

SOCIAL PROJECT AGAINST OTHERING: “THE RYHTM OF LOVE”:

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Abstract

Although the numbers differ it is estimated about 600.000- 1.000.000 Gypsy oriented citizen live within the borders of Turkey. The gypsies have first moved to Anatolia in the 16th century but many gypsy families have brought into Turkey after the Lausanne Treaty. Gypsies as well as the Jews were the first two minority groups who have adopted and internalized the Turkish identity enforced by the Kemalist politicians. Unfortunately it seems the gypsy attempt towards the acceptance of Turkish National and religious identity does not damp the othering process which the gypsies face with in Turkey. The social right to accomplish educational facilities without being suppressed by secret boundaries created in the Turkish Society is one of the major disadvantages of the gypsy society today. This paper will discuss a social project being carried out by TOG (Volunteers of the Society Foundation) at Bandırma region which fight against the othering process gypsy youngsters have to face with throughout their educational life. “The Ryhtm of Love Project” tries to give an opportunity to the gypsy youngsters who continue their educational life by improving their musical talents within their spare times. The project also proved out those gypsy students who is participating the project have both improved their educational- social talents and began to sweep out the difficulties they came across on the way up to their university careers.

Keywords: Gypsies, Bandırma, Rhythm of Love Project, Othering, Volunteers of the Society Foundation.

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGIN OF GYPSIES

As a result of the researches conducted, social scientists have stated that Gypsy communities who have maintained their life in different regions on earth dispersedly are originally Indian-origin. Philologists, in pursuit of their researches undergoing approximately 200 years on the language that the gypsies speak, have declared that an important part of the words used by this community is Indian language origin and this language has acquired more dominant qualification when it is gone deeper about the old basic words which are called as “*Root Words*”.(1) The same resources have allied that different words of the different languages have been settled in the language of the aforementioned community in course of gypsy migration wave having been

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observed till V. Century to the present and Balkan-European Languages have been absorbed by the Gypsies in the history.(2)

After V. Century, the Gypsies who have started to emigrate from India have taken to the immigration roads in small groups not on the basis of populations contrary to so many communities. Therefore, the immigration of the Gypsies has been taken place over a period of more than 1000 years. The first Gypsy groups coming from India between V and VII have come to Persia. The second weaving occurred in VII. - X. Centuries has appeared to the same sideway in the process of India and Persia conquest by the muslims. During the reign of Ghaznavid (Gazneli) Mahmud, the last Gypsy immigration has been spread into Europe starting from the same route. Ringold who gave the dates of IX- XIV century dates for arrival of the Gypsies to the Northern Europe sets forth that the situation referring to not able to settle in a region and not to adhere to that territory of the Gypsy communities getting into trouble with native ascendants due to their different belief attitudes in this large region is an obligation arising from the immigration results rather than Gypsies' preference. In respect to Ringold, in order to start the settlement in Northern Europe, XV century will be due waited.(3)

1- FROM INDIA TO CENTRAL EUROPE

The researchers who have thought the immigration of those gypsies has followed the line Persia-Armenia- Anatolia- Greece- Southern Slovakia- Hungary have pointed out that the Gypsy communities living in mass in Spain in a period have been exposed to the sanctions of the first massacre and collective exiling in Kingdom of Spain. Although the first gypsy traces in Anatolia have drawn attention at the beginning of IX. Century, Gypsy-origins have been found between iron masters and hostlers in Byzantine Empire, the date is given as X. century. After the battle of 1071 Malazgirt, the Gypsy communities coming across with Turks have started to settle in Anatolia, with conquest of it by Turks. Kenrick has stated that the Gypsy has been seen in 1050 in İstanbul and noted that the gypsies who have not settled in Istanbul have poured in Europe. (4) Especially, collapse of Eastern Bloc has revealed that the issues of identity as a political problem have not been deleted from communities' *collective subconscious* in spite of all suppressions and impositions. While Brunt has expressed the issue with these statements, "*it is a policy that we should construct and reconstruct our personality with our relations with others with a great effort and political activity so as to recognize the process. Everybody should be able to form his path as moving ahead.*" (5), with a simple definition identity is that political activity and effort establish themselves and create connections in relation with others.

The fact that each ethnic awakening cannot transform to nation has shown the nationalism represented by dominant culture will challenge ethnicity. Every ethnic awakening with itself brings dependence on "*the other*". Because one of them who have drunk the soup on the same table have separated himself and have begun to perceive everybody as "*the other*". In this context

it is clear that Turkey is a unfortunate geography for ethnic identity hunters. The development which is very interesting and in which cultural life has carried crucial features by evolving throughout the history has been stated by Mardin in Berkes: *"In Turks race, religion, blood, genealogy, even language have not accepted as the base of social unity. The base of social unity has been either craft association or state union within Turks because they have not accepted monism but plurality; Turks have existed by these concepts mostly through the history. Turks have never founded regimes like theocracy, aristocracy, racism."* (6)

Concepts such as *"othering-alienation-withdrawal-exclusion-disadvantaged groups,"* indicate the problems that social rights are not developed enough or are not expanded within society properly. In accordance with human psychology If "I" means circle and people thinking like me, *"the other" is someone who is close or familiar to me. Soykan has evaluated "the other-I" dilemma by adding "no one / the phenomenon of nothingness": "Who is the other? Chinese is other, the Serbian is enemy. Serbian is not the other. How can he be? He stands in front of me on tv, in my horizon every day. Enemy is in my horizon; one day he can be even my friend. In our life it is seen that so many friends become enemies, so many enemies become friends. But the other is not my enemy even. It is as if he did not exist. "*

2- TURKEY'S GYPSIES

It is exactly at this point, researchers have encountered Gypsies who have been despised and become a disadvantage group from the earliest times to the present day not only in Turkey almost everywhere they have been. Turkey's Gypsies¹ have been claimed to be a friendly and loyal community to Turkish society from Ottoman times to today. On the other hand besides Jewish intellectuals who have supported policies of Turkifying which have been dominant in Republican period and Gypsies who have affected by Kemalist ideology and it's emphasis on Turkishness have absorbed the title "Gypsy Turks ". Generally speaking with combination of the efforts of Ottoman regime aiming to place the identity policy, partly reformist, into a religious theme and Turkifying policies in Republican period, an important part of Gypsy community in Turkey have survived on these lands without going against *"sunni muslim- Turk*. It should be accepted that Gypsies have approved this attitude in order to avoid discriminatory attitudes and to go away from insulting expressions against Gypsy origin.

Gypsy origins strongly state that they have been loyal to country. In 1570 British Gypsies were forced to leave their homes where they lived because they were threated in a bad way in accordance with a law which aimed at *"bum - beggar - vagrant and fake the Egyptian."* According to one view British Gypsies who looked for a new home and could not get support from other European countries came to Ottoman lands and reached a motherland where they

¹ In this article instead of the term *"Roman"* which is very confusing and is used to define only a wing of Turkey Gypsies, the term *"Gypsy"* will be used. Gypsy origin former bureaucrat-activist Mustafa Aksu's request to call every community with it's original name and to respect all these communities is a concept which has been accepted by the writer of article. (an.)

looked for with the help of Ottoman tolerance. (7) During exchange between 1920 and 1930 according to some Gypsy leaders Turkish state approached to Gypsies more moderate and gave more fertile lands to Gypsies, and contrary to European countries Gypsy origins did not show resistance against Ottoman-Turk government's "*hold citizens settled whatever its cost*" policy.

The question, how many Gypsy origin people live in Turkey is not easy to answer because the population census which have been conducted since Ottoman period to today have not been analyzed in order to determine ethnic origins in details. In accordance with 1831 census, Kemal Karpat tried to determine Turkey's Gypsies. He stated that at that time approximately 36500 Gypsy Origins was determined in general population which was 3.5-4 million on average. All Gypsy groups, Romans, Doms, Loms and nomads, were included in this figure. When we take into consideration that little demographic scan about Gypsies have been done, we see that significant portion of the Turkey-based data analysis is derived from the work of Karpat. For instance the research which has indicated that 500-600 thousands Gypsies live in Turkey has been developed with the help of Karpat's analysis. However Gypsy activists and some foreign reseachers have emphasized that the given figure is much lower than the Gypsy origins population and have added that Gypsy population in Turkey is near 2 million.

It is known that the Gypsy population lives mainly in Thrace, Aegean, and Marmara Region. It should be mentioned that the population gap emerged because of removal non-Muslims in these regions after Lausanne and the gap was abolished with Gypsies defined as "*lesser evil*" Tuna-Oğuz and Kolukırık who have done a research on settlement and distribution of Gypsies in Turkey have stated that "*The settlement process was carried out according to economic and social conditions of migrants and the migrant who came from Drama, Kavala, Crete, the islands and the coast of Greece and who maintained their life with production of tobacco were placed mainly Aegean coastline and Tekirdağ. Apart from these regions BlackSea coastline especially the city of Samsun was preferred mostly. In this context, from some of Drama and Kavala inhabitants 30,000 tabacconists were located in Samsun and its vicinity. Approximately migrants who were taken to Turkey were mainly settled in Edirne, Balıkesir, İstanbul, Bursa, Kırklareli, Samsun, Kocaeli, İzmir, Niğde and Manisa*" (8).

3- IDENTITY CRİSES

Marsh stated that Gypsies living in Turkey represents a mixing structure. Beside Roman, Lom, and Dors a group refered as "*travelers / nomads*" and separeted to different wings are constituted the structure known as Turkey's Gypsies thus "*Roman-Gypsy*" identity which have put forward by some bureaucrats as well as the current government as approaching to Gypsy issue have proved to be invalid says Marsh (9). According to this scientific approach which has indicated Romans constitute only 30-35 percent of Gypsies in turkey the sub-groups: Dom,

Roman, nomad and lom cannot take place Gypsy upper identity but they obtain a holistic understanding under the concept of “*gypsy*”

Gypsy citizens who have not forgotten the founder elites embracing them and who stay in a *disadvantaged position* in society have developed a tendency to vote for CHP and to be *vote stock* of CHP so as to show their trust in founder elites and main principles of state. Today in regions like Edirne, Bandırma, Gönen, Manyas, İzmir where Gypsies have settled mosly and which have settlement sections as “Gypsy neighborhood” have shown favor to CHP and MHP. And they have not shown favor to other parties because most of middle generation Gypsy citizens have stated that they have socialized by taking responsibility in youth wing of CHP.

Contrary to other ethnic groups Gypsies have not demanded any political right which can be called “*separatist-divider*” from Turkey Republic. Through the history Gypsies with Jewish communities have represented to be the most willing ethnic groups to adjust Turkish state life style. Moreover Gypsy sub culture have put emphasize on Muslim-Turkish culture by shared religious values. And the only aim of Gypsy sub culture has been to accomplish a harmonic unity with Turks.

Although they did not do their religious duties by assuming integration with state is pre condition of integration with public, Gypsy origins citizens behaviors have been interesting because they have not wanted to be in contradiction with Sunni Islam identity. The process have started with Party of Union and Progress and continued during Kemalist revolution and Gypsies have absorbed the secular view of world which has been close to them and which have been a part of the same adaptation policy of society. The comments, “*asynchronous, disconnected from society*”, which have been made by some segments of society have consisted of unjust evaluations fed by prejudice. It has been clear that this colorful society segment has not been understood and perceived enough by Turkish society because they have been in “*disadvantaged groups*” and faced with even discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes. In this context Gypsy community who has shown concrete unity on the basis of social goals has different cultural codes and demands. And it should also be recorded that evaluation on the basis of singular point of view has emerged due to “*native Turks*”

4- ETYMOLOGICAL MEANINGLESSNESS OF “ROMAN REFORM”

AKP government who has claimed to start Roman reform in order to give Roman rights has not accomplished to eliminate the disadvantages of Gypsy community and even given a name to the issue. AKP government has fallen to a tragic mistake by ignoring 70 percent of Gypsy community. In this article so as not to fall to the same mistake “*Roman – Gypsy identity*” *error have not taken place and the society that have been studied on have been approached through “gypsy” supra-identity.*

When we go back to issues Gypsies- Othering- Social state- Social Rights, we see the most challenging difficulty faced by Gypsy Origins citizens is to access to educational opportunities. To reach educational opportunities has been an essential part of social rights and taking advantage of educational opportunities give a chance to gain social statue so it is easy to see the educational problems of Gypsy origins. It cannot be told that Gypsies living in different regions care about education in the same way. However Gypsies living in Thrace-Aegean have demanded more, they have been victims of inequality educational opportunities.

Contrary to this Dom origin gypsies living eastern-Southeastern Anatolia have not had demands about education. Dom adults do not benefit from education and do not know write or read. Önen's findings about two sub gypsy groups with different socio-economic indicators have faced with negativeness in education:

“We have realized different dimensions which have been marginalized socially in both communities benefited from education. Primary schools homogeneity in Edirne indicates social marginality. In fact all students are Romans in Fevzipaşa primary school in Menziliahir neighborhood. Turks as majority have drawn their children from schools which have given coeducation service. One of the interviewers has indicated that he has registered his daughter to a school in the centre in order to get high quality education. However his daughter has been called as ‘gypsy’ by her class friends so the father has drawn his daughter from that school. Thus discriminations have indicated that there has been no equal opportunity in education.”(10)

Another study which has confirmed education related problems faced by Gypsy origin youth have carried out by Suat Kolukırık on Gypsies in Tarlabası and İzmir. According to study, which has been completed before urban transformation of Tarlabası which situated in the centre of İstanbul, 23.6 percent of residents living in Tarlabası are illiterates. It has been detected that middle aged gypsies and girls who are on school age are not allowed to go to schools because of economical problems and unbelief in education. The educational status of former residents of Tarlabası is like that *“17.8 percent have left school not being graduated, 37.8 are primary school graduates and 12.2 percent have continued education after primary school. The rate of education of male interviewers is high when we take the gender relation and education status into consideration. Generally lack of quality in education has emerged because; parents’ educational level is low, socio-cultural conditions are not appropriate, students do not have proper school equipments and there are differences in school related life.”* Kolukırık has stated that young gypsies who have continued their education have found difficulty in communicating with others or have been discriminated. The researcher has believed that gypsies who live near migrant neighborhood experience problems related to communication in long term. Kolukırık has stressed that Balkan origin immigrant kids’ educational level has increased as young gypsies have gone away from educational opportunities. Thus the educational facts which connect community segments to each other have othered the Gypsies who have been unwilling to maintain their education. (11)

Under the light of all these data mentioned above “The Rhythm of Love” project which has been started by TOG (SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS) has gained more meaningful context. As we can remember, being musician within Gypsy community Turkey which has been regarded as a “valued” craft has been emphasized before. TOG’s project has been formed on a pragmatic basis. This project has aimed to prove that Gypsies not being broken from their sub identity, not being othered because of their activities can be integrated with society. Gypsy origin students whose musical ability has been accepted by whole segments of society have been integrated with a lot of efforts. The project implemented Banda district of Balıkesir province in related TOG report has justified on the grounds as follows:

5- THE RHYTHM OF LOVE PROJECT

“Through the interviews, which have been carried out with 2009 – TOG Volunteers Primary School’s students, administrative and academic staff, need analysis and meeting has been accomplished. During the preparation time in order to spend time and feel sympathy to students an activity has carried out which has included painting walls of classrooms, sanding desks in so as to improve physical conditions of school. For 2010 -2011 the academic year the scope of ‘I am valuable’ project which has been carried out by Ataturk Primary School and District National Education Management has been shared with TOG volunteers. Because Tog volunteers have approved to do activity together with ‘I am valuable’ project, they have decided to found music class and music workshops in order to carry out activities of both project. Ataturk Primary School is a school which is located near gypsy populated neighborhood and which experiences absenteeism fairly. The main goal for applying this project is to detect students with absenteeism problem, to support students to communicate, to make students trust in school, to improve their self confidence. Due to this goal; two groups as rhythm and voice has been established so as to create places where students can express themselves, their abilities and their interests. The studies were started on Feb 2010. The music and the rhythm workshop have been run three times a week regularly by different volunteers separately.” (12)

According to TOG reports “I am valuable” Project which has been carried out by Primary School and which has not attracted attention due to the school’s physical background has commenced to attract attention with campaign.

Sharing the Project TOG which has developed a new Project based on total principles of voluntary participation has helped to create conditions in order to fix the physical conditions of Ataturk Primary School and then has found solution to make school activities more sharing. With the scope of “ATAK”, three days activity, which has been carried out in 2010 summer by TOG, the opportunities provided by some industrial firms in Bandırma have been introduced to TOG volunteers participated from all over Turkey. Firstly TOG volunteers have detected school’s insufficient physical conditions then insufficient school conditions such as painting

school, repairing door and windows, placing computers properly have been met. ATAK has ended with ornamenting neighborhood with graffiti by participation of young gypsies also.

It has been emphasized by Ramazan Ömür, the Project manager, that after TOG has struggled with insufficient physical conditions, *“The Rhythm of Love”* has gained importance. In the beginning most of students’ absenteeism and being late problem to school had been accepted as a normal thing and there had been very problematic relations within students however things have started to change in Atatürk Primary school. Ömür has stated that musical education opportunity has been provided to very talented young Gypsies by very famous native musicians of Bandırma who have been respected by gypsy community, young gypsies who have promised not using smoke-drugs have taken rhythm and instrument lessons in school twice a week. The interesting part is that not only TOG volunteers but also other participants who have joined project have acted according to *“solely voluntary principles”*

“The Rhythm of Love” project target group has been children who have been 12-13 year old, have studied in primary school and it has been observed that these students have been supported with music in first year. In the second year the education issue has been gained importance mostly and young gypsy’s graduation from primary school has taken place. The application of giving extra courses which can prepare students for high school or even university is going to start as a part the project which has been working for 3 years and which has been educating kids. The Project, which is based on *“voluntary principle”*, has been supported by TR Balıkesir University Bandırma İİBF’s lecturers and sometimes by primary school teachers. İİBF’s students and lecturers have helped the students by giving free lessons to them on their main courses as maths, english, turkish, science two or three times a week in their separate times. Apart from these lessons Bandırma’s two famous musician families have supported students, who have taken rhythm-voice lessons two or three times a week, whenever they have found a chance. (13)

TOG members who have not been willing to spend their summer in vain have targeted to praise students especially who has continued their education by organizing summer camps with their friends. Within this scope gypsy students came together in a hotel which was rented because of Ramadan discount in Erdek and during the camp beside music they benefited from activities as football, basketball and swimming in 2011 in the first summer camp which was held. The Rhythm of Love music band which was the host of Erdek municipality during the first summer camp and whose concert attracted a great attention by public in Erdek Cumhuriyet square proved that the project worthed all efforts. The Rhythm of Love music band which started to play in 2011 with 21 students, 13 audio and 8 rhythm-instrument group, has continued to play with 19 students including 11 male in 2013 term and the number will increase in 2013-2014 term according to Gökhan Göksunlu, rhythm group teacher.

According to information given by TOG Head Office and agency of Bandırma, preparation to SBS has been given by volunteer university students from İİBF. From time to time school

teachers supporting the project from Bandırma and other districts have also participated in “free lecture” application. Lecturer like Harun Karacan who is the head consultant of TOG Bandırma agent and who is İİBF’s lecturer have supported “*The Rhythm of Love*” Project which is in third year. The Project includes giving courses to students who are successful and who can do more with proper help thus TOG volunteer university students give lessons like maths, science and Turkish so as to help students’ development.

TOG reports have revealed the Project results as follows: “*Transformation in students: At the beginning there was reluctance to participate, and students did not take and attend the works seriously at the workshop but thanks to TOG volunteers who kept being stable the problems related to project and school started to decline. (E-school records). Positive change in school behaviors was observed. It was also observed that student gradually gave up smoking. Student whose academic success was low realized that they had talent at other fields. A student who had absence problem started to come to class before anybody else and parent’s of that kid commenced to show interest.*” (14)

Besides, “*TOG the Rhythm of Love*” project’s success is not limited to only the achievements of the students involved in the project. According to both TOG’s reports and project volunteers’ official expressions students who did not attend to project even affected from “*The Rhythm of Love*” project’s success positively. Volunteers have emphasized that there have been a serious decline in physical violence resulted events in school where there have been a lot of students who had involved in crimes and who had benefited from. “*Controlled freedom*” and other students began to see school no longer a difficult-scary or pointless process. Project coordinator Ömür has stated that parents have developed a sense as “*they care about our children somebody*” and with the removal “*of no one but gypsies come here*” within students has made District Education Management show more interest in school. Ömür has outlined the project as follows:

“A-Project has carried out on a voluntary basis from start to finish.

b- Our students have realized that they are worthy ,

c- Parents have got away from the feelings of being discriminated due to their ethnic

Origin.

ç- Teacher has realized that students can be successful in fields other than school lessons.

d- It has been proved that success can be obtained with collective activities.

e- A very important stage has been preceded in terms of constructing school culture.

f- Different local NGOs have realized the school and stated that they could cooperate with the school

g- After two months effort the ultimate target of the project, raise awareness in disadvantaged group, has been reached.

h- The whole students who had attended to project continued their education in high school.”

6- THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GYPSY YOUTH

Although rhythm of love group members have a fame within Bandırma and neighborhoods, the first letters of the name and surname of the children who attended in Project will be used because children’s families are afraid that their children will be called “gypsy origins students.” For general questions name or abbreviation will not be used. In this context nearly all of the students who have been interviewed have stated that they started to show interest in project and then they moved away habits like smoking-drugs, fighting, lack of communication, absense. Students have stressed that they have started to like the courses and thanks to “*The Rhythm of Love*” group they have managed to approve themselves and communicate with others from outside easily. 14 year old HT expressed his ideas: “*While I was singing on stage, something wrong with sound emerged in Bird Paradise Festival of Manyas. I felt bad. Deputy of Bandırma and the major came and offered apology. After then the problem with sound solved and I continued my show. Exactly at that point I noticed that I was scared by others.*” HT added that he could manage to get what he wanted if he got enough points in SBS in order to enter test of talent. HT’s dream is to be music teacher after graduating from Balıkesir Fine Arts High School and conservatory. “*The Rhythm of Love*” group members have expressed that they have not liked science and maths. It has noticed that most of the group members like Turkish Literature and social science lessons.

CONCLUSION: SUPPORT/IN-OUT ISSUES OF PROJECT

Meanwhile it has been observed that there has been a lot of interest to “*The Rhythm of Love*” project by governmental and nongovernmental organizations so activities of TOG Bandırma agent have reached success. The Project was experienced by Aydın and Yalova and the Project has been attempted to be taken to Edirne where the 20 percent of population is Gypsy Origins. The Project which has been supported by Şeker and Banvit Chicken companies in Bandırma, the majors of Erdek and Bandırma as well as province and distric National Education Managements has been supported by İFSAK lastly thus we expect that the project will get more interest. İFSAK has given the following information on the subject: “*They performed more than 10 concerts at Erdek and Bandırma. Through concert pupils who had othering identity transformed into persons who had self confidence, who were ready to communicate. Thanks to pupils their parents became supporters of the project. BANTOG members have continued to carry out new*

projects in 2012-2013. This year (2012-2013) the team who is going to give courses as voice, rhythm, instrument and SBS is going to expand the project throughout Bandırma. They have been continuing to keep 'rhythm of love' since they have realized the positive changes within student in Bandırma Atatürk Primary School which they have worked in cooperation. Creating photo Project group which take photos of Gypsy pupils' own life and their efforts while working and which prepare a exhibition or show after Project is targeted through ongoing 'Rhythm of Love' Project ” (15)

TOG who has taken out a patent for 'Rhythm of Love' project in order to prevent project from being manipulated and being used by politic institutes now cares about the execution of the project within the association. Association officials have worried about that the Project focus on education would weaken and the project would be pointless if local governments integrated the project to their politic program and became a part of it. Another danger for project which is carried out in accordance *volunteer principle* is that the project may be withdraw from operation If TOG in Bandırma IIBF lose power and interest.

'Rhythm of Love' project which has been carried out in order to prevent *othering* against Gypsy Origins and to improve the education level of them has passed 3 years with success. If political parties were able to approach 'Rhythm of Love' with perfection without putting emphasize on any ethnic, religion and social classes, it would be proved that Gypsy origins people's problems would be solved and Turk culture which represent supra identity would integrate and live with other different sub cultures peacefully in Turkey republic which have a mixed ethnic culture.

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