

Migration, re-emigration and identities' change: The case of one Gypsy (Roma) group

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Abstract

The proposed presentation will trace the historical fate of one Gypsy (Roma) community, which currently lives in Odessa (Ukraine). The community ancestors have migrated from the then Russian Empire in China during the Civil War (1918-1922) and together with the White Russians they settled initially in Harbin, and then re-settled in Shanghai. Individual members of the community moved to Americas. The majority however, after the end of the World War II, following the agreement on repatriation between the USSR and China returned to the USSR, and after more than two decades roaming vast territories of the country they settled in Odessa, where they live nowadays. Years of living in China and lengthy internal migrations within the USSR had significant effect not only on personal identity of the migrants but also on the community identity as a whole and its vision about their future. In the collective memory of the group is preserved the migration experience and on its base was formed and developed a new community identity. The community members well remember that they were once part of the big Roma community of *Kelderari*, they even remember their erstwhile families and can identify present-day relatives. Yet they not only present publicly but actually experience themselves as a new community, called *Kitayako Rrom* in Roma language, or *Shankhaytsi* in Russian. They are firmly separated from other Gypsy groups, including through creation of own narratives and endogamic borders (they strive to marry only within their community). The case of *Kitayako Rrom* shows that outcome from migration and life in a new milieu can lead not only to changes on personal level, but it can create new forms of community identity.