、ロマ民族のサブグループのひとつ“ロヴァーラ Lovara”を対象に、ジェンダーの視点からロマ音楽研究のアプローチを試みている。具体的には、筆者が2002年からフィールド調査しているオーストリアにおいて、オーストリア学術視覚アーカイブに所蔵されているロヴァーラの録音資料を対象に、彼らの歌の中で“女”がどのように表現されているかを性格の異なる2つのコレクションから比較・分析した。

ロヴァーラは、歴史的に職業音楽家としての生業に従事せず、音楽を集団内で口頭伝承してきた。そのため、他のサブグループには見られない集団固有の音楽的特徴が見られると共に、歌詞には、ロヴァーラの伝統的な生活スタイル、集団内におけるコミュニティの在り方や個人の役割が反映されていると言われている。コレクションの比較・分析の結果、ロヴァーラの歌に登場する女は、“恋人”“妻”“母”の役割によって“犠牲者”“不誠実”“尊敬と崇拝に値する”女の3つに大別され、それらは常に男によって判断されるものであることが明らかにされた。加えて、オーストリア国内におけるロマの女性の社会的地位の変化が今後の彼らの歌に与える変化の可能性を指摘した。