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Central Asian Gypsies – Lyuli. The overview of current socio-economic problems

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Słowa kluczowe: *Cyganie, Lyuli, emigracja, Azja Centralna*

A Long, long time ago, there lived poor parents in the world.
They had a daughter Li and a son Lyu.
One day the enemy came into their country.
The parents fled and lost their children in chaos.
Orphaned Lyu and Li went to look for them – each of them chose own way.
Many years later, they met, did not recognize each other and married.
When the truth came out, a priest cursed them,
and from that time this curse follows their descendants,
that are called Lyuli¹

Introduction

This is one of the popular creation legend of sub-ethnic group of Gypsy people commonly known as Lyuli and characterized by pariah status resulted from one of their traditional profession – beggarism. The group refers to themselves as Mugat or Mugati Tubjoni, and by local population as Lyuli, Jugi, Multoni, Mazang and Tavoktarosh. Accordingly to geographical dispersion of their population the group is also described with the term Central Asian Gypsies. However, the last term includes also other sub-ethnic Gypsy groups, i.e. Afghan Gypsies (Kobuli) or Indian Gypsies (Pokiradzh)². Evolutionary adaptation of Lyuli group to surrounding environment led to their

¹ Откуда пришли люли?, „Вокруг света”, 10 July 2007, <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru/quiz/391> [10.04.2014].

² Балкис Кармышева „Цыгане”. Очерки этнической истории южных районов Таджикистана и Узбекистана, Москва, Наука 1976, <http://www.vostlib.ru/ocherki-etnicheskoj-istorii-yuzhnyh-rayonov-tadzhikistana-i-uzbekistana-po-etnograficheskim-dannym/istoriya-formirovaniya-naseleniya-890/drugie-narody-1001/tsygane-1005> [10.04.2014].

cultural closeness to Tajiks, i.e. similarities in traditional dress and replacement of native Domari with Tajik language. Furthermore, Lyuli group population adheres to Sunni branch of Islam. This led to their identification in Russia and Kazakhstan, but also in Uzbekistan as Tajik Gypsies.

The adoption of the term „Gypsy” in case of this group shall not be regarded as derogatory but rather as the description of wider ethnic group composed by proto-Romani descent subgroups as Lom, Dom/Domari, Rom/Romani and others. The adaptation of term „Roma/Romani” instead „Gypsy” to describe Mugat group could be seen as misascription as the group belongs to Dom people and uses the dialect of Domari language as its native language. Thus, Lyuli shall be seen as sub-ethnic group within Dom People branch of mosaical Gypsy ethnic group.

Table 1. Gypsy Population in Soviet Central Asia. Data form Soviet All-Union Population Censuses³

	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989
Kyrgyz SSR	-	644	776	863	1927	990
Kazakh SSR	-	4257	7265	7766	8626	7165
Uzbek SSR	3710	5487	7860	11371	12581	16397
Tajik SSR	-	1193	1556	1171	1139	1791
Turkmen SSR	227	190	103	216	357	119
Soviet Central Asia	3937	11771	17560	21387	24630	26462

In line with Soviet All-Union Population Censuses the population of Gypsy People was steadily growing from 1926 to 1989 reaching 24,4 thousands. However, this number cannot be fully associated with Lyuli group during the period of World War II and afterwards influx of Romani subgroups e.g. Russian Roma and Crimean Roma. The inflow of the first group started in 1941 and was caused by the threat of genocide from Nazis. Their return started immediately in 1945. The second group arrived in Central Asia as a result of 1944 Crimean Tatar deportations due to commonalities as Muslim religion and Tatar language. The other reason to deport Crimean Roma was their self-definition as Tatars during population censuses⁴. The free outflow of Romani after World War II till the introduction in 1956 the Decree No. 1373 „On the labor inclusion of vagrant Gypsies”⁵ by the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that imposed obligatory settlement as well as self-determination

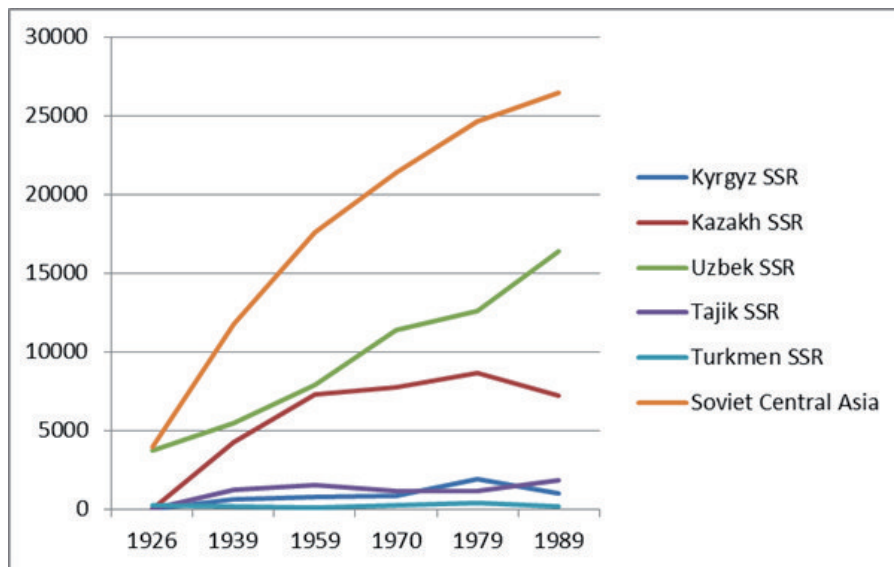
³ Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, www.demoscope.ru [10.04. 2014].

⁴ Marushiakova Elena, and Vesselin Popov, *Segmentation vs. Consolidation: The Example of Four Gypsy Groups in CIS*, „Romani Studies”, 5th ser. 2.14 (2004): 151-53. Research Gate, [10.02.2014]; Ильхамов, Алишер, ed. *Этнический атлас Узбекистана*, Ташкент, Институт открытое общество Фонд содействия (ИООФС), Узбекистан, 2002. Print. P. 241.

⁵ Совет Министров Союза ССР, Указ *О приобщении к труду цыган, занимающихся бродяжничеством* от 5 октября 1956 г., <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=ESU;n=15823> [22.12. 2013].

of Crimean Roma as Tatars allowed to associate presented statistical data with Lyuli group. Accordingly, it is possible to identify stable demographic growth of Lyuli group in Central Asian region in Soviet time.

Figure 1. Gypsy Population Growth in Soviet Central Asia. Graph based on Soviet All-Union Population Censuses⁶



Lyuli in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

The estimation of Lyuli population after the collapse of the Soviet Union is limited due to the character of the group – its closeness and self-isolation. Furthermore, population censuses and estimations in Central Asian states are distorted by their instrumental use by states operating in ethnically fragile national societies and migration process. Main sedentary communities of Lyuli are still present in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan when Kazakhstan and Russia are main destinations of their migration.

Before and during Soviet time Lyuli in Central Asia were moving from nomadic to sedentary life forming their own districts (mahalla) in cities. The process was accelerated in 1920-1930's when Soviet authorities organized first collective farms (kolkhoz)

⁶ Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, www.demoscope.ru [10.04.2014].

and industrial associations (artel)⁷. The decree No. 1373 administratively obliged Uzbek Lyuli to settle. The situation of Lyuli developed analogically in Tajikistan. Kyrgyz Lyuli community was settled in 1950's in Jany-Kyshtak village of Kara-Suu District (Rayon), Osh Province (Oblast).

The exact number of population in those countries is difficult to be stated. In example, Uzbekistan's official estimation from 2000 puts the number of Lyuli population at 5 thousands⁸ when the UNHCR's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) estimated their number at 50 thousands⁹. In Tajikistan official population censuses stated that this population was 4,2 thousands when in 2010 it fell to 2,3 thousands¹⁰. Official statistics of Kyrgyzstan stated that Lyuli population fell from 1 thousands to approx. 600 hundreds in 2009¹¹.

Table 2. Lyuli Population in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

KYRGYZSTAN			
Year	1989	1999	2009
Population	990	1000	600
TAJIKISTAN			
Year	1989	2000	2010
Population	1791	4249	2334
UZBEKISTAN			
Year	1989	2000	2014
Population	16397	5000	50000

Unreliability of state official data concerning Lyuli could be illustrated with the case of Jany-Kyshtak village, so called „Lyuli mahalla”. In April 2014 the Kyrgyz foundation „Family for each child” (ros. Семья каждому ребенку) stated that around 6 thousands

⁷ *Первая цыганская артель по сбору утиля*, литературный сайт Kaz-lit.kz, 7 Oct. 2011, <http://kaz-lit.kz/narody-kazahstana/pervaya-ciganskaaya-artel>; *Происхождение народа люли. Некоммерческое партнерство*, „Международный Информационный Центр”, n.d., <http://www.ethnoinfo.ru/ljuli/225-proishozhdenije-naroda-ljuli> [21.03.2014].

⁸ Алишер, ed., *Этнический атлас Узбекистана*, Ташкент, Институт открытое общество Фонд содействия (ИООФС), Узбекистан, 2002. Print. P. 242.

⁹ *Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Considers Report on Uzbekistan*, United Nations Office at Geneva, 12 Feb. 2014, <http://www.unog.ch> [21.02.2014].

¹⁰ Агентство по статистике при Президенте Республики Таджикистан, *Перепись населения и жилищного фонда. Республики Таджикистан 2010 года*. Национальный состав, владение языками и гражданство населения Республики Таджикистан, Том III, 2012, <http://www.stat.tj> [21.02.2014].

¹¹ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. *Population and Housing Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2009. Book I: Main social and demographic characteristics of population and number of housing units*. 2009, <http://unstats.un.org> [21.02.2014].

children in southern oblasts do not have birth certificates specifically pointing above mentioned village¹². In line with data of UNHCR project there are 600 families living in the village, and population is reaching 4 thousands. Approx. 30% of them do not possess personal identification documents¹³. Lack of documents excludes those residents from state system of social benefits and limits their access to labor market. Analogical social situation is observed in all three countries.

In case of Uzbekistan, the lack of personal documents in Lyuli community is even used in political competition. The informational agency „Fergana” reported that in 2008 group of oppositional activists gathering on the front Prosecutor General’s Office was physically attacked by group of Lyuli and theirs posters destroyed. The militia refused to intervene and arrest Lyuli stating that they do not possess passports and resident registration. Despite the Uzbekistan’s law regulating obligatory resident registration all citizens¹⁴. Such behavior of state authorities could be interpreted as instrumentally to Lyuli population that further alienating them from society.

Emigration of Lyuli to Russia and Kazakhstan

With the fall of Soviet Union and poor economic conditions in all three republics in different scale reverse process was observed – return to nomadic life and traditional professions including beggarism. Migration to Russia has mixed character – there are both Lyuli creating semi-permanent settlements as well as seasonal migrants. The statement on temporary status of migration could support official population census of 2010 where only 49 citizens of the Russian Federation defined themselves as Lyuli¹⁵.

The perception of Lyuli in Russia is dominated by their beggarism which is seen as threat to public order. Nicolai Bessonov, a well-known Russian expert on Gypsy issues criticized Russian media for one-sided and stereotypical depiction of Lyuli group as beggars and criminals. He underlines their non-criminal affiliation and work in areas as construction or agriculture¹⁶. In fact, criticism from the society has strong background. There are many cases that show evidence of disrespect to Russian law

¹² Жаныбек кызы, Мырзайым. *На юге Кыргызстана около 6 тыс. детей не имеют свидетельства о рождении*, Вечерний Бишкек. ЗАО „Издательский дом”, „Вечерний Бишкек”, 2 Apr. 2014, [20.04.2014].

¹³ Кожобаева, Замира. *Лица без гражданства*, Радио Азаттык (Кыргызская служба Радио Свободная Европа/Радио Свобода), 02 Oct. 2014, [20.04.2014].

¹⁴ Байрамов, Олег. *Узбекистан: Цыгане стали орудием милиции против правозащитников*, Информационное агентство Фергана. Ру, 21 Mar. 2014 [20.04.2014].

¹⁵ Федеральная служба государственной статистики, *Всероссийская перепись населения 2010 года Том 4. Национальный состав и владение языками, гражданство*, P. 20, http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf [20.04.2014].

¹⁶ „Эпопея о люли”. *Цыгане России*. Николай Бессонов, n.d., http://gypsy-life.net/Pressa2_4.htm [20.04.2014].

by Lyuli communities, esp. their instrumental use of children in beggarism or illegal settlement constructions.

One of the examples could be a situation of Lyuli's illegal settlements in Yekaterinburg. In October 2013 local law enforcement authorities identified illegally constructed migrant settlement on the territory of allotment garden „Vagonnik”. In December 2013 municipality closed this illegal camp and detained 50 children, citizens of Tajikistan stating that they were living in risky social conditions. Finally, children were returned to parents without constructive conclusion¹⁷. The settlement was revived in spring 2014. On 10 April, Federal Migration Service inspected the camp and announced further controls. However, the camp was burned by unknown persons on 16 April¹⁸. The general situation of Lyulu in Yekaterinburg serves as an example of criticism targeting this group that is coming not only from Russian state but also from Tajik migrants and authorities. In August 2013 Tajik Minister of Internal Affairs Ramzon Rakhimov arrived to Yekaterinburg. One of the proposals articulated by labor migrants from Tajikistan was to prohibit its fellow citizens to migrate with small children. Particularly, this request was linked to Lyuli group employing children in beggarism¹⁹.

Similar situation concerning Lyuli children arises in Saint Petersburg. In March 2013 the newspaper „Izvestiya” reported that in municipal child care facilities are around 30 citizens of Tajikistan that were detained during law enforcement actions against illegal migrants. Tajikistan's Embassy in Russia confirmed that children belong to Lyuli ethnic group and were arrested when begging²⁰.

As an interesting example of criticism against Lyuli could serve situation in Samara. The illegal settlement there is inhabited mainly by Lyuli from Uzbekistan and is estimated at around 100 people. Federal Migration Service based on conducted controls

¹⁷ Светлана, Добрынина, *Чужая люлька. В Екатеринбургe опробовали план спасения детей мигрантов*, Российская газета, Интернет-портал „Российской газеты”, 20 Nov. 2013, <http://www.rg.ru/2013/11/20/reg-urfo/deti.html> [20.04.2014].

¹⁸ „Депутат ЗакСО Андрей Альшевских обнаружил на Сортировке «аул имени Якова Силина» – нелегальный таджикский посёлок! О проблеме уже знают в свердловском областном полицейском главке”, Газета Ведомости Урал, ООО „Урал Медиа Плюс”, 9 Apr. 2014, <http://vedomosti-ural.ru/news/38141> [20.04.2014]; „В Екатеринбургe неизвестные «мстители» сожгли расположенный на Сортировке крупный нелегальный лагерь таджикских мигрантов, который удалось обнаружить депутату ЗакСО от КПРФ Андрею Альшевских”, Газета Ведомости Урал, ООО „Урал Медиа Плюс”, 16 Apr. 2014, http://vedomosti-ural.ru/news/38293/?ya_rss=1 [20.04.2014].

¹⁹ „Мигранты из Свердловской области попросили министра МВД Таджикистана запретить выезд людей с маленькими детьми на заработки в Россию”, Новости ИТАР-ТАСС Урал. ИТАР-ТАСС, 27 Aug. 2013, http://www.tass-ural.ru/lentanews/migranty_iz_sverdlovskoy_oblasti_proposili_ministra_mvd_tadzhikistana_zapretit_vyezd_lyudey_s_malenk.html [20.04.2014].

²⁰ „В Санкт-Петербургe детей мигрантов отправили в приюты. Таджикистан просит Россию вернуть их родителям”. Информационное агентство Фергана.Ру, 07 Mar. 2013, <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=20317> [20.04.2014].

stated that most of labor migrants living in the settlement respect Russian law – possess permission to work and residential registration. The case of Samara settlement exposed criticism from Uzbek community and attempt to distance themselves from Lyuli. President of Samara's based association „Uzbek Community” (Узбекская община) stated that Uzbeks are hardworking people and have no links to „Tajik Gypsies”²¹.

Next characteristic case would be Lyuli migration to Astrakhan. The city has district Yango-Aul with compact Gypsy community composed both by Russian Roma and Lyuli. The district has high level of crime linked to illegal drug trade dominated by first group²². In majority Lyuli presence in Yango-Aul has seasonal character – they arrive on the beginning of Summer and leave by Autumn. According to Federal Migration Service the tendency to legalize their presence is observed²³. Astrakhan is example of Lyuli seasonal migration and negative influence of other Gypsy group on their image.

Nodaway's Lyuli are present in almost all Russia's regions. Their involvement in beggarism led to their negative perception and sometimes radical actions by local authorities, i.e. expulsion of Lyuli from the Chechen Republic in November 2011²⁴. They are seen as threat to Russian society and disregarded on various level by authorities, other migrants and also by Russian Roma. As an example of the last could serve statement made by the founder of Kazan's ensemble „Nova Roma” Tanita Nikolaevna – „Lyuli – they are not Roma, they are not Gypsies, they even do not understand language. We do not socialize with them”²⁵.

The situation of Lyuli in Kazakhstan is similar to Russia. In 2011 Kazakh Police in Astana reported on detention of Lyuli children involved in beggarism that were citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan²⁶. Characteristic for Kazakhstan are mass deportation of Lyuli to Uzbekistan. In example, in 2008 in one action 30 Lyuli

²¹ „Самарские известия” №80 (6509) от 15.05.13, *Никому нэ мешаем, ничего нэ нарушаем*, Роман Арсенин, Валерий Трубин, Вячеслав Сорокин, <http://samarskieizvestia.ru/document/16092> [20.04.2014].

²² „Дурман цыганский”, Межведомственная комиссия Самарской области по противодействию злоупотреблению наркотическими средствами и их незаконному обороту, 10 Jun. 2008, http://www.netnarkotikam.samara.ru/smi/topic_1227 [20.04.2014].

²³ Шеина, Анастасия, В Астрахани – нашествие попрошаек из Средней Азии, Борис Борисов. 18 Jun. 2013, <http://kasp.ru/info/obshchestvo-novosti/8427-v-astrakhani-nashestvie-proproshaek-iz-srednej-azii.html> [20.04.2014].

²⁴ *В Чечню понаехали*, 17 Jul. 2013, <http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/17-07-2013/84658-migranty> [20.04.2014].

²⁵ Главатских, Анна, *Как живут казанские цыгане, и о чем болит их душа*, „Аргументы и Факты”, 8 Apr. 2014, <http://www.kazan.aif.ru/society/persona/1145523> [20.04.2014].

²⁶ *Шумною толпой*, 13 Aug. 2012, http://www.megapolis.kz/art/Shumnoyu_tolpoy [20.04.2014].

were deported from Kyzylordy²⁷. In 2011 Kazakh law enforcement agencies detained and escorted to Uzbek borders the group of 125 people²⁸.

Conclusion

During the Soviet Union Lyuli population was gradually integrated into Soviet society. The organization of social life and economic made unnecessary to involve in traditional activities as beggarism. With the fall of Soviet Union newly independent states as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were affected by economic crisis accompanied with dramatically rising unemployment. Local populations and among them Lyuli became part of labor migration to more prosperous countries – Russia and Kazakhstan.

In those destinations Lyuli are involved as labor force in various sector of economy including construction and agriculture. Most of them possess legal status and are allowed to work what is confirmed by Russian Federal Migration Services. However, their image is negatively affected by beggarism and esp. involvement of children in this activity. This led to whole group stigmatization in the eyes of Russian society, and enforcement of their „legendary” pariah status.

Abstract

The ethnic group known by many names – calling themselves Mugat or Mugati Tubjoni, and by others as Lyuli, Jugi, Multoni, Mazang and Tavoktarosh. The paper attempt to shed light on current socio-economic problems of ethnic group popularly known in post-Soviet area as “Central Asian Gypsies”, due to their regional inhabitancy in Central Asia, primarily Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Similarly to Romani, the Lyuli share bitter fate of socially marginalized group. The years of communism contributed to gradual integration with local societies in Central Asia. Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Soviet Union gave rise to acute socio-economic problems and accelerated reverse process. Currently, the group face new challenges related to migration and new wave of discrimination.

²⁷ 30 человек из Кызылорды были выдворены на днях за пределы Казахстана, 20 Mar. 2008, <http://www.zakon.kz/107295-30-chelovek-iz-kyzylordy-byli-vydvoreny.html> [20.04.2014].

²⁸ Ярослав, Красиенко, *Восточные цыгане из Узбекистана, незаконно находящиеся в нашей стране, были отправлены на родину*, 16 Sept. 2011, <http://www.ktk.kz/ru/news/video/2011/9/16/14043> [20.04.2014].