

## ETHNIC IDENTITY OF GORANIES\*

Impressive preservation and maintenance of ethnic identity is the leading problem of ethnic and historical drama of Goranies. Through ethnic identity as a determination symbol, their ethnic borders and sovereignty are established. Four basic constitutive models: biological, social, existential and spiritual, which determine the ethnic community of an absolute type and special identity characterize the ethnic community of Goranies. We will try to sketch the theoretical premises in an attempt to comprehend their ethnic identity.

This large and rather complex problem cannot be satisfactorily dealt with and explained if the two notions – *ethnic identity* and *ethnic personality* are not in advance clearly defined and confronted with each other because they overlap in practice. This narrow correlation is important in order to shape the picture of identity in general.

Ethnic personality is a scheme of notion indicatively deduced from concrete data, which can be classified into two not very peculiar types. The first type of data originates from a directly observed behaviour held apart as something typical of the ethnic group of Goranies. Such behavior is not simply human in relation to the fact that elements of the entire possible human repertory it involves are used in a special way. The second type of actual data is connected with instantly observed verbal behavior that represents generalizations of the ethnic personality specified by informers, who behave like self-ethnographers, as De Vos and Romanucci-Ross<sup>30</sup> formerly called them.

When ethnic personality is consciously applied in behavior, there is an inclination to experience it as the application of that kind of the ethnic identity model which, if logically analyzed, is already infected by the ethnic personality model. In many cases, it is more difficult to recognize the rash, spontaneous actualization of a certain aspect of the ethnic personality as such than to recognize the very act by which it is consciously expressed.

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<sup>30</sup> De Vos, Romanucci-Ross L. (1975), **Ethnic Identity**, Paolo Alto, p. 45

Ethnic identity is more difficult to define in the narrow logical sense than ethnic personality with a view to the fact that the latter is so often and so abusively contaminated in practice. Ethnic identity must first be logically and strictly taken into consideration in spite of the fact that such purely logical understanding of ethnic identity generally does not have any direct practical implementations. It should nevertheless be defined that we could, on one side, set the limits of the way in which ethnic personality contaminates it and, on the other side, of its function since it has so much been contaminated.

Ethnic identity is a generalization neither logically nor operatively deduced from data. In the narrowest sense, it is not even an ideal model; it is only an invention for classification purposes. In principle, it does not have any connection with the ways of behavior regardless of the fact whether the field investigator directly observed the behavior or an informant gave a statement about it. The most important thing is to express ethnic identity entirely by words or the ethnos itself.

Like ethnic personality, we also could imagine ethnos whose ethnic identity is identical with its comprehension of human identity. Even so pure ethnic identity can take its origin only from confrontation with “the other” and differentiation from it, where different ethnic identity is attributed to the “others”.

Frances Bacon and later theorists like Isaac, Glares, Meinck and others added to the creation of a thesis that the identities of ethnic groups include collections of inherited gifts and identifications already filled up. Every individual shares them with the others, from the very moment when he, by a stroke of fate, was born to the specific family at the given moment and the given place. First, there is here only the baby’s body, or the common physical characteristics of its group acquired over the parents’ genes, which come from the second process of selection or the phenomenon Rene Dubo called “the biological memory of the past things”<sup>31</sup>.

At first inhalation, when it hears the first sound or feels the first touch, the newborn is presented with everything that is in store for it in that family and that place. Here belongs the common fortune of the group whose member the baby has become, i.e. the social characteristics called by Ericson “the common sameness”, which by their intricate ways participate in the creation of identity of the individual ego<sup>32</sup>.

The baby that Goranies have got is thought to be a Gorany. It represents an event, which does not require participation, but passive experience. Therefore, the baby is presented with the ethnic identity of Goranies at birth. It is known however that the baby must acquire ethnic identity through an extremely strict training while it grows. All Goranies speak about it at length. They go so far to

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<sup>31</sup> Isaac M. (1975), **Idols of the Tribe, Identity and Political Change**, New York, p. 38

<sup>32</sup> Ericson E. (1975), **Identity, Joth and Crisis**, New York, p.59

believe that the baby Gorany is given the temperament (“predisposition”) of a Gorany already in the mother’s womb.

Ethnic identity does not represent, at least in theory, the existence of a subidentity. Men, women and children are all equally Goranies when their ethnic identity is in question. No one of them, either good or bad, either man or woman can be a Gorany to a greater or smaller degree. One simply is a Gorany or is not. Therefore ethnic identity of the type ‘all or nothing’ is so strong that the idea of typicality simply does not come in to be judged at any moment of the discourse relevant to it.

Bearing in mind that *ethnic personality* is a generalization inductively deduced from the existing data on behavior it could certainly depict or correctly represent the basic aspects of the personality of a Gorany. Although the conceptual model of ethnic personality of a Gorany was at first based on certain usual ways of behavior in Gora they happened to be deduced from it since the very moment of its creation.

In view of the fact that *ethnic identity* is not a generalization inductively deduced from the data on behavior one cannot believe that it describes or correctly represents any basic aspect of the personality of a Gorany. However, many activities point out that it can be regarded as a natural actualization of that pure ethnic identity or that it denotes ethnic identity. It becomes a model, more or less agreeable to some personality or completely separated from it on the plane of logical status. When we start dealing, as it should be done in practice, with the logical model of ethnic identity, which proceeds from many entries (linguistic, biological, cultural etc.), and the knowledge that the others (Albanians), with very different ethnic characteristics, exist in the neighborhood, along the border, the ethnic identity of Goranies is unavoidably strengthened. Special value connotations, which determine ultimate particularity and distinctiveness of the ethnic characteristics of Goranies, resolutely enrich them.

There are many important implementation aspects of the ethnic identity of Goranies. In behavior, for example, ethnic identity is expressed with greater disposition to rituality, particularly to the rituals of the life cycle (birth, circumcision) and as much as possible to St. George’s Day. In addition to other things, in rituals a rich palette of psychological phenomena becomes apparent. Individual and collective conscious and subconscious distinct entries emerge from there.

To identify itself the ethnos of Goranies must be differentiated from the neighbors for many reasons. We have therefore selected certain signs and symbols from their culture. They seem to be very important in order to distinguish Goranies from the neighboring groups. Certainly, the distinction is not made for the last time. The whole community, all individuals take part in that permanent process. The strongest are certainly those decisions when an individual identifies himself as a Gorany (personal identity), but accepts

common criteria of value and appreciation, creating as Barth said the feeling that persons from one group “play the same game”<sup>33</sup>.

If we proceed to archaic depths till the point when “an individual is almost completely merged with the genetic type”, and cannot comprehend his own being as a person separated from the group, that experience represents the highest degree of identification with the community, with all its members, and it can be marked with the pronoun “WE”. So ethnic consciousness is manifested mainly in the feeling that one’s own identity is a part of the collective identity, in the experience that can be expressed by the formula: I stand for them<sup>34</sup>.

The language of *Goranies* – called “našinski” (language spoken in our own way) is the strongest factor of identity. With that instrument they succeed to express the common fund of notions, which they shape with the help of words, and synthetic forms, adapted in due course of time to what should be expressed and conveyed to other people. The language of *Goranies* is retained as a discourse of ethnic identity and a powerful antidote in defense against assimilation and tendencies of tyrants to change their personal names and include them in birth registries as Albanian names.

A man from the community of Gora, at least when he lives there, cannot easily imagine himself beyond the framework of the ethnic group he belongs to. It is a special type of archaic behavior, which does not allow individuals, members of the respective society, to completely develop their personality at least when they are in their habitat, and to liberate themselves from the unconscious collective behavior. However, the ethnic group of *Goranies* does not live in isolation (remember their incessant beekeeping, permanent employment abroad, education etc.). The present-day man from that environment is free to some extent from many chains and bonds that worry men today. He is perhaps unaware of his individuality and his personality because he cannot easily imagine himself beyond the framework of the ethnic community he belongs to. Otherwise, he would not be conscious of himself and of his origin as a separate identity, and the members of that community would not develop their own, specific ethnic identity.

Let us mention the wedding ceremonies, which in their authentic extension demonstrate the exceptional archaic-magical and religious practice reduced to three levels of the *rites of passage* (rites de passage): separation, marginalization and aggregation. There is also a magic surplus to that model of ceremonies. The weddings of *Goranies* viewed as a whole add up a special quality, the charm of beauty and relaxation to extraordinary festivities and amusements.

Although the villages of *Goranies* do not exist any longer in the economic and social autarchy but in a lively communication with the outer world still a “barrier” is concurrently made towards the neighbors which isolates the villages.

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<sup>33</sup> Barth F. (1969), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Boston, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> From E. (1980), *Zdravo društvo (Healthy Society)*, Beograd, str. 82.

In that way a dynamic balance between various forces in a broad variety of models is established.

In all these structures, local autarchy is nonetheless smaller in every respect. The village community is obliged to organize itself in order to resist penetration of the global society. Migrants go to the outer world to strengthen their material position. They never return to their villages with foreign wives. Relations with the close vicinity ensure the barrier, which protects cultural, social and what is most important ethnic distinctiveness and identity. In general that autarchy is a necessary condition of safeguarding, and the mechanism to restore ethnic and cultural homogeneity up to the point when the difference in relation to others strengthens the feeling of personal identity and the character of group substance. Therefore, a Gorany is more than others attached to his village and his ethnos.

It is perfectly understandable that Islam as a religion and view of the world supplied Goranies with some specific traits as well. However, we did not notice any extremes in that field, not even exceptional demonstrations of Islamic bigotry either in elder or in younger generations. It is another interesting characteristic of Goranies. We should remind ourselves of historical facts: transition of Orthodox Goranies into Islam became more intensive under pressure, especially after the Great Migration of Serbs in 1690.

Memories of the Christian ritual practice have partly been preserved. During Christmas holidays, wheat is boiled and given to neighbors. On Christmas Day, doors in the house and economic buildings are decorated with small branches of the oak tree. The Christmas cake with a coin in it is baked. People believe that the person who finds the coin in a piece of the cake will be happy all the year round.

St. George's Day, which unites pagan and Christian elements, is certainly the greatest Saint's day of Goranies. The cult of vegetation plays one of the most important roles in the customs related to that day. Goranies go to the fields and forests at dawn to pick up together various plants and medicinal herbs in agreement with participation laws of the ethnic community. That event is of great imitative-magical importance. The strong magic charge of water is enjoyed in the small hours when household members go to wash their faces and bodies in the water with plants fully grown on St. George's Day and the obligatory egg for better health. Especially children rub their faces with eggs, and sprinkle them with water from the river or stream. They decorate doors and gates with plucked herbs, mainly with small branches of the weeping willow.

Research carried out in the last several years has revealed the wealth of folk songs and dances in Gora assimilated from all over the Balkans. The women of Gora gracefully mastered two-voice singing from 3 to 5 tones in which second chord in parallel motion and in one-directional motion from prime to second and from second to prime is flawlessly expressed with a conclusive loud scream on "I". Two or four women of Gora sing together, merging their

voices into one and staring at one point in an exquisite position. This two-voice singing in the consonant conception of second as a vertical interval between two voices represents the oldest musical heritage of Goranians.

In folk dancing compositions, we discovered deposits of the whole centuries. Women's ritual dances accompanied by singing with two steps to the right and one to the left are among the oldest types of folk dances in the Balkans. Men's folk dances accompanied by drum and zurla, mainly during wedding ceremonies, before going abroad in search of employment (emigration), and similar festivities demonstrate how much they got accustomed rhythmically and plastically to their dancing roles.

One fact should be stressed in the end. The mentioned examples of the ethnic heritage of Goranians implicitly show that several cultural layers border on each other and overlap: the old Balkan layer, the Serbian, Oriental and other layers, which add outstanding spiritual and material characteristics to Goranians by which they differ from cultural patterns of the closer and remoter neighbors.

In spite of contemporary changes and processes carried on under the influence of modern time Goranians succeed to preserve their ethnic characteristics and ethnic identity, represented in deep archaic, authentic structures and life-supporting functions. "The syndrome of Goranians" denies the well-known sociological thesis that contemporary development (industrialization, urbanization, education etc.) leads to general homogenization of life and culture of the society. The Goranians constantly vitalizes his ethnos and ethnic identity and in that way defends his "ethnic borders" as towards the close neighbors so towards the society as a whole.