

THE PERIOD OF CRISIS AND KINSHIP RELATIONS — in the Region of Vranje —*

This paper represents an attempt to perceive the impact of the socio-economic crisis in Serbia on kinship from the ethnological viewpoint. This paper will point out the manner in which economic conditions and specific cultural rules influence the structure of the kinship network and the functioning of kinship relations.

The research was carried out in the city of Vranje and its immediate surroundings among the Serb population, and chronologically it includes the period from the end of the eighties to the end of the nineties of the 20th century.

Key words: kinship, nuclear and extended family, socio-economic crisis, the region of Vranje.

It is considered that kinship, i.e. its structure, content and function depend on the external socio-cultural environment and the time limits of its existence. In that sense, this paper represents an attempt to perceive the impact of the socio-economic crisis in Serbia on kinship from the ethnological viewpoint.

The kinship maintained between the nuclear¹ and extended family² on one hand and their extra-family³ kin on the other hand have been observed in the town of

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¹ This term is used to denote the community of husband, wife and their unmarried children. The use of the terms nuclear and extended family is not incidental, for the idea is to emphasize that both family forms represent merely phases in the development of family. The only difference is in structure, but not in the principles on which organization within family relationships is based (see: Bogišić, 1884, 50–51)

² This family form is characterized by the vertical line of descent and generation. To denominate the above mentioned family form, Serbian ethnology also uses the term multiple-generation family (see: Pantelić, 1973, 155). In the region of Vranje a two generation household of patrilinear connected relatives is present today as a variant of that family form.

³ The expression extra-family kin denominates the kin outside the nuclear family, disregarding their geographical distance from the family (see: Bott, 1957, 114–118). The working definition of this expression has been somewhat modified according to the subject matter scope of this research. Thus the expression extra-family kin includes also those living in the joint household (house or apartment) together with the nuclear family members (for example: father, mother, brother-in-law and the like). Namely, the informants themselves have considered the kin living with them in the joint household, not being the nuclear family members, as the extra-family kin.

These are the kin that have mutual relations of vertical and horizontal ramification with the family and in this network of kinship relations include not only agnatic but also matrilinear and affinal kin (Ivanović, 1988, 156).

Vranje. The paper is based primarily on the ethnographic material collected during the research on family problems and its kinship network⁴ in the region of Vranje. Only the basic and most important observations and results of the above-mentioned research have been briefly interpreted in this paper. The ethnographic material was collected by using three methods: observation, questionnaire and interview. The research was located in the town of Vranje⁵ and its immediate surroundings among the Serb population, and chronologically it includes the period from the end of the eighties to the end of the nineties of the 20th century, considering that the empirical research itself was carried out from 1996 to 1998. The supplementary field research in the year 2000 has been carried out in order to collect new research data for this paper. The period in which the research has been carried out is significant not only on account of the changes that have occurred in the political and public life but also on account of the consequences of those changes that we are facing today and that are most frequently denominated with the expressions socio-economic crisis⁶ and social stagnation.

It is considered that the socio-economic crisis in Serbia culminated in the nineties of the 20th century (Vujović, 1994, 88). The following has been stated as the basic characteristics of the crisis: pauperism, decrease in standard of living and quality of life, black market occurrence, criminalization and the like. The social crisis has also been manifested by the larger social problems and general discontent of the people. The war in Kosovo and Metohija has also contributed to additionally deepen the crisis in Serbia, and particularly in the Vranje area and its immediate surroundings. A large number of families in Vranje and in surrounding villages have found themselves obliged to receive and accommodate refugees, mainly their relatives forced to leave their homes and flee to Serbia.

This paper is primarily intended to point out the manner in which economic conditions and specific cultural rules influence the structure of the kinship network and

⁴ A term kinship network has been used to denominate connections and relationships between family and the kin, with the meaning as presented in the E. Bott study. "In network formation,... only some, not all, of the component individuals have social relationships with one another.... In a network the component external units do not make up a larger social whole; they are not surrounded by a common boundary. They do not form an organized group." (Bott, 1957, 58–59). We could see network as a field of kin relationships. The use of this expression enables us to bridge the gap between a macro and micro approach on one hand and the researches on the other hand and establishes mediation between the individual actors and global structures (Milić, 1991, 122).

⁵ Geographically, the town of Vranje is situated in the far south of Serbia, approximately 380 km from Belgrade and approximately 50 km from the border with the Republic of Macedonia. It is an important border place, situated approximately 20 km to the southeast of the administrative border with the Kosovo province. Vranje is a very important administrative, industrial and cultural centre of the area. The community of Vranje has a population of approximately 87,000, considering that the town population amounts to approximately 66% (see: Popis 1991, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd 1995, 79). The main characteristic of the ethnic and confessional structure of the population of Vranje is the homogeneity. In 90% of the cases, the population of Vranje has declared themselves Orthodox, 0.50% are members of the Islam religion, and Roman Catholics are represented with 0.14%. In ethnic structure, the majority of the population in this community (90%) are Serbs, followed up by Roma (5.8%), Bulgarians (0.79%), while Albanians are only 0.10% of the population (see: Popis 1991, Stanovništvo, Veroispovest, Savezni zavod za statistiku, Beograd 1993).

⁶ Study of socio-economic crisis in Serbia, as well as of its impact on family and everyday life was taken up primarily in the sociological research of everyday life (see: Jugoslovensko društvo krajem devedesetih, Beograd 1996; Društvene promene i svakodnevni hivot, Beograd 1995; Razaranje društva (ed. Lazić, M.), Beograd 1994).

functioning of kinship relations⁷. The paper has been thus conceived to approach kinship research from the viewpoint of family and individual. Considering that, it should be said that the majority of the families in Vranje can be classified as a traditional family organization model⁸. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that in the family one comes upon parallel existence of traditional and contemporary forms. Family relations in particular domains, such as taking care of children and housework, are organized according to patriarchal principles, and in some others (for instance distribution of money, spending spare time and so on) patterns of behavior typical for contemporary way of life become prominent.

According to family classification derived on the basis of property relations (Mladenović, 1995, 150) and relying on statistical documentation the conclusion can be drawn that in Vranje the worker — clerk family is represented in the majority of cases⁹.

The families in Vranje maintain an intensive interaction with a small number of relatives and primarily with the genealogically closest kin¹⁰ that are not physically distant from the family. Therefore the kinship network is getting narrower in its range. Kin socializing is getting less intense, considering the reduced frequency of mutual visiting. Families in Vranje with the greatest number of relatives achieve an effective type¹¹ of kin relationships. The results of research demonstrate that the achievement of intimate kinship is primarily conditioned by interaction intensity. It should be added that the family has been achieving intimate relations primarily with the genealogically closest relatives disregarding the side of kinship. As the criteria intimate relations with kin, informants state genealogical closeness, similar life situation, common interests. Therefore, it could be said that there is a cause — effect connection between the achieved intimacy of kinship and the closeness of relationship. The achievement of a higher degree of kinship connectedness depends more on the factors of emotional-psychological nature than situational¹² ones. Where no intimate relation with the kin has been achieved and when relatives are not living near the family, interaction is reduced to meetings on appropriate occasions such as: baptism, wedding, funeral, family and village patron saint feast.

⁷ This report mainly argues the impact of society on kinship, while the opposite influence, i.e. the impact of kinship on society, has been given less attention. However, this does not mean that during the research their mutual influence and impact had not been taken into consideration.

⁸ It means that inter-family relations are being regulated mainly in accordance with the traditional behaviour patterns, in other words, the roles and obligations of the spouses are determined according to their classification by their gender roles. For more complete explanation of basic characteristics of this type of family in Serbian society, both in the past and in present, see papers: Nikolić, D. (1989) 59–66; Živanović, M. (1989) 83–93; Rihtman-Avğuštin, D. (1981) 71–76; Ivanović, Z. and Čurčić, N. (1989) 83–91.

⁹ See: “Zaposleni prema stepenu stručne spreme u svim sektorima svojine”, Opština Vranje, Odeljenje za statistiku, stanje: 31. 12. 1993.

¹⁰ The citizens of Vranje consider as genealogically close relations the kin up to the fourth or fifth degree; other kin is considered distant relatives (Đorđević, 2001, 128).

¹¹ Interaction with relatives of this type of relationships means that they gather together from once a month to twice or three times a year, depending on geographic remoteness of relatives. For more detailed explanation of criteria on the basis of which classification of kin relationships to types is carried out, as well as the explanation of their characteristic see: Đorđević, 2001, 16–17, 54–59.

¹² By situational factors I understand influences of the total social environment such as: geographic distance of relatives, commuting, etc. Frequency and intimacy of interaction with kin depends not only on these factors. Other factors like: family structure and the organization of inter-family relations, socio-economic ties between relatives, socio-economic status of family, the individual's personality and his interests, also have an impact on kinship. The influence of these factors on kin relationships is regarded in this research in their interrelation and mutual dependence.

Annual holidays are also opportunity to visit kin living in another town or abroad. More intense socializing of kin, even those not physically distant from the family, in the opinion of informants, is made impossible by everyday professional and private obligations, but primarily by the present economic situation (i.e. low income, material impoverishment and the like).

The frequency of visiting and interaction among kin depend considerably on the geographical distance between the family and its relatives. The geographical distance is one of the main situational factors impeding the interaction of kin, and it is closely connected with the economic factor. Notwithstanding the existence of emotional need and want, the families are unable to visit more frequently their kin living in another town, more distant village or abroad, due to high travel expenses¹³ and gift purchase¹⁴. Therefore the family maintain the contacts by phone with the kin intimate to them but physically distant (brother, sister, uncle, aunt and the like). However, that form of communication has also been reduced due to financial difficulties¹⁵.

Factors other than geographical distance also contribute to the less intensive interaction with the kin, which could be seen as a consequence of the economic crisis in Serbian society. Many individuals in Vranje are working extra part-time to obtain additional livelihood. This means working on a farm¹⁶ in the nearby village or black market of diesel, petrol, clothes, cleaning products, cigarettes and the like. On account of such a lifestyle the individual has insufficient free time for socializing¹⁷.

It has been stated that the socio-economic situation in Serbian society has a negative impact on the frequency of socializing and on the connectedness of the kinship network. However, this does not mean that the importance and the role of the kin is disappearing. On the contrary, this study like the other investigations of kinship in modern Serbian society confirm the importance of kinship relations in the individual's and family's social lives (see: Ivanović, 1988, 165–166; Milić, 1991, 115, 134, 140). Mutual assistance¹⁸ is a social activity taking place within the kinship network and it indicates the degree of kinship connectedness. Help to kin depends considerably on the acceptance of cultural patterns of behaviour which include the obligation of helping relatives. The role of the kin, pointed out here, is solving the problems occurring most

¹³ Compare with Hammel, 1986, 81.

¹⁴ One is expected to bring small gifts (coffee, candies, bottles of drinks and the like) when visiting relatives, but the kind and economic value of the gifts depend of the individual purchase capacity. In the period of the gravest economic crisis of 1993 many people could not even afford to buy coffee, let alone something else when visiting their relatives. Thus the existence and acceptance of these patterns of behavior in a given situation had negative influence on kin associations, particularly taking into account the custom of hospitality, which, among other things, includes serving the guest with food and drink, as well as accommodating him. That is why people, being considerate not to "expose their relatives to costs", avoided visits or reduced them to shorter stays than usual (instead of staying for ten days they stayed for five, etc.)

¹⁵ Compare with Vujović, 1994, 85–88.

¹⁶ The examples are not rare of married couples going to the country to help the parents (mostly of a husband) with farm work. In this way children (in this case adults who are married and have made their own families) fulfill their moral obligation – help their parents, and in return they get help in the form of food (diary products, fruit, vegetables...).

¹⁷ It is necessary to point out that in the network of kinship relations both patrilineal and matrilineal relatives are equally represented. In other words, the side of kinship is not the factor which is of special importance in choosing the relatives the family keep interaction with (Đorđević, 2001, 49).

¹⁸ Helping relatives depends primarily on the closeness of the relationship. Relatives' help is first expected and asked from parents, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc. Practice showed that both patrilineal and matrilineal relatives help equally in solving the problems taken into consideration (Đorđević, 2001, 82–98).

frequently in individual and family life and involves baby-sitting, finding a job and accommodation.

It has been demonstrated that the family solves the problem of baby-sitting, mostly for pre-school children, with the help of the closest female kin. Coming as the result of a poll, 61% of the total of 145 individuals questioned had received or have been receiving this type of help from kin, considering that mother-in-law and mother have been figuring as persons from whom such help has been most frequently received. The above-mentioned fact is not surprising since the citizens of Vranje consider the moral duty of female kin, primarily of mother-in-law, to be the first to help her daughter-in-law and son with the children. Moreover, people consider that helping with baby-sitting and raising grandchildren should be her pleasure and joy. This type of assistance has resulted in the formation of the specific social institution, so-called "granny service". The above-mentioned institution contributes to solving the baby-sitting problem in the present socio-economic conditions (the number of kindergartens is insufficient or their capacity is limited, the prices of services for that type of institutions are high). However, "granny service" in the region of Vranje is not only and primarily the consequence of present life conditions, but it is considerably connected to the acceptance of the traditional cultural patterns on the role and position of the individual within the kinship structure. The socio-economic situation has in fact only contributed to actualization of the established practice and extension of this institution in Serbia. The above-mentioned can be seen as confirmation of the opinion of some anthropologists and sociologists that the present socio-economic situation in Serbia has been contributing to "re-traditionalize and re-privatize the society" (Blagojević, 1995, 186).

On account of the economic crisis and the inefficiency of the social institutions competent to mediate in finding employment, individuals are unable to find employment by themselves. Therefore, in solving their problem they most frequently turn for help to relatives. Help is given by the closest male consanguineous and affinals (father, mother's and father's brother, father-in-law, brother-in-law etc.)¹⁹. To put it briefly, help is given by the kin who have acquired a certain position and reputation in the local community on account of their professional status (for example: manager, physician, lawyer, professor, military personnel and the like).

The socio-economic crisis is an aggravating circumstance also in solving the accommodation problem²⁰. On account of the difficult situation in providing for existence and of material impoverishment, a married couple is unable to build a house or to buy an apartment and thus achieve the neolocal residence model. The families in Vranje solve the accommodation problem by continuing to live in a house or an apartment together with the parents of one of the marital partners. The examples of patrilocal residence of married couples are the most frequent²¹. The results of research demonstrate that 31% of the total of 145 individuals questioned continue to live in joint household with the husband's parents and in a significantly smaller number of cases (11%) they live with the wife's parents. Not only in the region of Vranje, but also in other

¹⁹ Men more often occupied important offices. Because of that they are able to help their relatives in finding employment.

²⁰ About the aggravated accommodation problem in Serbia and consequences of such conditions see: Vujović, 1995, 115; Blagojević, 1995, 201.

²¹ Similar conclusion was made by M. Blagojević, who stated that statistical data (referring to the Register of 1991) indicate that patrilocal type of marriage represents the dominant type of marriage in Serbia (1995, 193).

parts of Serbia, this is a consequence of the expansion of the patrilocal marital practice. Matrilocality form of residence is acceptable only in specific situations (wife is an only daughter, husband deriving from a family with many male children and the like) and it has been attributed with negative connotation. The unfavourable position of the son-in-law within the father-in-law's household has been indicated by the various derogatory names (for example black raven) used to denominate a man living in the house of his wife's parents. To put it briefly, male individuals accept to live in the father-in-law's house very rarely and reluctantly. This indicates the fact that the marital and family relations have been organized mainly in accordance with the "patriarchal ideology principles" (Ivanović, 1997, 119). However, it should be remarked that the expansion of the extended family form in Vranje is not only the consequence of acceptance of a certain cultural concept, but could be also seen as "...a manifestation of the practical solution in the present conditions of life" (Erllich, 1978, 174).

It is necessary to point out that people, when solving the above-mentioned and also other life problems, are guided by the notion that the relatives are there exactly to help each other. The citizens of Vranje use to say: "The kin are there to help one another". The mere fact of kinship is enough for an individual, when in trouble, to ask for help without hesitation. That means that the contacts between family and relatives are based on the fact of the existing kinship connections and of solidarity and collectivism patterns related to it (Ivanović, 1988, 156–160).

The citizens of Vranje are guided mainly by the traditional cultural patterns when regulating relationships with kin; notwithstanding, it turned out that some of them have been using the socio-economic crisis as an excuse when they did not want to act in accordance with common practice. Such behaviour has been often condemned and interpreted as disrespect for the relatives and tradition. The economic moment has been considered as an invalid excuse to disrespect customs and to evade obligations to kin, even from the viewpoint of the present social situation. It means that it has been accepted as a moral imperative that the traditional behaviour patterns should rule the kinship. Therefore, acting to the contrary often contributes to disturb the harmonious relationships with kin²². Considering that the number of those not acting in accordance with the traditional behaviour patterns is minor compared to those that do observe them, this can be seen as an indicator of the role and significance of kin in individual and family life. It means that the kin relationships in modern society remain effective, the changes in its structure and content notwithstanding²³.

It can be concluded that the socio-economic crisis in Serbia is a factor with a double impact on changes within kinship. On one hand, it contributes to strengthen the kinship ties and relationships, and on the other hand it impedes kin socializing and affects less intense interaction. However, the impact of the above-mentioned factor should not be considered in isolation, but connected and dependant on other factors active in a certain time and place. Therefore, it is questionable whether certain phenomena and changes in the kin relationships and society would have occurred without the crisis.

²² On causes and effects of conflicts between the relatives in this region see: Đorđević, 2001, 64–71.

²³ About this conclusion also see: Hammel, 1986, 73–84; Ivanović, 1988, 155–167; Milić, 1991, 111–142.

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Јадранка ЂОРЂЕВИЋ

ПЕРИОД КРИЗЕ И ОДНОСИ МЕЂУ СРОДНИЦИМА — У ОБЛАСТИ ВРАЊА

Овај рад представља покушај да се са етнолошког аспекта сагледа утицај социо-економске кризе у Србији на сродничке односе. Рад је конципиран тако да се проучавању сродничких односа приступило са аспекта породице и појединца. Истраживање, чији су резултати изнети овом приликом, је просторно лоцирано на подручје града Врања и његову непосредну околину, а у хронолошком смислу обухвата период од краја 80-их до краја 90-их година XX века. Показало се да социо-економска криза у Србији представља фактор који двојако утиче на промене у сродничким односима. Са једне стране доприноси јачању сродничких веза и односа, а са друге отежава сродничка дружења и утиче на слабији интензитет интеракције.