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Power Structures in *După gâşte* (After Geese) by Lucian Dan Teodorovici

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Abstract. The distribution of power is present at all levels of our existence: race, religion, ethnicity, culture, military level, politics, and economics. The power structures have never been based on equality because there is always a person or a group that wants to impose his/her/their view upon others. The present study follows these balances at multiple levels: from the point of view of the macro- (societal) and the micro- (individual/private) sphere, but also from the perspective of ethnicity and gender as they are represented in *După gâşte* (After Geese) by Lucian Dan Teodorovici. The main stream of the short story has a rather simplistic pretext – the theft of some geese by the Gypsies in a Romanian village –, which masterly introduces us to the problem of power structures.

Keywords: power structures, Gypsy tradition, macro- and microsphere, public and intimate sphere, interaction

1. Introduction

"The structure of every legal order directly influences the distribution of power […] within its respective community. This is true of all legal orders and not only that of the state. In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber 1978, 926). If the

power is held by a man/group of men, this assumes that there is a man/group of people who are imposed the point of view of those in power.

The paper discusses the distribution of power at different levels. On the one hand, the power structures can be dealt with at a macro and a micro level, where the former embodies the social, economic, cultural, ethnic, and gender aspects, while the latter refers to problems related to individual identity, individual biological and mental aspects. The two spheres can be linked by interaction viewed as "an occasion when two or more people or things communicate with or react to each other" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). On the other hand, the paper will refer to the macro level as one being identifiable as a public sphere and to the micro level as one representing the intimate, private sphere.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Macro Level

Speaking of the economic, administrative, or political fields, it can be seen even nowadays that at the institutional/organizational level it is still men who dominate worldwide, mostly in the power positions. Regarding gender structures, the European Institute for Gender Equality states the following:

> One of the most persistent patterns in the distribution of power is that of inequalities between women and men. The set of roles, behaviors and attitudes that societies define as appropriate for women and men ("gender") can be the cause, consequence and mechanism of power relations, from the intimate sphere of the household to the highest levels of political decision-making. ("Gender Power Relations")

If and when there is a biological woman in such a position, she "acts as a social man" (Acker 1990, 139). Some changes can be sensed in this way, "perhaps due to the changing demography of the scientists. As women entered the academy there was more interest in, and attention to, women's lives, and eventually the impact of gender more fully" (Risman 2018, 11). This change can be felt only from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. Before that, "[s]ociologists thought the traditional family helped society to function and addressed issues of gender when they wrote about women as the 'heart' of families with male 'heads.' At the same time […], psychologists used socialization theory to explain how we could train girls and boys for their socially appropriate roles as men and women, husbands and wives" (Risman 2018, 11); so, to follow a gender script, shows Risman, speaking about the discovery of sex and gender by social sciences.

The basic social unit is the family, which has had, until recently, the biological function of reproduction (changed by the possibility of adoption) and social functions, as seen in Folsom's classical categorization, who, in fact, speaks about the changing state of these functions, which are overtaken by institutions:

> (1) to reproduce the race; (2) to produce and prepare for final consumption some of the material goods we use (economic junction); (3) to provide space, facilities, and organization for recreation, or pleasant use of leisure time; (4) to train, educate, and socialize children in certain ways and especially during certain age periods (educational function); (5) to maintain certain social controls, whether called "discipline" or otherwise, over its members, in the interests of the larger society; (6) to provide certain direct emotional satisfactions to individuals, including security, love, sex, and affection. (1940, 64)

The second half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century came up with new theories of the family, due, among other factors, to the changes that the family forms are undergoing in the industrialized society, says Weggemans (1987, 247). "Traditional family forms are losing their fixed boundaries and become one of many options in the supermarket of living arrangements. New 'products' in this supermarket are, for instance: unmarried cohabitation, single-parent families, Living-Apart-Together (LAT) relations, serial monogamy, the swinging bachelor, and communes" (Weggemans 1987, 247). Even though the mid-twentieth century family theories[1] can be regarded as "classics" today, they still function, alongside the new ones, in many situations due to the worldwide variations in family compositions, functions, models.[2] This kind of "cohabitation," even though it seems paradoxical, illustrates the reality of Gypsy family structures.

"Roma/Gypsy reality is enormously varied. The historical experience of various groups, their encounters, stopping-places, routes travelled and intersected, and the diversity of their contacts with constantly changing surroundings, have given rise to a great variety of cultural and social characteristics within various groups – and continue to do so" (Liegeois and Gheorghe 1995, 29). Liegeois and Gheorghe's report states that the Gypsy's immersion in other cultures resulted in "the invention and development of strategies of adaptation and negotiation" (1995, 29) and that there is a "[p]ublic misunderstanding of Roma/Gypsies – and even research concerning them, by seeking to establish constancy and uniformity where in fact there is only change and variety" (1995, 29).

1 Joseph K. Folsom (1940), G. P. Murdock (1949), or Talcott Parsons and Robert Freed Bales (1955).

2 As is the case of gender structures not only as concerns the Gypsy family but also the Romanian one (in some aspects) in Lucian Dan Teodorovici's short story. These families cannot be placed in the late or postmodern family types.

This variety can also be found in their appellations, which are ascribed and self-ascribed. The ascribed terms are the ones used by the majority community that holds a Roma community. Among these appellatives, Bunescu (2016, 16–17) enlists the term Gypsy,[3] which is used by several majority populations; it refers to the Egyptian origin of the Roma, as the Spanish term *Gitano*. Along these two, there is also Hajkalija, used in some territories occupied by Turks. There are other ascribed terms, too, generally pejorative, intended to offend, like Tsigani,[4] which, according to Bunescu, is also a self-ascribed one: "[s]ome Roma refer to themselves as *Tsigani* in certain circumstances" (Bunescu 2016, 18). A generally accepted self-ascribed term is Roma, which can derive from the Greek Rhomaion (Eastern Byzantine Empire) or, according to Indian authors, from Sanskrit, and it can mean "[o]ne who pervades and operates all, […] one who roams about […] 'non-stop, moving,' [d]ark-colored, […] *Husband*, […] [p]leasing, delighting, charming" (Bunescu 2016, 18). Other self-ascribed terms, differing by geographic area, are as follows: Sinti (Austria and Germany), Manouche (French Sinti groups), Calé (or Kalo) for the Andalusian Gitano and the Northern European groups. Also, there are appellatives used among them, and sometimes by outsiders too, which derive from occupations: Lohars (blacksmiths), Rabagi (transporters), Chergari (fortune-tellers – mostly from former Yugoslavia), Arlia (musicians), Gabeli (acrobats, dancers), or some special occupations for the groups from Balkans Calderas (cauldron makers), Ursari (bear trainers), and Lautari (musicians), Rudari (they made objects out of wood), Lovari (horse traders).

Accepting the principle of variety does not eliminate some characteristics (structures, laws, customs, some being "mediaeval") that are available at least for some Gypsy families – understood as a nuclear family but also as a regional ethnic group. These families/tribes preserved their ethnic and cultural identity, propagated some of the laws (for example, the Romaniya, the law of the Rom) and customs for centuries, living "amongst a larger homogenous population of the majority" (Bethlenfalvy 2000, 74). Bethlenfalvy says that we have to "keep in mind that the Gypsies have taken along with them their Indian social structure of the caste-jati rules; and if we remember the survival of practically every ethnic entity within India not for centuries, but for millennia. Each Gypsy tribe is like an

3 My choice throughout the paper to use this term derives from the fact that the community is depicted through the eyes of a Gadjo, a non-Roma. As such, the short story uses an ascribed appellative.

4 "The translation of the pejorative *ascribed* term of *Tsigan* in different languages is as follows: French *Tsigane*; Albanian *Cigan*, *Maxhup*, *Gabel*; Bulgarian: Цигани (*Tsigani*); Czech *Cikáni*; Dutch and German *Zigeuner*; Danish *Sigøjner*; Lithuanian Cigonai; Russian Цыгане (*Tsyganye*); Hungarian *Cigány*; Greek Τσιγγάνοι (*Tsingávoi*); Italian *Zingari*; Romanian *Țigani*; Croatian and Serbian *Cigani*; Polish *Cyganie*; Portughese *Cigano*; Spanish *Gitano* and in Turkish Çingene" (Bunescu 2016, 18).

Indian *jati*, by continuing the same traditional occupation, not marrying outside the caste" (2000, 74), and obeying the inner laws and customs.

In a Gypsy family,[5] gender structures have not changed almost at all for centuries, and the roles of members show only slight differences from one region to another. The Gypsy culture is a patriarchal one, where the man is the head of the family, and the woman obeys him. Interesting in this structure is that a woman also has "masculine" functions, because she "must work and earn money and take care of the family's material well-being" (Afanasieva et al. 2020, 289). From a gender perspective, the "factors of gender-role socialization are such as: gender guidelines as a system of ideas about men and women; ethno-cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity; excellent means of upbringing the boys and the girls; specific types of work of each sex; differentiated male and female roles" (Afanasieva et al. 2020, 290). And all these roles are specific for each age stage: from an early age to the status of a married woman.

2.2. The Micro Level

At this level, the most fundamental aspect that comes into question is the biological one, pertaining to sex, to different theories along the way (hormonal, neurological, etc.). Wade explains that environmental and social contexts can affect our bodies, just as our bodies affect human behaviour. She speaks about the field of epigenetics, which deals with the fact that environmental experiences may be detectable in the bodies of one's descendants. Moreover, "[t]hese developments in research on genetics have implications for both individual and group level phenomena. Some genetic profiles, for example, increase the risk that a child will be a violent adult, but only if that child is exposed to violence when they are young" (2013, 281), says Wade, referring to Kristen Jacobson's 2009 study "Considering Interactions between Genes, Environment, Biology, and Social Context."

2.3. Interaction between the Macro and Micro Level, between the Public and the Private

Interaction itself is a dominant characteristic of the human being, as one is born to be a social being, thus, ultimately, a social construct. Generally, one needs to interact with others for different purposes – biological, social, economic, or cultural –, so the interaction is the link between the macro and the micro level, between the public and the private. Consequently, human beings develop a series of interactional forms as family interaction, group interaction, individual interaction, or social interaction, where each has specific types and styles. Only to illustrate

5 The term family covers in this paper the nuclear family but also the group/tribe/community.

the complexity of the idea of interaction, social interaction includes different behaviour types, for example, cooperation, exchange, competition, conflict, and coercion. From the point of view of the communication pattern, it can be pluralistic, consensual, protective, and laissez-faire. The paper discusses only the ground zero of interactions, from the social point of view, illustrating some examples of the individual–individual, individual–institution relations in contemporary Romanian writer Lucian Dan Teodorovici's short story *După gâşte* (After Geese).

3. "The Gypsy Case" – From a Child's Perspective

3.1. Intro

The theoretical apparatus above is meant to introduce some aspects of Lucian Dan Teodorovici's short story *După gâşte* (After Geese), which – even if it reads individually – according to the author is part of a "a puzzle novel, which completes and creates a whole" (Talabă 2017) by the time one has finished reading the book. The 2013 novel *Celelalte poveşti de dragoste* (*The Other Love Stories*) employs a single narrator depicted at different ages – from childhood to the age of thirty-five. In the novel, "the theme of love is approached from distinct angles: the narrator being less able to understand it as a child, then over time understanding more and more, and at the same time less and less" (Talabă 2017).

The short story begins with the inciting incident from which we learn that someone has stolen the family's seven geese. The narrator-protagonist finds out from a hissing, hare-lipped friend that someone has stolen their geese and notifies his grandfather, who goes to the Gypsy part of the village to retrieve the geese. The narrator accompanies him to the house of the thieving Gypsy, where the two are forced to stay for a while because there is a case of domestic violence in the neighbourhood. From the image filtered through the child's eyes, we learn that the young Gypsy is being beaten for having an affair with a married Gypsy woman.

3.2. Breaking the Patterns

The story is a real balancing act between the macro (public) and the micro (intimate) sphere, touching on deep and complex issues in just a few pages. But, finally, these multilevelled universes, settled on collision course, are all spinning around the idea of a closed social system – represented by the institution (police), the traditional village community, and the authoritarian, unequal type families – that sanctions any deviation from the rule, written or – especially – unwritten law.

The first "disturbing" element is the explanation of the habits of the geese and their "masters," the peasants. The geese were left free in the streets (public space)

because they "did not mix with each other"[6] (Teodorovici 2013, 121) and stayed "grouped together after the household they belonged to" (Teodorovici 2013, 121). Moreover, in order to recognize their belonging, "the peasants considered that a goose or a crazy duck might still leave their group and wander off, they marked their property with paint on their wings" (Teodorovici 2013, 121). This leads us to think, on the one hand, of the practice of stigmatization, but also of the fact that people are afraid of what is different, of someone who behaves outside the norm. A good example in this sense is the peasant who painted a phallus on the wings of the goose with brown paint, his gesture being a pattern violation that had to be sanctioned immediately. Consequently, the neighbours made a complaint to the police and the man had to pluck the feathers of the eight geese *adorned/ennobled* with the brown phallus and draw a square instead. So, exposing a sex symbol in public is considered to be immoral, and society immediately reacts collectively and institutionally, because when the man tells the policeman that he wants to see the law prohibiting the painting of a phallus on geese, the policeman explains "at first calmly, then more and more nervously, that [...] he is the law, and at the end he even swore at him and showed him his cane threateningly" (Teodorovici 2013, 122).

The situation of the goose is, in fact, foreshadowing the "Gypsy case," where the family in general and men in particular are in power position and "mark" the woman by marriage, though we find out that "what the hell, Gypsies don't mark theirrrr geessse" (Teodorovici 2013, 123). This is not necessarily true because the fact that they are not visible only means that they are not public, that they are kept within their own community.

3.3. Breaking the Rules

Following the grandfather and the eight-year-old homodiegetic narrator, we approach the Gypsy ghetto, a mysterious land with its own rules and "legislation," where "[n]o one had the courage to go [...], because at that time they lived in another world. Even the militia didn't pay them any attention" (Teodorovici 2013, 123). On the way, the boy's eyes are drawn to a courtyard where there are several men and women. But the narrator and his grandfather enter the neighbouring courtyard where the boy who stole the geese lives and are greeted by a pig. When the boy's father finds out that the boy stole the geese, he does not worry about the stealing act itself, reinforcing the stereotype that Gypsies steal, but rather about the fact that he stole them from the narrator's grandfather, whom the Gypsies respected. The father punishes his son by beating him and comes to terms with the narrator's grandfather. Just when we think the conflict has been resolved, in the neighbouring courtyard, two vigorous Gypsy men drag a third one, who was seriously beaten, but they do not stop there and start whipping him on the back. The grandfather asks the old

6 Translations from Romanian belong to the authors of the paper.

Gypsy man what the issue in the neighbouring courtyard is all about, and the old Gypsy man replies "*n-apoi, d-ale noastre*" (Teodorovici 2013, 131), making it clear that this is something that concerns the Gypsy community, something that does not concern the Gadji. The Gypsies use the ascribed term Gadji for someone who is "'an outsider,' tolerated perhaps, but never accepted. Attention, not totally, brutally rejected (except in some rare situations that require total 'closure' to strangers), but neither received with ease: with naturalness and hospitality, with kindness even, but not with complete openness" (Bănică 2019, 50). What is more, even though he is not a Gadji, and he knows what it is all about, he consistently repeats "not our business" / "not my business." So, the power of the ethnicity, community imposes that a family as a group and men as representatives of the family are especially "untouchable," they are in a position of power, in the position to implement the rules, to be judges and executioners. This probably comes from their roots, as in the Gypsy community disagreements are generally judged by the *bulibaşă*,[7] but "in the more serious cases, by virtue of some old laws of the Gypsy, are resolved by either demanding a sum of money or by taking justice into their own hands, sometimes even with the knife?" (Cherata 1993, 56).

And what would cause this disturbance? The old man considers the young Gypsy who was beaten up a fool, not because he did an immoral thing by committing adultery but because of the fact that he spoke about it while being drunk. He did not name the married woman who broke her vow, he just specified that she was seventeen. The four seventeen-year-old wives are rounded up by their in-laws and forced to watch the bloody and cruel scene of beating the young man up, in which they try to get him to utter the woman's name. The four "weren't crying, they weren't scared. They were just sitting" (Teodorovici 2013, 133). This attitude may come from their environment or "inherited" collective identity, which is "a balancing process where the internal cohesion and external distinctness of the group overweigh the group's internal diversity and its external similarities" (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 337). Group identity is a homogenous core, identifiable mostly in small-scale rural communities or in specific ethnic groups (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 338), and our opinion is based on these images that materialize in the way we construct a world. But their silence can be interpreted in other ways, too: as a revolt against their situation or even as a defence, because we learn from the old Gypsy man that the adulterous woman in question could be hanged by her husband. Even though we find it outrageous, it seems that in the Gypsy world it shows how powerless women are, in all fields. Stewart shows that:

> The subordination of the Gypsy woman to the man is not limited to formal aspects of social life. From birth, the social status of the girl makes it impossible for her to be as full and unquestioned a participant in Roma

7 Gypsy chieftain.

> social life as the boy. The birth of a daughter provokes no reaction or even hostility from some fathers. […] Boys learn early on to assert their superiority over girls in all areas. […] This form of relationship continues into adulthood, when […] women do the work of running the household and men engage in more public and spectacular business. When a Gypsy couple go to town together, it is the wife who trudges behind her husband, and it is the wife who carries a huge bag on her back without her husband to help her. And if one of them doesn't want to get muddy […] it's the woman who carries the man on her back, not the other way round. At home, it is the husband who eats and washes first, and in most things he has first priority. In the occasional "trials" (kris), only the men take part, suggesting ways of resolving disputes. And, finally, since a woman's social identity is less likely to be expressed publicly throughout her life, the death of a woman causes much less social trauma for the Roma than that of a man. (1994, 208)

This is also reflected in the fact that the women in question are hardly present in the short story even though they are the tragic victims of the *kris* (traditional Gypsy court)[8] we are reading about. The publicly adulterous woman is a rare case in the Gypsy world. Ostentatious behaviour is not desirable in the Roma society. Sexual self-denial is a good quality of a Gypsy girl – who has to be a virgin until her marriage –, "unlike the Gadjis, whose shamelessness is proverbial. In the summer, the Romany men go to the beach baths […], but none of the girls go with them because, as they say, they are ashamed to undress in public – unlike the Gadjis, who expose their bodies in public. From the Gypsies' point of view, this is an amusing, even grotesque sign of the shamelessly shabby and promiscuous sexual relations of the Gadjis" (Stewart 1994, 219–220). All of these doubled by things like menstruation, sexual intercourse, or pregnancy are taboo themes, even among female representatives.

In such a secluded way of life, it is not surprising that "within the Gypsy society, women were often subjected to cruel laws. For instance, "an English Gypsy could kill his wife if he liked, without suffering for the crime" (Macritchie quoted in Rădulescu 2008, 197). The most common reason for a Gypsy man to kill his wife was adultery" (Rădulescu 2008, 197). The Roma women are mistreated by both Roma and non-Roma men (look at the families of the four women, but also at the narrator's grandfather, who accepts the fact that one of the four women could be hanged by her husband). Rădulescu states that "no matter how oppressed and marginalized a group of people may be, there is always another group that is going to be even more oppressed and marginalized: the women of that group. In fact, history and statistics have shown that it is precisely within marginalized and

8 The kris-Romani, or assembly of Rom elders is a "convened administer justice under the Romaniya (law of the Rom)" (Lee 1997, 346).

oppressed groups that domestic violence is most rampant" (2008, 197–198). These kinds of family structures can be influenced by the above-mentioned theories of the genes or by environment, but also by social and economic outcomes that influence the patterns of family structure (Duranton et al. 2009, 25).

Alexandra Oprea, a Roma feminist scholar demonstrates that we tend to turn "a blind eye to patriarchal practices, excusing them as the 'other culture'" (quoted in Rădulescu 2008, 198), as we can see it in the discussed short story in the grandfather's attitude or even in that of the representative of the law, the policeman: "The village militiaman, who had cursed and shown his stick to the neighbour with the geese which had the painted phallus, kept saying that the gypsies were not his problem, that they could form their own militia if they wanted to, he wouldn't interfere" (Teodorovici 2013, 123–124).

3.4. The Representatives of Power

As seen from the case of the policeman, individuals with institutional power make abuse of their status, turning into an authority. Authority can be represented by an individual, the family, or an institution, and this short story illustrates very well all of these cases. It is interesting that all power positions are held by men.

Our first such case was that of the policeman, but then we could also talk about the case of the grandfather who, although never beats his grandson, continuously threatens him. The grandfather is also in a power position in the Roma community because he is a controller on the train and the Roma depend on him when they travel. The old man earned their respect because he facilitated their free transport; they even called him "Boss." They also respected him "because they still needed him, as he was a few years away from retirement" (Teodorovici 2013, 124). The grandfather exercises his authority over the old Gypsy when he forces him to promise to send the son to work for four days as payment for the two geese consumed even though the old man tries to imply that the boy is lazy and probably would not work. The old Gypsy man is the authority in his family, and he beats the hell out of his son for stealing the "wrong" geese. But this authority is limited to his family, as in the case of his neighbours he repeats all the time that it is not his business. That probably means that he is not related to them.

In addition, there has to be remarked the *in absentia* power position of the husband, who has, even though only potentially, the right to hang the woman because "We have a law," which transcends not only state laws but also human rights.

4. Conclusions

Teodorovici's short story perfectly illustrates the macro sphere through the depiction of the abusive institutional representative, the traditional village community, and almost all the points from Folsom's classification – the latter by the reproduction of the race (multigenerational representation); economic aspect (procuring – here stealing – the goods or trading them; not paying for train tickets because they know the conductor, and, in return the Gypsies do not steal from him); the education and socialization of children in certain ways (by community laws); the maintenance of certain social controls – whether called "discipline" or otherwise – over its members in the interests of the larger society (the case of the man who painted the phallus, the Gypsy women's brothers beat the lover, and the girls do not have the right to say anything). According to these examples, the classification works for those parts that can be applied to the collective and misses those that would apply to individuals: "to provide space, facilities, and organization for recreation, or pleasant use of leisure time; […] to provide certain direct emotional satisfactions to individuals, including security, love, sex, and affection" (Folsom 1940, 64).

In the case of the characters, the micro sphere can be linked to the macro one because the individuals are determined by society in all its forms: family, ethnic belonging, economic and cultural situation. So, they act only according to expectations, and even when somebody tries to stand out (the man who painted the phallus on the geese), s/he is hushed by the "institution," obligated to re-enter the "normal" way of life, to make amends for his "mistake." Accordingly, the interactions between institution and individual, individual and individual, between the public and the private are set on showing the unequal relationships where men are in power, are the heads of the family, of the institution, act as decision makers. Also, the interactions in this literary work reinforce some of the prejudices and stereotypes inoculated by socialization, which, after they are formed, become "resistant to change on the basis of new information" (Aronson et al. 2005, 434).

Another conclusion is that breaking the patterns and breaking the rules can lead to tragic outcomes – the exposure of a very young boy to fatal physical violence (nobody of his age was taken in the Gypsy land before, and he was quite proud of this), the beating of the thief by his father, the beating of the lover, and, most importantly, the punishment of the four wives and the possibility of murdering the adulterous woman – which, according to Wade, could have, on the individual and group level, repercussions "in the bodies of their descendants" (2013, 281).

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