

---

# THE GYPSIES/THE ROMA IN HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

---



---

REGIO  
KÖNYVEK

# THE GYPSIES/THE ROMA IN HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

TELEKI LÁSZLÓ FOUNDATION  
BUDAPEST, 2002

*Edited by*  
Ernő Kállai

*Editorial Assistant*  
Nándor Bárdi

*Translated by*  
Gábor Várkonyi

*The translations were proofread by*  
Bob Dent

*The publishing of this volume was supported by*  
the Teleki László Institute:  
Cultural Foreign Policy and National Identity Project

Copyright © Regio – Teleki László Foundation  
© Gábor Várkonyi  
© Gábor Bernáth, Gábor Havas, Ernő Kállai,  
Júlia Károlyi, István Kemény, András Kovács,  
Vera Messing, Péter Szuhay, Imre Vajda, Balázs Wizner

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced  
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical  
without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Cover illustration by László Hajnal

ISBN 963 85774 6 0  
ISSN 0866-1251

# CONTENTS

Foreword /ERNŐ KÁLLAI/	7
------------------------	---

## STUDIES

The Linguistic Groups of the Roma in Hungary and the Beginnings of Scientific Research	13
PÉTER SZUHAY	
I. Ethnographical and Cultural Anthropological Research	13
GÁBOR HAVAS	
II. On Sociological Studies about the Roma	18
PÉTER SZUHAY	
III. Self-Definitions of Gypsy Ethnic Groups	24
ISTVÁN KEMÉNY	
IV. Linguistic Groups and Usage among the Hungarian Gypsies/Roma	28
ERNŐ KÁLLAI	
The Hungarian Roma Population During the Last Half-Century	35
ISTVÁN KEMÉNY	
The Roma/Gypsies of Hungary and the Economy	51
GÁBOR HAVAS	
The School as Breakout Point	79
GÁBOR BERNÁTH – VERA MESSING	
The Neglected Public On the Media Consumption of the Hungarian Roma	107
ANDRÁS KOVÁTS	
Local and International Views on the Migration of the Hungarian Roma	126

## REVIEWS

IMRE VAJDA	
The Gypsies – The Roma and Scientific Research Some thoughts about the role of Gypsy intelligentsia in the wake of the “Who is a Gypsy?” debate	149
JÚLIA KÁROLYI	
The Roma, Poverty and Culture	157
BALÁZS WIZNER	
A Book about the Roma	161
BALÁZS WIZNER	
How the Roma Make a Living	170
NOTES ON AUTHORS	178

## FOREWORD

By no means the first or the only such undertaking, the journal *Regio* of the László Teleki Foundation has nevertheless taken on a significant task by publishing the English version of the volume *Gypsies/Roma in Hungarian Society*. There is an ever growing demand for a scientifically grounded analysis of the current situation among researchers and political decision-makers who do not speak Hungarian but who are increasingly interested in the subject. This is certainly not accidental, but has several reasons. Such, for example, is the fact that for several years one of the most critical points made by the country assessment reports prepared by the EU has been the lack of the social integration and equal opportunities of the Roma in Hungary. Nor has the significance of the debate about the Roma leaving the village of Zámoly for France and receiving political asylum there been confined within the borders of the country. Just how intolerable the situation has become is well exemplified by the fact that a few months ago the Canadian government introduced a compulsory visa system for Hungarian citizens to put an end to the tide of emigrants from Hungary, most of them Hungarian Gypsies in a socially desperate situation. After such developments it would be folly to suppose that these are merely transient problems: in effect these are social issues with very deep roots and, left unresolved, they will lead to increasingly severe conflicts.

It is for these reasons, too, that we would do well to understand just who the Gypsies or the Roma are.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the representative Gypsy

---

<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the practice widespread in the field of scientific research, we use the terms “Gypsy” and “Roma” as synonymous in the volume. Several studies, however, point out the differences underlying the two terms. Thus, the word “Gypsy”, which has become widespread since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is a collective term used by majority society, is today primarily used by Gypsies whose mother language is Hungarian and who have lost their ancient culture. On the other hand, the term “Roma” is used by Gypsy groups who have preserved their language and culture as well as by actors of Roma politics. They choose to use the term “Roma” to denote themselves because of the increasingly pejorative connotations of the word “Gypsy”.

survey of 1971 the number of Gypsies living in Hungary was 320,000 – a figure that reached half a million by 1993. Even according to the most modest estimates of researchers, the number of Gypsies in Hungary at the beginning of the third millennium is between 500,000 and 600,000. We are speaking about a population that has been living in Hungary for several centuries, scattered in all regions and leading a wholly settled life for a long time. Today, on the verge of Hungary's accession to the European Union it is essential that political leaders – and, indeed, society as a whole – face the social problem called “the Gypsy question”. On the other hand, the same has to be done by the present EU member countries if they wish to have a realistic picture about the centuries-long tribulations of these people, since as yet they have had no experience with the problems of a large number of settled Gypsies. It is intolerable that an entire people today lead their everyday lives in utter misery and with no hope for the future – right in the centre of Europe. Civilized Europe has an obligation to deal with this unfortunate situation and investigate the possibilities of resolving it. In order to put in place the appropriate programmes, however, all decision-makers should possess scientifically grounded knowledge about the situation of the Gypsies in Hungary.

Given our limited resources, in the present collection of studies we only investigate a few, albeit extremely important issues. To start with, we attempt to summarise the history and present status of Hungarian Gypsy studies as well as to show the different approaches to the basic question of “Who are the Gypsies?” that has generated heated debates for decades. We then provide readings about the historical past of the Gypsies in Hungary from their appearance in the Middle Ages right through to the present. Detailed analyses are provided about the situation of Hungarian Gypsies, which has undergone drastic changes since the time of political transformation in 1990, covering the various relevant socio-political concepts and programmes of the Hungarian governments during the last decade. A separate study has been included about the issue of unemployment, which is the greatest among the problems of the Roma today. In his writing István Kemény – one of the most prominent personalities in Hungarian Gypsy studies for decades – describes and analyses in detail all those factors that determine the position of the Roma on the labour market. The study by the eminent sociologist, Gábor Havas, scrutinises what is perhaps the most important element for the social elevation of the Gypsies: education. The media research of Gábor Bernáth and Vera Messing provides data about the media consumption habits of the Gypsies. András Kovács, a young researcher of migration, has written a study about the migrational tendencies and their causes among the Hungarian Roma – the issue which has received the most public attention both at

home and abroad. The rest of the volume contains reviews of books which present the significant results of and progress made by research during recent years. Among these, special mention has to be made of the contribution of Imre Vajda – a researcher who proudly accepts his Gypsy identity. This study goes well beyond the scope of a review and puts forth a very marked opinion about the situation of scientific research and the possible role of a new generation of Gypsy intellectuals within it.

In this volume we shall not, obviously, solve the problems that have been accumulating for decades and centuries. Our goal is to draw attention to those most recent results of research which reveal the roots of the problems and provide political decision-makers with the possibility of formulating strategic programmes. All our propositions are based on the results of notable experts, and we are ready to accept the fact that it is sometimes not easy for Hungarian society and its political leaders to face the omissions and mistakes committed during recent decades. It is, however, our firm conviction that without open debate and solid knowledge there is no hope of changing the extremely miserable living circumstances of the Roma.

ERNŐ KÁLLAI





# STUDIES



# The Linguistic Groups of the Roma in Hungary and the Beginnings of Scientific Research

## I. ETHNOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PÉTER SZUHAY

To date, the system of scientific classification of the Hungarian Roma population most widely accepted was established by Kamill Erdős as early as 1958. However, there had been various attempts before his time that have an effect on today's political and public administration practice. The census of the Gypsies in 1893 regarded the extent of vagrancy and settlement as the main ordering principle, and accordingly distinguished wandering Gypsies, Gypsies who dwell in one place for a longer period and permanently settled Gypsies.

The work of the researchers known as the first “Gypsy studies trio”, Henrik Wlislocki, Archduke Joseph and Antal Hermann, also displayed a certain romantic attitude. Even though all three of them applied the method of participatory observation, they described wandering Gypsies as people who would not tolerate social obligations and were reluctant to become part of society; they were children of nature, albeit of not too honourable character. Their scientific interest was directed by a kind of enlightened absolutism and their aim was to settle wandering Gypsies. Archduke Joseph wanted to settle a group of vagrants on his Alcsút estate, while Antal Herman, as a chief counsellor to the Ministry of the Interior, worked on the preparation and co-ordination of the 1916 ministry order. It appears they had little understanding of the culture of the vagrants, did not recognise the economic pressure behind migration, and the mistrust and suspicion directed towards their environment. The long supplement to the entry “Gypsy” in the Pallas Encyclopedia may be regarded as a summary of the work of the trio.

One of the first scientists to provide a description of the three major Roma groups in Hungary was Antal Heiczinger in his 1939 study. He laid down a valid description of the tub-making Gypsies, which is still valid. In his *Data on the Gypsy Question of the Villages* his observations equally take into account language, migration, occupation and livelihood, lifestyle, and the relationship with the village and the peasants. Kamill Erdős tried to set up a classification of the groups of the Hungarian population termed as Gypsies in his studies *The Gypsies of Békés County – Gypsy dialects in Hungary* and *The Hungarian Gypsies – Tribes and Clans*. To date this is the most detailed such classification and we can easily assert that it is this system that has been codified by the fields of science dealing with the Roma. It has provided the conceptual framework for ethnographical and anthropological studies, and has also influenced the basic categories of later sociological studies.

*“We can distinguish two main types of Gypsies in Hungary:*

*A) those whose mother tongue is the Gypsy language*

*B) those whose mother tongue is not the Gypsy language.*

*The first group may be subdivided into two, markedly distinct sub-groups:*

*A<sub>1</sub> those who speak the so-called Carpathian Gypsy language;*

*A<sub>2</sub> those who speak the so-called Romany or Vlach Gypsy language.*

*The second main group consists of those whose mother tongue is not the Gypsy language. They may be divided into two categories:*

*B<sub>1</sub> those whose mother tongue is Hungarian;*

*B<sub>2</sub> those whose mother tongue is Romanian.*

*Members of group B<sub>1</sub> (Romungro, “Rumungro”) are descendants of the Carpathian and Vlach Gypsies who were not taught the Gypsy language by their ancestors, possibly in the hope of easier assimilation. Today it is almost impossible to distinguish them according to their origins.*

*They fall into two categories:*

*a) musicians (the “gentleman” group)*

*b) adobe makers, basket weavers, day labourers, etc. (the poor group).*

*Members of group B<sub>2</sub> also fall into two categories:*

*1) Romanian Gypsies (e.g. in the townships of Elek and Méhkerék in Békés County)*

*2) the tub-maker Gypsies.*

*Romanian Gypsies have no further sub-groups.”*

In his descriptions Erdős always clearly identified the group he was speaking about and never applied information about one group to another.

Once beyond the difficulties of classification, ethnographical literature was more or less interested in the description of the Roma. In its approach and attitude toward the question, the science of the fifties and the sixties carried on the endeavours of the thirties. Interest was directed at two main areas. On the one hand it was traditional trades and crafts that interested researchers, while on the other they turned their attention to phenomena of folklore. The positivist description, museal collection of objects and photographic documentation of traditional or ancient trades and crafts has obviously added a lot to our knowledge of the Roma (tub makers were described in detail by Béla Gunda, Margit Békeffy, Tivadar Petercsák and János Bencsik; metallurgy by Ferenc Bakó, Kamill Erdős, Ferenc Bodgál, Ilona Ladvenicza and Zsuzsa Bódi; but research also covered such other crafts as adobe making, brick burning and basket weaving). These works, however, restrict themselves to describing a craft or trade and are not embedded into the history and actual system of relations of the community as a whole. Therefore, such descriptions document the history of technology much more than real socio-historical processes.

At the outset, folkloristic studies were motivated by the desire to document ancient elements of Hungarian folk culture that had been adapted by, and were still discernible amongst the Roma. Researchers set out with the presupposition that the Roma have no independent ethnic culture of their own, but, as an archaic community, they have preserved many cultural elements that they have adapted from Hungarian dance folklore or folk tales. Research, therefore, did not strive to describe Roma culture itself but attempted to glean information about the archaic system of Hungarian folk culture. Emphasising the co-existence of Roma and non-Roma to some extent legitimised the notion that the culture of the Roma was solely the result of adapting elements from other cultures. No doubt, we should regard folklore as basically dependent on social class or stratum, but we also should not forget about the ethnic knowledge generated during the course of the formulation of group identity. The study of folklore primarily concentrated on the collection of folk tales. Thus, for example, the series of Gypsy Studies of the HAS Ethnographical Research Group has mainly published such tales; however, we also have to call attention the achievements of Olga Nagy and József Vekerdi.

An alternative approach is represented by the work of Katalin Kovalcsik who, while collecting folklore, was interested in the given community rather than just the afterlife of a genre. The work of Károly Bari is fundamentally different from both trends and strives to reconstruct the once unified folkloric knowledge of the Roma by collecting works of folklore among them.

During the last decade, folkloristic interest has come to include the belief sets of Roma as well as certain elements of their system of customs, such as the sub-system related to pregnancy and birth, death and grief and the description of curses and vows. Kamill Erdős's smaller studies may be regarded as forerunners of this line of interest. As regards the concrete nature of the descriptions, we have to distinguish the works of Melinda Rézműves, Gusztáv Balázs and Julianna Kalányosné László, who apply actual field experiences to the individual communities, from the writings of György Rostás-Farkas, Ervin Karsai and Pál Farkas who, for the most part, project their own experiences from Vlach Gypsy circles over the entire Roma population. It was also these authors who attempted to create a comprehensive ethnography of the Roma people in a synthetic work of some proportion. The value of their work has lost much due to the lack of references and the romantic image they depict.

The history of science looks upon Kamill Erdős, József Vekerdi and András Hajdú as another "trio". From the point of view of our subject matter it was the first two who had the most definitive effect on later ethnographic research. The similarity in their approaches is perhaps best characterised by the fact that both of them believed that administrative decisions could force Roma to give up their "outdated lifestyles". While researchers even today often cite Kamill Erdős, József Vekerdi has become persona non grata among romologists. In his later works, philosophising on the theory of culture, he stated that there is no independent Roma culture and the formation of such is made impossible precisely by the lack of tradition; furthermore, that Roma lack "material or intellectual aspirations".

The first significant summary work on the Roma was the volume published in 1983, entitled *Gypsies: Where they Came from, Where they are Going* and edited by László Szegő. This book contains texts representing various different approaches including scientific analyses as well as articles intended to promote the elevation and integration of the Roma population. During the last few years several authors who found it less important to treat Roma culture as a political affair have written a book on Roma ethnography or compiled a reader on the subject (for example Zsuzsa Bódi, Tibor Tuza, Elemér Várnagy or Katalin Kovalcsik–Anna Csongor, but in a certain sense we may also include here Géza Csemer's book, *Habiszti*).

All in all, we may conclude that ethnographic and folklore research of the past few decades have been primarily interested in Vlach Gypsies who were regarded as traditional, and, for the most part, were restricted to the description of archaic phenomena without regarding the community or the group as the starting point of study. Interest in the trends of the present was insignificant. This is

the reason why the growing number of manuals on Roma and the ethnographic notes of educational supplements usually tend to describe the cultural phenomena of archaic or Vlach Gypsies rather than Gypsy culture in general.

It is perhaps the works which exhibit a socio-anthropological approach that offer the most detailed description and analyses of the Hungarian Roma groups. Using this approach researchers examine the culture of Roma groups as a living culture whose primary function is to organise the community and life, to maintain the survival of the social group and to ensure livelihood. This culture cannot be described in itself but only in the context of its relationship with majority society. Most significant among anthropological studies is the work of the British Michael Stewart.

In clear opposition to the ethnographical approach, the anthropological field studies of Michael Stewart among the Hungarian Roma during the 1980's and the resulting publications started a new period in Roma research and added novel information to our knowledge of the Roma. Stewart intentionally selected a group of Vlach Gypsies because he chose to set out from the assumption that these groups have preserved much more independent elements in their cultural system or, we could say, tried harder to maintain traditional values and lifestyles. In describing Vlach Gypsies he examined both their relationship with the peasants and other Gypsy groups. Stewart draws the primary distinction between Vlach Gypsies whose lifestyle and philosophy is traditional and different from that of society and its codified set of values and the Hungarian Gypsies who try to conform to the value system of society in their lifestyles and outlook.

Gábor Fleck and Tünde Virág have conducted anthropological studies in Boyash Gypsy communities while Viktória Burka examined Hungarian Gypsy communities.

At this point we have to mention two works on the history of science that could provide readers with further and more detailed information on the subject. József Vekerdi's work *The History of Hungarian Gypsy Studies* describes and summarises a wide variety of scientific fields, while Csaba Prónai's volume entitled *Gypsy Studies and Cultural Anthropology* assesses earlier and present-day Hungarian and international research efforts primarily from the point of view of cultural anthropology.



## II. ON SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES ABOUT THE ROMA

GÁBOR HAVAS

A constantly recurring problem related to the views on the situation of the Gypsies is whether to regard the Gypsy question as primarily an ethnic-national or racial question, or as a problem of social stratification,” wrote Árpád Szakolczai in 1982. Even though the statement is rather general, it highlights the basic problem of the sociological study of the Roma. All such studies have to ask at the very beginning who the people to be regarded as Gypsies are, and what the basis is for such classification. The answer to the question may, of course, be (or appear to be) theoretically grounded, or it may be clearly practical and only take into account the practical aspects of research, but the question itself cannot be avoided. On the one hand, therefore, the problem of definition is there at the outset of all sociological studies related to the Roma, while, on the other, quite independent of the particular subject of research and the approach applied, the results of research may provide information for the solution of the problem of definition; information that may be contrary to the original hypothesis. The history of the sociological approach to the Gypsy problem in Hungary demonstrates that it is far from easy to find a reassuring answer to the question and that the attempts to solve the problem hitherto have not been able to entirely remove the contradictions inherent in it.

Following the census efforts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the first comprehensive and methodical attempt to assess the situation of the Roma, the “Gypsy census” conducted by the Royal Hungarian Statistical Office, exhibited a rather practical, down-to-earth approach in this matter. *“Ascertaining Gypsy origin usually does not involve too much difficulty. Public opinion, the consciousness of the people, usually keeps a reliable record of Gypsy origin, a marked feature of which is the set of anthropological characteristics.”* This definition – whose purpose was to determine the group of people to be included in the census – is remarkably similar to that applied almost eight decades later in 1971 by István Kemény’s nation-wide survey of the Roma: *“In our research we have classified as Gypsies those persons who are regarded as such by their non-Gypsy surroundings.”*

This definition does not include among the Roma those individuals who have been fully assimilated by the majority society. The study describ-

ing the results of the 1893 census also alludes to this fact: “...*despite all care and exactitude the census has not included the people whose Gypsy origin is unknown...*”. Similarly, in all probability the 1971 census also mostly excluded assimilated Roma.

The approach that uses the opinion of majority society as a key for definition essentially understands the Roma as a social minority, whose continued existence is due to the discriminative attitude of the majority rather than its own, immanent characteristics, even though it has evolved in the course of history as an ethnic entity.

The attempts at definition that do not take into account the system of relations with majority society and aim to find generally applicable criteria within the immanent characteristics of Roma society usually either narrow down the reference of the concept or generalise characteristics that only apply to certain groups of the Roma.

László Szegő (1970) regards as real Gypsies only those whose mother tongue is the Gypsy language (according to the 1971 survey, the mother tongue of only 22% of Gypsies was the Gypsy language). József Vekerdi (1976), taking as his starting point the historical hypothesis about the Gypsies according to which “the ancestors of the Gypsies were the Indian Domba people, the lowest stratum of the outcast group”, derives their present eating and dwelling habits, forms of consciousness and behaviour, etc. from the living conditions that prevailed among them several thousands of years ago. Then, using these elements, he attempts to build up a consistent system whose organising principle is the so-called characteristic Gypsy lifestyle.

Dénes Csengey (1982) also speaks of “the objectively different quality of the entire Gypsy people”, neglecting both the similarities in the lifestyles of marginal social groups and the differences in the manner of living prevalent among the various groups of Roma.

After the political transformation, the Minorities Act (1993) added a new, wholly practical dimension to the problem, since it grants the individual the exclusive and inalienable right to decide whether or not he or she is a member of a minority. This, coupled with the relevant legislation on privacy rights, forces sociologists, too, to rethink the problem of definition and the procedures of sampling. János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi (1997) took a novel stand in the disputes that have yet again become increasingly heated. In their view, the objective definition of the Roma is impossible; science can only examine who were regarded as Gypsies by the various groups of society at various times – something that is determined by the logic of the struggle for social positions. Accordingly, the term Gypsy will denote groups of very different composition and sociological parameters,

depending on the historical period and social position we take as our frame of reference.

The results of the 1893 census provided a relatively clear picture of the situation, socio-structural position, level of integration, inner stratification and relationship toward majority society of the Hungarian Gypsies of the time. The first surprising fact is that although the census was conducted to address the case of “vagrant and semi-vagrant Gypsies”, it classified 88.5% of them as permanently settled, while only 7.4% were “stationary for a longer term” and no more than 3.3% were qualified as “vagrant Gypsies”. This distribution in itself already seems to prove a hypothesis that has been supported by the further data gleaned by the census, namely that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the vast majority of the Roma in Hungary cannot be regarded as fully integrated into society, but their situation was not entirely marginal either, rather, it was intermediate. The distribution of data concerning employment, location, dwelling and schooling also support this conclusion.

Another important result of the census was that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Roma had undergone a not overly widespread, but nevertheless significant process of differentiation. This differentiation exhibited extreme polarities (even at the time the Roma had a not fully assimilated – i.e. distinguishable – “elite” who led middle class lives in the broad sense of the term), but much more important than these were the smaller differences between the “intermediate” groups that had a much more significant effect on the stratification of Roma society as a whole. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian Roma were integrated into society to a greater degree than during the decades following World War I.

The passing of the liberal period of the Dual Monarchy also brought about the end of statistical and sociological interest in the Gypsies. In 1893 the administrators of the census still believed that “... the Gypsy affair cannot be settled simply with decrees of public administration, police rules or general laws”. Amidst the increasing economic difficulties of the Horthy era, the growing misery of rural have-nots and the urban poor and the fast spreading of increasingly brutal forms of racial discrimination, the role of “public administration decrees” and “police rules” increased, while the growing intolerance of society and the authorities finally led to measures aimed at the annihilation of the entire Roma population. Among such circumstances little thought was given to actual facts and the scientific examination of the problem. Following 1945 the optimism of the age that expected the speedy resolution of all social problems, and the narrow-minded ideology opposing all forms of social self-knowledge and banishing sociology from the sphere of sciences, once again rendered serious sociological research impossible.

It was only at the beginning of the sixties that sociological interest could once again turn toward the Roma. Besides the gradual “rehabilitation” of this science, an important motivating factor of this change was that the country had run out of non-Roma labour resources, opening up the gates of industry to the Roma as well. This situation immediately revealed that masses of Roma lived well below accepted social standards and that most of them dwelled in segregated, slum-type conditions. The early research tried to force the problem and its solution into the single dimension of “backwardness” versus social elevation. Within this framework ethnic characteristics and cultural traditions could only appear as factors conserving a historically outdated state of affairs.

Another sign of interest in the Roma was the appearance of literature analysing particular communities or settlements from a sociographical point of view. These writings often made false generalisations on the basis of “case studies” authenticated by personal experience, which is quite understandable, since at the time there were no national data concerning even the most elementary of facts.

It was this recognition that led to István Kemény’s 1971 nation-wide survey. Kemény approached the problem from the aspect of social structure. He was interested in the economic and social mechanisms that once again created a gap between the living conditions and perspectives of the lowest strata and the rest of society amidst the changes of the 1960s, and thus contributed to the reproduction of poverty in Hungary. It was within this framework that Kemény conducted the examination of the sociological problems related to the Roma, stating that “the problem of the Gypsies is fundamentally not an ethnic question, but a question of social strata”, and stressing the similarities between the Gypsy and non-Gypsy poverty in the study summarising the results of the survey. The survey managed to clear up the previously much disputed question of linguistic distribution, the regional and settlement characteristics of geographical position, the role of Roma in the division of labour, the typical trends in the changes of occupation and the extent of segregation within settlements. It explored housing conditions, the most important indices of income and consumption levels, the level of education and the anomalies in schooling. It was this study which enabled later researchers to approach individual topics in possession of the most basic facts.

For a long time Hungarian sociology hardly gave any significant answers to this “challenge”. (From the time of its launch in 1972 to the end of the 1980s, only two Roma-related studies were published in the journal *Szociológia*). Few researchers were “committed” to the subject, many of whom had already participated in the 1971 survey as Kemény’s students.

In the debates about definition Zsolt Csalog formulated his position based on Kemény's concepts and wrote significant works of sociography about the subject of the Roma, plus a comprehensive study on the situation of the Roma in 1982, stressing the changes that had occurred since 1971. Ottília Solt (1975) examined the living conditions and schooling situation of the Gypsies in Budapest, Gábor Havas and László Kardos (1981) prepared comparative studies of various types of Roma communities while Gabriella Lengyel's case studies (1972, 1981) depicted the conditions of individual communities.

During the sixties and the seventies the level of integration of the Roma population certainly increased, but this process was burdened with contradictions and led to novel conflicts and problems. Sporadic research endeavoured to explore these processes and their consequences. Differentiation due to changes of occupation were analysed (János Bársony, Havas, Kardos, Árpád Tóth) as well as the evolution of new forms of segregation (Csalog, Bársony), the contradictions in the liquidation of slums and the evolution of the new focal points of dwelling segregation such as "CS" projects, small villages, and slums (György Berkovits, Csalog, Gábor Demszky, Havas) and the malfunctions of identity and value systems (Elemér Hankiss, Árpád Szakolczai). Opinion polls conducted among the non-Roma population (Endre Hann, Ferenc Pártos, Miklós Tomka, 1979; István Tauber, 1982) pointed out that public opinion was not unanimous about the Gypsy question, yet "there is a negative image of Gypsies in the vast majority of people". Ágnes Diószegi's sociographic work, *Cigányút* (The Gypsy Way) provides a comprehensive description of the changes that had occurred until the mid-eighties and their consequences.

By the second half of the 1980s the crisis of the political system had led to the strengthening of negative tendencies in respect of the Gypsy population as well. At this point sociological literature primarily sought to describe the phenomena of crisis and their increasingly grave consequences. According to the surveys conducted, Gypsies had already started to be forced out from the labour market (Solt, Havas), and dwelling segregation gained significant proportions especially in the "Gypsyisation" of small settlements on the brink of extinction (Havas) and slums (János Ladányi), as had the closely related matter of segregation in schooling (Anna Csongor). The intolerance of majority society toward the Roma grew strongly. (According to a poll conducted in 1988 in Borsod County, 10% of party members believed physical extermination would be the most effective instrument in dealing with the Gypsy question.) Literature has also documented the first attempts at the systematic dwelling segregation of Roma (Ladányi: 1989).

After the political transformation, such negative tendencies gained alarming force, as witnessed among others by the results of István Kemény's new representative study (1993–94 with Gábor Havas and Gábor Kertesi) which show a dramatic decrease of labour market participation, an exceedingly high unemployment and inactive ratio, strong dwelling segregation, etc. The conclusions of Kertesi's examinations of workplace discrimination and the consequences of the schooling lag that had accumulated during the previous decades are similar, as are those of the studies of János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi about the latest trends of geographical segregation and the related trends of discrimination, Pál Tóth's Borsod County study on the miserable situation of rural Roma and the studies of György Csepeli, Ferenc Erős and Endre Sik which document increasing anti-Roma sentiment within public opinion in general and the various groups of the population.

At the same time, certain newer studies lay much greater emphasis on depicting the internal stratification of Roma society, the different cultural traditions and the consequences of the differentiation process that society has undergone.

From this point of view Michael Stewart's work, *Brothers of Song*, which was written in the eighties, had a seminal effect on Hungarian sociological literature. Using primarily the tools of cultural anthropology, Stewart examines the lifestyle and value system of a Hungarian horse-trading community. Zita Réger has studied the connection between oral culture and linguistic socialisation, and the relationship between cultural traditions, childhood socialisation and school failures. Kemény has called attention to Gypsy traders who have made successful careers following the political transformation, Ladányi has compared the sociological parameters of low and high income Roma and non-Roma, Gábor Kertesi and Gábor Kézdi examined the family background of Roma youth who were successful at school, while Ernő Kállai prepared a case study about the various types of Roma entrepreneurs.

Studies depicting the conflicts in the relationship of Roma and the institutions, the prejudicial or discriminative attitudes of the latter and the role of cultural differences within this framework have also been significant. The discriminative mechanisms of the labour institutions were described by Kertesi, Mária Neményi and György Gyukits studied the workings of these mechanisms in health care, while Péter Szuhay examined them in the operation of the courts using statistical data and case studies.

From the mid-eighties, in parallel with the growing number of crises phenomena, sociology began to pay greater attention to the problems related to the situation of the Roma, as witnessed by the increase in the number of relevant studies and by the growing complexity of both subject matter and approaches.

### III. SELF-DEFINITIONS OF GYPSY ETHNIC GROUPS

PÉTER SZUHAY

Those in Hungary, whom science classifies as Vlach Gypsies call themselves Rom or Roma, those who are classified as Hungarian Gypsies prefer the term “musicians”, while those called Romanian Gypsies prefer to call themselves Boyash.

It was a commonplace occurrence at the end of the eighties that intellectuals feeling solidarity with the Gypsies started to use the term Roma to coin all Gypsy people in general, as they felt the word “Gypsy” and the related associations were pejorative. We have witnessed several cases when the musicians protested against being called Roma, claiming that they were not Roma but musician Gypsies. Nevertheless the majority of Gypsy politicians with Hungarian as their mother tongue often – and by today generally – use the term Roma in the names of the political and social organisations of Gypsy people; hence such names as the Roma Parliament, the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, the Roma Press Centre and Roma Veritas. In other cases the name of the organisation is entirely in the Gypsy language, e.g.: Phralipe, Amaro Drom, Lungo Drom, Romano Kher. All this shows that on the level of “Gypsy politics” there is a demand for cultural and social integration between the various groups, though this does not mean that that demand has also been recognised within popular culture and on the level of everyday life. By today the term “Roma” has gained ground in the language of the media as well, though this is more of a euphemism and a matter of political correctness, and the interpretations attached to the term often do nothing more than devalue the name “Roma” itself.

The most important sociological fact that we have to record is that among, and often within, these groups there exists a strict system of endogamy, which means that members of one group may only marry within that group. There are also strict barriers within the groups that define themselves as Roms or musicians. These groups may be separated along the lines of occupation, lifestyle, financial situation or geography as well as according to the system of clans and kinship. Another pregnant form of social segregation occurs when the members of two or three main groups live in different parts of the given settlement and do not “mingle” or, if there is only a single Gypsy slum within the settlement, then it is divided by an imaginary frontier line.



Separation of the main groups is discernible in the forms of work organisation as well. During earlier decades members of the different groups tended to belong to different work brigades and, if possible, asked for different rooms in workers' hostels. This observation may be generalised over the entire field of social relationships (friendships, age group "ganging", etc.). All these facts show that while the majority of the population classifies all people called "Gypsy" under a single concept, these people themselves express their differences and group identities with real and symbolic instruments.

This trend is also clearly discernible in the linguistic separation among the groups called "Gypsies". The terminology of the Vlach Gypsies classifies people according to the following categories. The group referred to as "us" comprises the Roma. Opposite this group are the *gadje*, who can further be divided into peasants and gentlemen (peasants, in general, are the rural population and those hostile to us while the gentlemen are those who do not despise us and display solidarity). An intermediate category is that of the Romungro, those who are not Roma any more but they are not fully *gadje* either. Hungarian Gypsies apply a similar classification, calling themselves musicians, calling those who are classified by science as Vlach Gypsies the Vlach, while referring to non-Gypsies the *gadje* just as the Romany Gypsies do.

A process of unification can be seen among the groups whose mother tongue is the Gypsy language. It appears that even those groups are increasingly using the term *Lovári* for themselves, whose ancestors actually belonged to a different tribe or clan. According to the Vlach groups, a true Rom is independent from the hierarchical system of the division of labour, is his own master and answers to no one but himself, even though his activities would be impossible without the system of relationships with the peasants and the majority in general. That is, the true Roma make a living from trading with the peasants. From this point of view the central value consists of dealing well and successfully as this ensures independence from majority society and its system of institutions.

Similar tendencies are apparent if we examine the ethnic group of Gypsies whose mother tongue is Hungarian. Almost all Hungarian Gypsies define themselves as musicians, regardless of whether they or their ancestors have ever worked as such. For example, those who had earlier been brick makers or day labourers or who were industrial or agricultural workers during the previous period call themselves musicians. Those who believe themselves to be real musicians generally reject this formula and narrow down the definition of the group by referring to the maxim that "all musicians are Hungarian Gypsies, but not all Hungarian Gypsies are musicians". Real musicians interpret life in a manner that is akin to the views of "true artists", or,



using an earlier formula, “gentleman” (the nobility and the gentry). According to this view of life, a musician respects others, is a lavish host, likes to give and thereby achieves a symbolic form of superiority. Even though his livelihood depends on the peasants or the guests, his outlook on life is not identical to theirs. He strives to find an expression for the good life in material objects, yet he is not a hoarder, rather he is a “liver” of life. As his livelihood is based on a kind of service – playing music – he does not attempt to accumulate capital the way trading and dealing Gypsies do.

For the groups of Hungarian Gypsies who define themselves as musicians but do not actually live from playing, it was the peasant and petty bourgeois system of values of recent decades which served as a model, even if they did preserve the – unattainable – image of the true musician Gypsy. Safety, the security of the workplace and the family became the meaning of life; the goal to be achieved was the peasant or worker form of life. Those living in slums wished to move into the villages or the cities to dwell among the Hungarians and they detested being called Gypsies by others. Yet, however hard they tried they could not achieve this and were constantly forced to face the fact that society labelled them on the basis of their ethnic identity.

Today we are already aware that the attempted integration on the part of Hungarian Gypsies was only partially successful. From the second half of the eighties onwards very many of them – especially the semi-skilled and unskilled workers – became unemployed and the lifestyle they previously believed to be secure and stable came to an end. Many who had previously achieved a peasant or petty bourgeois quality of life were once again forced to live day to day, and certain cultural forms came to life that originate from the culture of poverty. It is from this period onwards that – as many examples of the life strategy of Vlach Gypsies show – dealing and trading became the most secure forms of livelihood. Even in communities where previously the men had worked in industry or agriculture, mediating commerce and street peddling began to appear as possible solutions.

The Gypsy ethnic groups with different mother tongues still maintain the practice of rivalry between themselves and try to enforce the general hierarchy of Gypsy society. However, there is no single hierarchy accepted by all. It is perhaps generally accepted that the Boyash groups, whose mother tongue is Romanian, feel that both Hungarian and Romany Gypsies despise and shun them, even though they believe that they have the largest intelligentsia and have even established a high school in the town of Pécs, the Gandhi High School. Vlach Gypsies, especially those who managed to achieve economic independence and believe themselves to be rich, clearly place themselves at the top of the hierarchy. They speak with contempt about those they

call Romungros, even the musicians, whom they refer to as the “500 forint people”, alluding to the fact that these only make enough money with their music to live from day to day. They look upon the Gypsies who make a living in industry or agriculture as slaves of labour, who are not true Gypsies not only because they do not speak the language but because they have given up the Gypsy form of life and imitate the *gadje*. Certain poorer groups, however, whose mother tongue is the Gypsy language believe that the highest among the Gypsies are the gentlemen, the musicians – but they reserve this term strictly for those who actually play music.

Musicians – the real ones – place themselves at the top of the hierarchy and proudly believe that their music promotes Hungarian composed music (which they believe to be Gypsy music actually) and elevates the image of the country. They define themselves strictly as Hungarian citizens belonging to the higher strata of the entire society and are “respected people” since they conform to society’s set of values. They believe that prejudices and misjudgements about the Gypsies are caused by Vlach Gypsies. The rich ones have created their wealth by incorrect and criminal means, and therefore deserve the judgement of society while the poor ones – who have only themselves to blame for their poverty – give musicians a bad reputation with their backward lifestyles, since society is prone to make generalisations. They are afraid that the opinion about Vlach Gypsies will be applied to them too, and thus defeat their endeavours to integrate.

## IV. LINGUISTIC GROUPS AND USAGE AMONG THE HUNGARIAN GYPSIES/ROMA<sup>1</sup>

ISTVÁN KEMÉNY

Hungarian Gypsies or Roma belong to three main linguistic groups: the Hungarian Gypsies or Romungro, who speak Hungarian and who call themselves “musician Gypsies”; the bilingual (Hungarian and Gypsy) Vlach Gypsies, who call themselves “Roma” or “Rom”; and the Hungarian-Romanian bilingual Romanian Gypsies, who call themselves “Boyash”.

One third of the Gypsies registered by the census on 31 January 1893 were either fresh immigrants or the children of immigrants who arrived in the country after 1850. Accordingly, the mother tongue of 38% was Hungarian, 30% Gypsy and 24% Romanian, while the mother tongue of the rest was Slovak, Serbian, German, Ruthenian, Croatian or some other language. There were significant differences between the various regions of the country from this aspect as well. The ratio of Hungarian speakers in the region between the Danube and the Tisza was 82%, while that of those whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language or Serbian was 8% in each case. The mother tongue of 72% of the Gypsies in the Trans-Danubian region was Hungarian, 11% Gypsy, 8% Romanian and 6% German. In the eastern counties of present-day Hungary, the ratio of those whose mother tongue was Hungarian was 89% in Békés, 94% in Hajdú, 98% in Szabolcs, 70% in Szatmár and 45% in Bihar; while those with Gypsy as their mother tongue constituted 12% in Bihar and 17% in Szatmár. The ratio of the Boyash was 29% in Bihar and 13% in Szatmár. In the northern counties the ratio of the Romungro was 76% in Nógrád, 88% in Borsod, 75% in Abaúj and 47% in Zemplén, that of Vlach Gypsies was 16% in Nógrád, 12% in Abaúj and 29% in Zemplén. In these counties there were also Gypsies whose mother tongue was Slovak: 8% in Nógrád, 11% in Abaúj, 22% in Zemplén and 10% in Borsod.

In January 1983, in the area of present-day Hungary, the proportion of Gypsies whose mother tongue was Hungarian was 79.5%, that of those whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language was 10%, Romanian 4.5%, while the remaining 6% had Slovak, Serbian, German, Ruthenian, Croatian

<sup>1</sup> Re-edited and synthesised versions of studies published in *The Hungarian Roma* (Ed. István Kemény).

or other languages as their mother tongue. Hence, there was an extremely marked difference between the former territory of the country and the part of it that is present-day Hungary. This difference is even greater if we compare the Gypsy population of what is present-day Hungary to Transsylvania, where the proportion of Gypsies whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language was 42%, while 39% had Romanian as their mother tongue, or if we take the angle of the rivers Tisza and Maros, where the proportion of those whose mother tongue was Hungarian was only 5%. From this it is obvious that in 1893 the majority of the Gypsy population of what is present-day Hungary were the descendants of older immigrants who had arrived in the country well before 1850 or even before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those, however, whose mother tongue was not Hungarian could well have been fresh immigrants, for example in Baranya County, where many Boyash and Vlach Gypsies came from Southern Slav territories and the proportion of the Romungro was 53%, or in Bács-Bodrog County, where Vlach (22.5%), Serbian (38.5%) and Boyash (4%) Gypsies arrived from the south and where the proportion of the Romungro was 34%.

#### *The 1971 Nation-wide Survey*

By the time of the 1971 nation-wide survey the distribution of the Gypsies in Hungary according to their mother tongues had changed. At that time 71.0% of Gypsies had Hungarian as their mother tongue, 21.2% the Gypsy language, 7.6% Romanian and 0.2% other languages. The size of the Gypsy population was 320,000, 224,000 of them had Hungarian as their mother tongue, 61,000 the Gypsy language and 25,000 Romanian. Thus, in 78 years the total size of the population of the Gypsies increased almost by five times, within which the number of the Romungro increased by four times, the number of Vlach Gypsies by almost nine times and the Boyash by more than eight times. An increase of 8 or 9 (or even 4 or 5) times can only be explained by immigration. The immigration of Boyash Gypsies to Baranya and Somogy Counties was examined by Gábor Havas in his study *The Baranya County Tub-Making Gypsies*.<sup>2</sup> Havas is probably right in saying that a part of the tub-maker Gypsies were resettled here by landlords from southern estates. Most of them had moved to Hungary before 1914, but immigration continued between the two world wars and even immediately after the end of the Second World War. Havas also points out that immigration was followed by a scattering of the immigrants toward the north.

---

<sup>2</sup> In: *Gypsy Studies* (Institute of Cultural Research, Budapest. 1982) pp. 61–140.

Katalin Kovalcsik has distinguished three sub-groups within the Hungarian Boyash.<sup>3</sup> The Mucsán who live in the south of Baranya County are related to the Croatians on the other side of the southern border, the Argyelán speak the Bánát dialect, while the Ticsán came from the region of Nagyvárád in the 1910s, reaching the region of Tiszafüred after living in Szabolcs and Szatmár counties. On the basis of documents in the archives of Somogy and Zala counties, László Pomogyi mentions Gypsies arriving from Croatia and Slavonia at the beginning of the century.<sup>4</sup>

It is worthwhile noting that the Gypsies whose mother tongue was Slovak, Ruthenian, Serbian or Croatian had disappeared or changed language by 1971. As a result of the place of immigration, in 1971 most of the Boyash lived in the southern parts of the Trans-Danubian region, forming the majority of Gypsies in Baranya and Somogy counties. It was the same border that a part of the Vlach Gypsies had crossed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, to a lesser degree, between the two world wars. They made up one fifth of the Gypsy population of the southern Trans-Danubian region. The Vlach Gypsies of today's Bács, Csongrád and Szolnok counties partly came from Serbia and the Bánát region and in 1971 accounted for 19% of the Gypsies of these three counties. The Vlach Gypsies of Szabolcs, Szatmár, Bihar, Békés and Hajdú counties obviously resettled from Transsylvania and Romania and, together with the earlier immigrants, accounted for 21.6% of the Gypsy population of the region.

Before 1918 the arrival of Gypsies whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language to what today are Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Nógrád and Heves counties was a natural occurrence, and such immigration was not hindered between the two world wars. László Pomogyi quotes a ministerial order from 1927: „*Masses of hitherto unknown Gypsy families have appeared in the townships on the Czechoslovak border; moving from village to village, which is a risk to public health and security alike. According to my intelligence the Czechoslovak state is banishing crowds of vagrant Gypsies from its territory, throwing them across the border at points that are weakly guarded. From there they are scattered especially in the areas of the villages along the border.*”<sup>5</sup>

At 24.1%, the proportion of Vlach Gypsies was the highest in the Budapest region (Pest, Fejér and Komárom counties). In this region their number was around 15,000.

<sup>3</sup> “The Folk Music Traditions of Boyash Gypsies”. In: *Gypsy Ethnographical Studies 1*. Ed. Gábor Barna. (Mikszáth Kiadó, Salgótarján, 1993) pp. 231-244.

<sup>4</sup> László Pomogyi, *The Gypsy Question and the Public Administration of Gypsies in Bourgeois Hungary*. (Osiris-Századvég, Budapest, 1995) p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 11.

Besides immigration and relocation, the life of the country as a whole and the Gypsy population in particular had undergone other changes and transformations, yet the differences between linguistic groups did not diminish.

One such major transformation was the process of urbanisation. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in 1971, the proportion of urban dwellers among Gypsies was significantly lower than among the rest of the population, and this was especially so in the case of the Boyash. There were marked differences among the proportion of slum dwellers among the various linguistic groups: 65% of the Romungro, 75% of the Vlach Gypsies and 48% of the Boyash lived in slums. Partly due to this, and partly to other factors, the average number of people living in the same dwelling was 6.3 among the Vlach Gypsies, 5.5 among the Romungro and 4.9 among the Boyash. Sixty % of Vlach Gypsies, 56% of the Romungro and 40% of the Boyash lived in families with three or more children. The number of dependent persons for 100 earners was 250 among Vlach Gypsies, 221 among the Romungro and 191 among those whose mother tongue was Romanian. In 1971, 33% of Gypsies whose mother tongue was Hungarian were illiterate, while the rate of illiteracy was 54% among those with Gypsy as their mother tongue and 57% among those whose mother tongue was Romanian.

Before the First World War the proportion of children not going to school was 60% among the Romungro, 90% among Vlach Gypsies and 100% among the Boyash. Between the two world wars this proportion was successfully lowered to 40% among the Romungro and to 70% among the other two groups. The period after the Second World War brought greater change. The proportion of children not going to school among those who reached school age after 1957 was 6% among the Romungro, 10% among the Boyash and 17% among Vlach Gypsies. However, going to school was irregular and lasted for only a few years in the case of most Gypsy children. In 1971, 26% of Gypsy children had completed the first eight forms: this was 30% among the Romungro, 21% among those whose mother tongue was Romanian and 7% among those whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language.

#### *The 1993–94 Nation-wide Survey*

During the 1993–94 nation-wide survey among people who were at least 15 years of age and had left school, 5.5% proclaimed their mother tongue to be Boyash, 4.4% mentioned the Gypsy language and a further 0.6% mentioned other languages different from Hungarian. Since the 1971 survey the proportion of those whose mother tongue was Boyash had decreased from 7.6% to

5.5%, while that of those whose mother tongue was the Gypsy language had decreased from 21.2% to 4.4%.

*Distribution of Gypsies according to mother tongues in 1971 and 1993 (%)*

	<i>Hungarian</i>	<i>Boyash</i>	<i>Gypsy</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1971	71.0	7.6	21.2	0.2	100
1993	89.5	5.5	4.4	0.6	100

Those whose mother tongue was Boyash or the Gypsy language were bilingual in 1971 (and had been so for a long time previously); they spoke both their mother tongue and Hungarian.

*Distribution according to languages spoken in 1993 (%)*

<i>Hungarian</i>	<i>Boyash</i>	<i>Gypsy</i>	<i>Other</i>
77.0	11.3	11.1	0.6

Among the Boyash and the Vlach Gypsies we find a kind of bilingualism which Zita Reger has described by saying that one of the languages “*is used as the instrument of intimate, familiar communication within the group*” while the other belongs to the sphere of more “formal”, “official” discourse. (“*Generally this is the language used in education, public offices, the workplace and in communication with members of the other linguistic community, as well as within the group itself when the subject of conversation is education, bureaucracy, the workplace, etc.*”)<sup>6</sup>

The change of mother tongue from Boyash and the Gypsy language to Hungarian has occurred and is going on within the framework of this bilingualism.<sup>7</sup>

The elimination of the majority of Gypsy slums between 1965 and 1985 definitely contributed to the change of languages. As we have mentioned previously, in 1971 75% of Vlach Gypsies and 48% of the Boyash lived in slums. At the end of 1993 this proportion was 4.9% among Vlach Gypsies and 1.1% among the Boyash. At this point we have to note that the

<sup>6</sup> Zita Réger, “The Gypsy Language: Research and Disputes”. *Workshop Studies from the Fields of Linguistics and Related Sciences*. Issue IV, August 1988. (HAS Institute of Linguistics) p. 159

<sup>7</sup> Anna Borbély describes a similar bilingualism and a strong trend of switching languages in her article “The Linguistic Usage of Romanians in Hungary in the Context of Changes”, published in *Regio*, 3/1995. The switch of languages among the Slovaks between 1960 and 1990 was almost as rapid as among Vlach Gypsies between 1971 and 1993.

fact that in 1971 only 48% of the Boyash lived in slum areas was already the result of a long process. At the beginning of the last century the Boyash still lived in “forest slums” far from the villages. They started to move into the villages between the two world wars, a process that intensified after the end of the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> Leaving the slums not only accelerated the change in language by loosening communal ties, but even more by forcing daily communication with the Hungarian majority and making the use of Hungarian unavoidable during the entire course of the day.

Another factor that had promoted the change of languages was that already in 1971 84% of Boyash men and 75% of Vlach men were employed in places where they were forced to speak Hungarian. At the time a quarter, but, by the end of the decade, a full half of the women were in a similar situation. They had to use Hungarian to communicate with nurses, doctors and lawyers, as well as in all official communications. However, it was probably kindergarten and school that had the greatest effect, as in these institutions, apart from very few exceptions, the mistresses and teachers didn’t know a word of Gypsy or Romanian. The process of switching languages is excellently described by Gábor Fleck and Tünde Virágh in their work *The past and Present of a Boyash Community*.<sup>9</sup> Fleck and Virágh distinguish three generations: the 40–50 year-old grandparents, the 20–40 year-old parents, and the children. Grandparents are characterised by „*the functional separation of Boyash and Hungarian. Boyash was used within the community and the family, while Hungarian was only spoken when communicating with the peasants or in official institutions like the school or the municipality.*” Parents had been unsuccessful at school because they spoke no or only a little Hungarian. Therefore, some parents took to speaking Hungarian with their children at home, too. Today the 25–35-year-olds usually use Hungarian rather than Boyash with their peers. They speak Boyash with their parents and the friends of their parents, but speak Hungarian with their children. “*Children enter institutional education at the early age of three, and kindergarten education demands the use of Hungarian. They spend most of their time out of school or kindergarten not within the family, but rather on the street with their school or kindergarten friends. Hungarian is almost used exclusively in this medium... the generation that is growing up now has only limited command of both languages; they are dual demiglots.*”

Fleck and Virágh also conscientiously mention that in the community they have examined in Gilvánfa the view that interprets the Boyash language as an instrument of creating a nation and political prestige is also present.

<sup>8</sup> On the efforts to settle in villages see Pomogyi, *op. cit.*, pp. 231–249.

<sup>9</sup> HAS PTI Ethnoregional Research Centre. Budapest, 1999.



This concept is primarily represented by the mayor, yet his children and grandchildren speak no Boyash. A number of young men have participated in courses whose aim was the revival of the Boyash language, but they don't use Boyash in everyday communication either. Fleck and Virágh classify the families they have examined into two main categories: those who have given up and those who changed strategy. In the case of those who have given up we may note "*a continuous, relatively slow, intergenerational process of the perishing of the language*". Those, however, who changed strategies, are characterised by a conscious, intragenerational change of language. The description and analysis of Fleck and Virágh is restricted to the Boyash community in Gilvánfa. The extent of linguistic changes in other Boyash and Vlach communities is different, as is the frequency of the various phenomena and behavioural forms, and obviously there are other factors and behavioural patterns, too. However, we can encounter similar trends, causes and effects everywhere in the country. The factors toward the switch of mother tongue have remained operational, while contrary factors which hinder or decelerate change have only limited effect. The process of linguistic change, therefore, will probably continue.

# The Hungarian Roma Population During the Last Half-Century

ERNŐ KÁLLAI

## I. A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW FROM 1945 TO THE PRESENT

Before the 1944 German occupation, the majority of the some 200,000 Roma led a settled life and the various decrees about public order or epidemics aimed at their regulation only affected those who remained vagrants. Even though traditional Gypsy crafts began to gradually fade away during the era of the Dual Monarchy, the fast economic growth and liberalism of the age allowed the Roma to successfully find new livelihoods. Between the two world wars, however, the disappearance of traditional crafts accelerated and the Roma could keep up less and less with the technical and social changes accentuated by periods of crisis. The situation was further aggravated by strong Roma immigration from the surrounding countries, leaving significantly less job opportunities for an increased number of Roma. Thus the increase in the social and cultural gap between Roma and the rest of the society accelerated. *“On the eve of liberation the situation of the Roma population in Hungary had reached its historic worst.”*<sup>1</sup>

Conditions deteriorated further in the wake of actions against the Roma following Nazi occupation. The liberalism of the previous decades was gradually replaced by anti-Roma sentiment in public administration and among the gendarmerie. The ideas of “reconditioning”, “civilization” and the establishment of some sort of forced labour camps were considered in the interest of the “management” of the Gypsy question. Soon afterwards forced labour brigades began to be established and after 19 March 1944, the “Gypsy question” led to genocide. The original objective of the Nazis and the Hungarian Arrow Cross had been the deportation of the vagrant Roma but, since they could hardly find any such, execution of the plan actually involved the

---

<sup>1</sup> István Kemény, *Report on the 1971 Research on the Situation of the Hungarian Roma*. (HSA Institute of Sociology), 50p.

deportation of the entire Roma population of townships to extermination camps. To date, history has not been able to provide a definite answer as to the exact number of victims of this genocide. According to the research held to be the most reliable,<sup>2</sup> the number of victims was 5000, but the much disputed estimate of the Committee of the Victims of Nazi Persecution speaks of over 30,000.

### *From 1945 to one-party rule*

For the Roma, the end of the war primarily meant survival and escape from the threat of extermination. The period of democracy between 1945 and 1948 did much to change the relationship of the Roma to the society as a whole. The pre-1944 authoritarian regime denied equal rights to the Roma, while democracy proclaimed the principle of emancipation. Even though the newly formed police force – which replaced the gendarmerie in rural areas – soon became an instrument of political struggle, racial or ethnic discrimination was strictly forbidden and, due to its composition, socially it tended to take sides with the poor. Economically, however, the reallocation of land and the carving up of large estates had an adverse effect on the Roma as it involved a loss of job opportunities. The Roma were excluded from the redistribution of land, even though previously they had, for the most part, sustained themselves from agricultural labour. The reason for their exclusion was that there was not enough land to meet all demands, and by leaving out the Roma, more was left to distribute among the non-Roma population. The process of democratisation affected education as well. Before the Second World War the proportion of Roma children not entering the schooling system was 50%. This began to decrease quickly after 1945 and by 1957 the proportion of school-age Roma children who did not enter the schooling system was only 10%.

Politically, however, for a long period after the end of the war there was no progress as regards the situation of the Roma: even the relevant question hadn't been formulated. The first and for a long time the only theoretical discussion of the situation of the Roma was published in the theoretical journal of the Communist Party in 1946.<sup>3</sup> According to some authors,<sup>4</sup> András Kálmán's study was no more than the expression of his personal opinion, nevertheless after a long time he was the first to apply a comprehensive approach to the problem. "*Economic rehabilitation has to be supplemented by giving the Roma ethnic rights.*"<sup>5</sup> According to his formulation, the "Gypsy problem" is

---

<sup>2</sup> László Karsai, *The Roma Question in Hungary 1919–1945* (Cserépfalvi, undated.)

<sup>3</sup> András Kálmán, "The Problem of the Hungarian Roma". In: *Társadalmi Szemle* 1946/8–9.

<sup>4</sup> Erna Sággy, "Roma Politics in Hungary 1945–1961". In: *Regio* 1999/1.

<sup>5</sup> András Kálmán, "The Problem of the Hungarian Roma". In: *Társadalmi Szemle* 1946/8–9.

not tantamount to the problem of the Roma race or those whose mother tongue is the Roma language, since the majority of the Roma population consist of assimilated, urban-dwelling workers, craftsmen and merchants. The main problem concerns those rural or “vagrant” Roma who do not have regular jobs and income. According to his opinion the question is an ethnic one, since the Roma actually constitute an ethnic group, albeit one that has not been granted the rights it would deserve as such. He correctly recognised the fact that at the time the economic situation of the Roma had reached a historic low, and that discrimination and segregation will only be further aggravated by cultural and educational backwardness. It is also beyond doubt that the Roma were excluded from the redistribution of land even though after 1945, in the conditions of a democracy which proclaimed the equality of all before the law, this held the promise of the future for many. For a long time no movement, no Roma intelligentsia developed which could have effectively influenced the solution of the problems of the lives of the Roma.

Though we are aware that the analysis described above was actually not the official party position, its influence is nevertheless apparent in the principles of the Cultural Federation of Hungarian Roma, a short-lived organisation launched in 1957. Initiated by Mária László, the organisation’s first General Secretary, herself of Roma origin, the Roma Federation was established on 26 October 1957 in the same way as the other ethnic federations, under the auspices of the Ethnic Division of the Ministry of Culture. The objectives of the organisation included the creation and preservation of original Roma literature, music and other arts, and preservation of the ancient language for scientific research. The organisation’s statutes however also mentioned the creation of jobs and the development of schooling, health care and general living conditions. The Federation also played a significant role in supporting the Roma blacksmith small co-operatives formed in the forties. All these objectives pointed in the direction of establishing the status of an ethnic minority – something that the political authorities strongly opposed. Furthermore, the activities of the organisation became increasingly engaged in the management of individual complaints, which indicates that there was significant demand among the Roma for some sort of interest group. The authorities did not tolerate such activities for long, and launched a campaign against Mária László, based on her alleged Nazi past to replace her with Sándor Ferkovics in the post of general secretary. Ferkovics, as a former army officer, was trusted to carry out party instructions to the letter. During the period between 1959 and 1961 preceding its dissolution, the Federation was a mere shadow of the original, dynamic initiative. In the background, from 1960 onward Sándor Végh, head of the Department of Ethnic Minorities was already instructed by the party to work on the elaboration of a Marxist approach to the Roma question. This was to become the famous, or rather infamous, Party Ruling.

*From 1961 to the time of political transformation*

The 1961 ruling of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party defined the Roma question as a social rather than an ethnic issue. *"The basis of our policy toward the Roma population is to be the principle that, despite certain ethnic characteristics, it is not an ethnic group. In the solution of their problems we must take into account their particular social situation and ensure their full citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as provide the necessary political, economic and cultural conditions for exercising these. (...) Many perceive it as an ethnic question and propose the development of the 'Roma language', the establishment of Roma speaking schools, colleges, farming co-operatives, etc. Such views are not only incorrect but dangerous as well, as they tend to conserve the segregation of the Roma and decelerate their integration into society."*<sup>6</sup> This obviously amounted to attempt at assimilation in the guise of a social crisis management exercise. Nevertheless, the ruling contains a useful summary according to which there were 2100 Roma settlements in the country offering barely human conditions.

In 1971, twenty-six years after the end of the Second World War, a nationwide study of the Roma was conducted under the leadership of István Kemény, which provided the most reliable source of data for many years to come.<sup>7</sup> According to the study, at the time the size of the Roma population was 320,000. 23% of these lived in the eastern regions (Szabolcs-Szatmár, Békés and Hajdú-Bihar counties), 20% in the northern region (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Nógrád and Heves counties), 21% in the Trans-Danubian region, 19% in the Budapest region (Pest, Fejér and Komárom counties) and 16% on the Great Plain (Csongrád, Bács-Kiskun and Szolnok counties). According to settlement types: 7.7% lived in the capital, Budapest, 14% in rural towns, and 78% in townships and villages.

At the time Hungarian was the mother tongue of 71% of the Roma, Romany of 21% and Romanian of less than 8%. Two-thirds of Roma dwellings were located in Roma slums. Over two-thirds of the Roma lived in adobe, earth or mud huts. 44% of residences had no electricity. Water mains was installed in 8%. 16% had wells on their own plots, 37% had wells within a 100-meter area. 3% of the residences had internal, 4% had external toilets; 61% had outhouses while 32% even had no outhouses.

<sup>6</sup> "On the Various Tasks Related to the Improvement of the Situation of the Roma". Ruling of the Politburo of the HSWP CC, 20 June 1961. In: *Documents of the Roma question in Hungary 1422 – 1985* (hereafter: *Documents*) 240.p.

<sup>7</sup> István Kemény, *Report on the 1971 Research on the Situation of the Hungarian Roma*. (HSA Institute of Sociology, 1976)

39% of the 14+ Roma population was illiterate; 26% of Roma youth between the ages of 20 and 24 had completed elementary school, the rest were either dropouts or (10%) had never gone to school. The nationwide study also recorded that, as a consequence of the industrialisation process of the 1950s and 1960s, by 1971 85% of working-age men were employed; 11% of Roma heads of families were skilled workers, 10% semi-skilled, 44% unskilled workers, 13% were physical workers in agriculture, 3% day labourers and 6% were self-employed or family-employed, or supported themselves from odd jobs. Employment of working-age Roma women was 30% in 1971, but rose to 50% by the beginning of the 1980s.

The programme to eliminate Roma slums was launched in 1965. As a part of this campaign, Roma citizens who had a regular income were given access to subsidised loans to build so called “CS” (lower comfort) houses or purchase old peasant cottages. “CS” houses were usually built as part of projects, adjacent to each other, while old peasant cottages were generally available in small settlements on the brink of extinction, which led to new forms of segregation in dwelling. Nevertheless, the dwelling and housing conditions of the Roma improved significantly.

According to a party document from 1984,<sup>8</sup> the strong Roma population of 360,000 was completely settled with a permanent geographical structure. The majority lived in or around the capital and in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár counties, mostly in villages. However, most of them found job opportunities in industrial cities and towns and therefore had to commute to work or live in workers’ hostels. The rate of employment had increased further: by 1984, 53% of Roma women had permanent jobs. Half of the active wage-earners, however, were unskilled workers; the ratio of skilled workers was minimal compared to that within the majority population. The process of the elimination of the slums accelerated, but the building of the new “CS” houses led to the creation of separate settlement parts that were inhabited exclusively by Roma people.

According to the document, some 60% of Roma children went to kindergarten, one half of them completed elementary school, and an increasing number learned trades or went to high school.<sup>9</sup> The first generation of Roma intelligentsia had begun to evolve, most of whom achieved success in artistic fields or adult education. The segregated, special or remedial education of children had become increasingly accepted, yet the relationship between these special forms of education and the low educational level of the Roma

---

<sup>8</sup> The data were taken from the report discussed at the 2 October 1984 session of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the HSWP CC. In.: *Documents* 275.p.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

as compared to the majority society was not recognised. Open and covert prejudices had not disappeared; the “soft dictatorship” merely kept them submerged. Society blamed the Roma themselves for their bad living conditions and slow development and the mass media further reinforced the stereotypes of the Gypsy as skiver or criminal.

All in all, we can say that by the end of the eighties the situation of the Roma population had changed compared to previous decades. The opportunity to rise in social rank opened up before many, and those who could make use of it were no longer looked upon as “real Gypsies”. The foundations for these results, however, were very shaky. The bad quality of education and the low skill level of the workforce acted as time bombs after the unforeseen events of political transformation came about, and the debris buried a significant part of the Roma population along with the results and illusions of previous decades.

#### *Following the political transformation (1990 – )*

The spectacular social escalation that rested upon extremely uncertain foundations collapsed like a castle of cards moments after the political transformation. Following the privatisation of state-owned companies, redundancy first reached those Roma workers who had been employed to perform the lowest skill tasks, usually as unskilled workers (this involved more than one half of active earners!). While in 1971, as we have seen, the employment level among the working-age population was 85% (hardly lower than the 87% among the non-Roma population), by the end of 1993 this fell to 29% (as opposed to the 64% employment rate among the non-Roma population).<sup>10</sup> People with lower education, who had been employed only for menial tasks during the past period, now had no hope whatsoever of making it among the conditions of the new labour market dictated by business rationality. This undermined the livelihood of Roma families, and those who became unable to make repayments on previous housing loans lost their homes one by one.

During the years following the shock of the political transformation, the Roma population has undergone a further process of differentiation. We have witnessed the evolution of a (still very narrow) stratum who have been able to successfully meet the challenges of the last few years. Most of them try to make a living as entrepreneurs, some with substantial success. Of course this applies only in a lesser degree to those who have been forced to become entrepreneurs – they can only provide a daily livelihood for their

---

<sup>10</sup> István Kemény, “On the Hungarian Gypsy (Roma) Population”. In: *Magyar Tudomány* 1997/6.

families, but are still much better off than the majority of the Roma population. Others have made careers as intellectuals, becoming public figures.

A significant number of Roma families, however, suddenly fell back to the level prevalent several decades ago, and due to their lack of skill they have no chance of holding jobs. Poverty-induced crime has once again become frequent among the Roma in desperate situations, for many of whom this is the only hope of physical survival. Furthermore, since the political transformation has shaken their financial situation, too, the majority population turned on the Roma with new hatred. Beside segregation in education, employment, policing and housing, which had become commonplace by the mid-1990s, the idea of forced resettlement appeared, coupled with attacks and atrocities committed against Roma by organised groups. Openly racist political forces organising marches to honour Nazi “heroes” often appeared alongside nationally recognised political organisations, enjoying their covert or open support. After the infamous case of the segregated matriculation ceremony in Tiszavasvári, the plaintiffs struggling for the protection of their human rights appeared in the right-wing media simply as the “scabby horde”. Misinterpretation of the freedom of speech and democracy brought to the surface the hatred that had been latent for decades.

Political awakening and the beginnings of Roma self-organisation also gained momentum in the wake of the political transformation. Following the long period of organisations directed from above – such as the National Roma Council established in 1985 or the Hungarian Roma Cultural Federation revived in 1986 – the new legislation based on the ideal of constitutionality and proclaiming the freedom of association, speech and the press allowed the formation of independent organisations. Three specifically Roma parties had been formed for the 1990 elections – of which the most successful was the Social Democratic Party of the Hungarian Roma – but none of them managed to secure an independent mandate. However, during the first cycle of the freely elected parliament three openly Roma MP’s (Antónia Hága, Aladár Horváth and Tamás Péli) were able to participate in the legislation as representatives of large, national parties. In the next two parliamentary cycles however only one of them managed to keep his seat. Aside from a number of superficial exceptions, the parliamentary parties did not attach real significance to the question of the Roma and had no intention of including Roma representatives in their campaigns.

The activities of Roma NGOs took off in a much more dynamic manner. By the end of 1991, 96 such organisations had already been registered. However their operation is becoming increasingly uncertain, financing is uncertain and the awarding of programme funds is often a question of loyalty to



the government in power. The state has set up public foundations granting such organisations support for individual programmes. The public foundation “For National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary” was established in 1995 primarily to support the preservation of minority identities and cultures. The “Public Foundation for the Hungarian Roma” was launched in 1996 to support the livelihood of the Roma population, distributing some 80–90% of its support budget to promote agricultural production.

Act LXXVII 1993, On National and Ethnic Minorities, is of historic significance as regards the political activity and indeed the fate of the entire Roma population. For the first time it acknowledged that this people forms an ethnic minority and beyond individual rights grants the Roma the right of collective self-organisation. It was this act which made it possible for these organisations (now tending to call themselves “Roma” instead of using the word “Gypsy”, which has become increasingly pejorative) to establish representative bodies on both the local and the national level. In 1994 (and following the supplementary elections of 1995) 477 local Roma self-governments were formed. In the capital the district minority self-governments elected the Gypsy Minority Municipal Self-Government and set up the Gypsy Minority National Self-Government with 53 members, which latter received a one-time funding of Ft60 million. These self-governing bodies were elected for the second time in 1998, when the number of such local self-governments increased significantly, elections being held successfully in 764 locations. On the other hand, the municipal self-government could not be elected. In the second elections for the (now called) National Gypsy Self-Government the coalition lead by Lungo Drom won for the second time, and Flórián Farkas was re-elected as president. However, at the start of the second cycle, problems which could only be resolved by modifying the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities became more apparent. The law does not guarantee the financial basis for the operation of minority local self-governments, thereby making them dependent on municipalities. This is especially so in the case of the Roma as they have no motherland that could provide them with financial and moral support, as is customary in the case of the other national minorities in the country. The past few years have also made it clear that, due to the alarmingly low educational level of the Roma population, the elected local representatives and even the national politicians are, for the most part, unable to perform their tasks and formulate long-term plans. Successive governments have tried to produce spectacular action plans and set up various bodies to help the Roma population and reassure the majority society that they are “managing” the issue. These attempts, however, have not been overly successful to date.

More hopeful are those experiments which launch new initiatives in the field of education to enable the Roma to overcome cultural backwardness. Among these we find various bridging and skill-training programmes as well as the now internationally respected Gandhi High School in Pécs or the Romaversitas Invisible College, whose purpose is the training of experts with above-average skills. Albeit slowly, a new group of highly trained young Roma intelligentsia is evolving, whom it will be more difficult to exclude from decision-making in issues concerning the Roma. Another promising sign is that scientific research has started concerning the situation of Roma children in elementary schools and kindergartens. The results of this will perhaps make it possible to change the practice of segregated education, which has clearly proved to be a dead end.

To summarise the situation following the political transformation, we can conclude that there was a tragic decline which not only halted the social ascent of the previous decades but also destroyed many of the results achieved. The significance of this is now recognised at the level of politics. If we do not dispute the fact that masses of the Roma population are living at the very lowest level and are the most despised group in society – and it would not, in my opinion, be worthwhile to do so – then it is imperative to implement urgent, yet well thought through and scientifically based measures if we are to maintain the peaceful nature of the centuries old Hungarian-Roma coexistence. This is especially important now that the case of the Zámoly Roma has alerted the countries of the European Union to the situation – the increasingly hopeless and unbearable conditions of the majority of the Roma might well incite other groups to undertake such desperate acts.

## II. GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL EFFORTS DURING THE LAST DECADE

After the political transformation the first democratically elected parliament and government immediately had to face the problems related to minorities, which had been suppressed for decades, and the challenge of immediate action. We can distinguish two major phases of the course of events during the last ten years: the issue from 1990 to 1995 was the reconsideration and review of the entire legislative and institutional background, while the first government programmes aiming to improve the situation of the Roma population commenced in 1995. Government action could not be further delayed as the political transformation had shaken the economic basis of the entire Hungarian population, and intolerance and the lack of solidarity grew among the masses of desperate people who had become unemployed. The Roma population became the primary target of the emerging and strengthening extreme right and fascist organisations. Organized harassment and abuse became everyday occurrences and, fearing unleashed emotions, political decision-makers also recognised that the situation could not be resolved without special state support helping the social integration of the Roma population.

### *Legislation and new institutions*

Right in 1990 a new institution with national authority was established: the Bureau of National and Ethnic Minorities (NEKH). Its primary task is advising the government on ethnic policy and providing the theoretical support for minority politics. In addition its tasks include the continuous monitoring and analysis of the situation of minorities and liaising with minority representatives. From the mid-1990s the Bureau has taken a decisive role in the formulation of Roma-related short and medium-term programmes and is now preparing a long-term strategic programme. A significant and widely acknowledged step forward was that, as of 1998, a separate vice-president of the Bureau is responsible for the coordination of Roma affairs. On the other hand, the reorganisation exercise of 1998, which placed the Bureau under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs instead of the Prime Minister's Office, received much criticism. It was primarily representatives of the Roma who felt that the Bureau had thus lost some of its weight, also noting that it is not very fortunate that the institution dealing with Roma affairs is ranked together with the judiciary and the prison system. Overall, however, there is general agreement that NEKH's activities are necessary, though

many believe it would be useful to elevate the status of the Bureau within the state hierarchy, thereby signifying the importance of its activities.

After the political transformation, the most important element of legislation concerning minorities which defined further progress and provided the basis for institutional framework was Act LXXVII 1993, On the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, passed with a majority of 96%. This was an important step, since for the first time it established the legal recognition of the Hungarian Roma as a minority. Singularly in Europe, the Act enshrines minority rights to which both individuals and communities are entitled. The significance of this is that it grants minorities the opportunity to establish organisations, create minority self-governments or even achieve independent territorial organisation (autonomy). The Act solves the question of the criteria for belonging to a minority on the basis of the principle of self-definition. This principle provides a sound basis for the proclamation of identity, though it has also led to several problems during the past few years. Suffice it to recall only the notorious “cuckoo” case, when someone became a member of a minority self-government even though he had nothing to do with that minority. To avoid such frauds, minority organisations have been urging for years that the date of the elections of minority self-governments be different from that of the “ordinary” local self-government elections, or that membership in a minority organisation be a precondition for candidacy. It is also important to note that the Act provided for programmes in the public service media, recognised minority languages, the possibilities of establishing cultural institutions, the bases of the right to tuition and education, the right of minority representation in Parliament and the institution of an ombudsman for minority rights.

However, we also have to mention the shortcomings of the Act. First and foremost is the lack of sanctions. There is not much point in formulating what constitutes forbidden conduct and stipulating parliamentary representation if breaches against, or omission of these provisions do not entail any legal consequences, and if such are not provided for by other laws either. Another problem is that the Act does not ensure the financial conditions of the successful operation of minority self-governments. Multi-channel financing (supplementary financing from local councils, tenders) to complement the state’s normative support is rather uncertain, making it difficult to make long-term plans. This leads to the dependency of such bodies on local councils. It is also important to note that the Roma have no independent country of origin, which could extend moral and financial support. The scarcity of finances jeopardises successful operation, especially if minority self-governments intend to conscientiously fulfil their tasks and exercise their rights

provided for by law. On the basis of the ongoing debate of the amendment of the Act, we can expect positive changes. Minorities will probably achieve parliamentary representation on the basis of an acceptable compromise, but there has been no final agreement yet as to exactly how this will be carried out. We have no information, however, about any efforts to regulate financing and implement a system of sanctions.

Other important laws have also been passed which directly affect the situation of Roma in Hungary. Such, for example, was the 1996 amendment of Act LXXIX 1993, On Public Education, which defined the opportunities for national and local minority self-governments to establish and operate public educational institutions. Ministry of Education order no. 32/1997 provides for the principles of the kindergarten and school education of national and ethnic minorities. Its primary objectives include the definition of the principles of a system of education that fits the children's age characteristics and individual levels of development, promotes the learning of minority languages and cultures, as well as the preservation and development of cultural traditions. The order details the possible forms of education and the criteria systems related thereto. However, due to the complexity of the system, local councils and schools are often unaware of the possibility of the application of these forms; the various forms of education are often mixed up and even more often educators ignore parental wishes and consent.

Extremely important from the point of view of the Roma population was Act LIX 1993, On the Ombudsman for the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities. The task of the minority ombudsman – as laid down in the constitution as well – is to investigate abuses of constitutional rights and initiate general or individual measures for the remedy of such. The events of recent years and the reports of the ombudsman indicate that the creation of this institution was indeed necessary; its activities are indispensable for the functioning of a constitutional state. The ombudsman, however, has very limited potential of rectifying the abuses that come to light. The right of proposal and initiation of measures often does not fulfil its purpose, and the case of Roma appealing to the public is not always effective. It would definitely be necessary to broaden the ombudsman's sphere of authority.

The declared purpose of government order no. 1121/1995 (XII.7) on the Establishment of the Public Foundation for the Hungarian Roma was to promote equal opportunities.

### *Medium-term action plans*

Government order 1120/1995 (XII.7) was the first significant government initiative which expressly sought a remedy for the increasingly impossible situation of the Roma. As a first step in this direction a Co-ordination Council for Roma Affairs was set up to harmonise the work of the ministries and the various national institutions, to promote finding a solution to the problems of the Roma and to support their social integration. Its declared objectives include the elaboration of a medium and a long-term programme to promote equal opportunities. Another, closely related government order was no. 1125/1995 (XII.12), a document which deals with the most urgent tasks concerning the situation of Roma in Hungary. Recognising the urgent necessity for government participation, this order prescribes the creation of action plans in various areas for the ministries.

The first medium-term action plan, Government order no. 1093/1997 (VII.29), was based on these government orders issued in 1995 and tried to comprehensively assess and define the tasks necessary for the social integration of the Roma. Its first part contains the measures to be taken during 1997 and 1998. In the field of *culture and education* the programme declares the necessity for the development of tuition fee and child protection support, the elimination of segregation in education, the further development of regional programmes for talented children (e.g. Gandhi High School and College) and the broadening of their networks, plus the establishment of boarding schools for talented pupils. In the field of *employment* the programme's objectives include the elimination of Roma slums, the creation of new employment schemes and the development of existing ones, the integration of Roma students into the vocational training system and the implementation of farming programmes. *Regional tasks* include the implementation of comprehensive crisis management programmes in areas with a high concentration of disadvantaged groups, i.e. where Roma form a significant part of the population. With respect to *anti-discrimination measures*, the programmes attach importance to the assessment of the necessity of further legislation and the inclusion of information about the Roma into police training. In the field of *communication*, finally, the programme speaks of the necessity for the elaboration of a PR strategy related to the development of the conditions of the Roma. The second part of the action plan lays down the guidelines for later measures, including support for the higher education of Roma students, the role of minority self-governments in the struggle against unemployment, the development of a screening and health-care network to improve the health conditions of the Roma population, support for legal aid

bureaus for conflict management and the necessity of a realistic image of the Roma in public service media.

The new government elected in 1998 found it necessary to revise the medium-term action plan. Basically the contents of government order no. 1047/1999 (V.5) reflect the objectives laid down in 1997; however, *priority is given to the tasks related to education and culture*. In the field of *education* therefore, presently the basic objective is the development of elementary education (beside the promotion of regular kindergarten attendance and the decrease of truancy), while in medium-level and higher education it is decreasing the dropout rate (via boarding schools and scholarships). In the field of *culture*, basic objectives include the development of cultural institutions to support group cohesion, the training of experts and the creation of technical materials. The basic objectives in the field of *employment* are support for people who are long-term unemployed or unable to start their careers, the organisation of public works schemes and the elaboration of a social land-ownership programme. In the case of *anti-discrimination* aims, greater attention has to be paid to the actual implementation of laws, while the task of *communications strategy* is to explain to the majority society why programmes for the Roma population are necessary at all.

To help the successful implementation of the medium-term action plan, the new government also found it necessary to change the governing body. Government order no. 1048/1999 (V.5) dissolved the Co-Ordination Council for Roma Affairs, replacing it with the *Inter-Departmental Committee for Roma Affairs*. A sign of progress is that the new forum may form sub-committees and invite representatives of Roma NGOs with consultation rights to its minimum four annual sessions. The ombudsman for minority affairs and the presidents of the Public Foundation for the Hungarian Roma, the Gandhi Public Foundation and the National Roma Parliament are permanent invitees.

### *The long-term strategy programme*<sup>11</sup>

Experiences of recent years made it obvious to political decision-makers that even though the level of the present system of minority protection in Hungary is acceptable, it is insufficient to resolve the problems of the Roma population and there is need for additional state measures. Changes, however, can only be implemented on the basis of a far-sighted, consistent long-term strat-

---

<sup>11</sup> As we have no access to documents, we were acquainted with the programme under preparation from a lecture held by Dr. Gabriella Varjú, vice-president of NEKH responsible for Roma affairs (since resigned from her post) held in Budapest at the public hearing of the Roma Expert Committee of the Council of Europe on 31 October 2000.

egy. If we examine the results of the medium-term and long-term programmes, it is evident that even though the efforts made have been positive, the conditions of the Roma population have not improved but have, in fact, deteriorated. The causes for this are the age-old poor living circumstances of the Roma and the scarcity of the country's economic resources. Representatives of Roma organisations and independent experts, however, attach at least as much importance to the defects and inconsistencies of the state's Roma policies, as well as the fact that several – not specifically Roma-related – legislative acts in various fields (child protection, social policy, family tax reductions) put the Roma at a greater handicap than they were years ago. The question of the utilisation of funds for the solution of the problems of the Roma is much disputed as well. According to statistics, in the year 2000 the budget reserved some Ft4.85 billion for the realisation of the objectives of the medium-term programme and a further Ft2.2 billion for other minority-related tasks, totalling to Ft7 billion. The problem, however, is that these funds are distributed among the budgets of the various ministries and there are no established procedures to supervise the actual spending – in particular, representatives of Roma organisations have no possibility of exercising such supervision. Such lack of transparency hinders the successful implementation of the programme, even though it would be a basic pre-condition for a long-term strategy.

After assessing the deficiencies and errors of the implementation of previous programmes, the long-term strategy declares as its objective the social and economic integration of the Roma population in Hungary, while maintaining their identity. Other objectives include the creation of jobs and the promotion of equal opportunities for the Roma to participate in society and politics. The programme intends to provide guidelines for changing the impossible situation of the Roma via a set of *principles*. Such principles include social solidarity and responsibility, partnership (Roma participation), subsidiarity and decentralisation (the local resolution of local problems), as well as the necessity of preserving and protecting the values of Roma culture. Further principles are the development of the legal framework against negative discrimination, transparency and publicity, and the necessity of a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to the question. To ensure the financial basis for the implementation sustainability of the programme, the strategy recommends *a greater concentration of financial resources*. An important objective of the plan is *the creation and consistent implementation of a system of supervision and monitoring*. To effectively improve the conditions of the Roma, two *sectoral priorities* have been defined: improvement of the conditions of education and employment to promote the self-sustaining



ability of families. An interesting element is the definition of trans-sectoral, so called *horizontal priorities*, such as the elimination of social and political segregation and the promotion of Roma participation.

According to plans, the long-term strategic programme will be put to broad public debate where all parties concerned will have their say, thereby helping to eliminate potential errors. The opinion according to which yet again this programme is no more than a set of generalities and principles and contains few references appertaining to concrete methods to resolve the extremely serious situation has already been formulated by representatives of Roma organisations. Final acceptance of the programme will probably be preceded by heated debates. Everyone agrees, however, that, beside the participation of the Roma and non-Roma population, the greatest responsibility has to be assumed by the state, and that improvement of the living conditions of the Hungarian Roma population is only possible with strong support from the European Union.

# The Roma/Gypsies of Hungary and the Economy<sup>1</sup>

ISTVÁN KEMÉNY

## *1. Occupations at the end of the 19th century*

The 1893 Gypsy census, the most comprehensive registry of the Roma population to date reports the distribution of the various occupations some 100 years ago. The publication containing the results of the census<sup>2</sup> contains records of 273,000 persons, or 275,000 if we also include the army, the police and those who were under arrest, but it also mentions that because of the ruling of the capital's authorities, Budapest Gypsies were not recorded. Including them, the number of Roma living in the territory of the country at the time was 280,000.

Half of these 280,000 persons had immigrated during the 19th century, a third of them after 1850, or were descendants of such immigrants. The mother tongue of the majority of immigrants was Romany or Boyash<sup>3</sup> and, to a much lesser extent, Serbian or Croatian. Accordingly, in the Hungary of 1893, the mother tongue of 38% of Roma was Hungarian, 30% Romany and 24% Romanian, while the mother tongue of the rest was Slovak, Serbian, Ruthenian, Croatian or other.

The situation was different in the area that is the territory of present day Hungary, where there were 65,000 Gypsies in 1893. Most of them were descendants of earlier immigrants. Accordingly, here the proportion of those whose mother tongue was Hungarian was 79.5%; Romany accounted for 10% and Romanian 4.5%.

Of the 275,000 people registered, 101,000 were under the age of 16. Of the 174,000 adults 143,000 were earners, 18,000 were dependent and 13,000 had no occupation. The last-mentioned also included those who were

---

<sup>1</sup> A re-edited version of the study *The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy* (Edited by István Kemény) Osiris–MTA KM. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the Gypsy Census Conducted in Hungary on 31 January 1893. National Hungarian Royal Statistical Office. Budapest, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Boyash is an archaic form of the Romanian language.

registered as making a living from begging, fortune telling, card tricks, quackery, theft and vagrancy.

From among those who were earners, 50,506 worked in industry, 4453 in commerce, the number of musicians was 17,000, 5847 were agricultural workers, and 64,190 day labourers. The distinction between these two categories must surely have been artificial. Most Roma lived in or on the outskirts of villages or far from the villages, and therefore could mainly do agricultural work if they were day labourers, occasionally supplemented by odd jobs around the households of the village. For such work, the peasants most often offered remuneration in kind. Such jobs, however, could only have been supplemental beside day labour proper, which primarily consisted of agricultural work: the hoeing of corn, potatoes, sugar beet and vegetables, share harvesting, sheaving, participation in threshing and treading, corn snapping, picking carrots, pepper and tomatoes, harvesting fruit and vine, sheep shearing, stuffing geese and plucking.

Beside agricultural wage labour, day labourers undertook any other job they could find. *"He is willing and able to do anything,"* wrote Lajos Kiss<sup>4</sup> about the day labourer. *"The day labourer's situation is the least secure: at best he can work two hundred days a year."*

Two hundred days a year of work was certainly only achieved by non-Roma day labourers, the Gypsies could get much less work. In the winter there were practically no work opportunities, just as there are none today. Work was scarce in the spring, too. The summer and the autumn presented the most opportunities for work; harvesting, threshing and treading in the summer and corn snapping, carrot picking, cleansing and clamping and vintaging in the autumn. Both Roma and non-Roma day labourers had to earn their whole yearly income during the summers and autumns.

Of the 64,000 day labourers, 28,000 were men and 34,000 women. A significant part of the later came from families where the man worked in industry, so the livelihood of the family was only dependent on day labour to a – usually smaller – degree. The day labour – and indeed, any wage earning labour – of women was strongly limited by the large number of children. In this respect Roma day labourers were not different from the others. *"Most who have large families,"* writes Lajos Kiss<sup>5</sup> *"are constantly pregnant – if her husband throws his hat at her, she conceives right away."* The number of children in the families of non-Roma day labourers, agricultural wage workers and in general, the village poor, was just as high as among the Gypsies right up to the Second World War and even afterwards.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Life of the Poor Man.* (Gondolat. Budapest, 1981, 1891)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

The total number of agricultural earners and day labourers was 70,000, i.e. almost 50% of the 143,000 earners working primarily or mainly in agriculture. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the half of the livelihood of Roma in 1893 depended on agriculture. A mistake, because we have seen that the income of a part of the 34,000 female day labourers was only supplementary, and also that the large number of children limited the earning capacity of women. Therefore, beside the distribution of the occupations of all earners we, should also separately examine the distribution of occupations among the men.

Of the 85,000 male earners, agricultural workers and day labourers totalled 32,000, or 38%. If we were to estimate the extent of the dependency of the Gypsies' livelihood on agriculture, then this figure is probably closer to the truth.

We should proceed similarly in the case of industrial earners. The 50,000 industrial earners made up some 35% of the total 143,000 earners, but the proportion is different if we only take the men. Of the total 85,000 men who were earners, 33,930 or 39.9% were industrial earners, that is the livelihood of Roma depended somewhat less on industry than on agriculture. In this respect the Roma were fundamentally different from the other inhabitants of the country. At the time of the census only 5.45% of the general population worked in industry, while the proportion of industrial earner Roma was 18.4%. Another significant and thought provoking difference is that in the general population there were 171 women for 1000 industrial earner men while among the Gypsies this number was 487.

In his examination of the industrial occupations of Roma, Antal Hermann distinguishes exclusively, primarily or mainly male occupations from mainly or exclusively female occupations. This distinction could only be partially implemented in the statistical tables. According to statistics, the manufacture of rope and brushes was a mainly or almost exclusively female occupation, meaning that rope layers, string makers, brush makers and lime brush makers were almost always women among the Roma, (of the 4163 persons 4135 were women), and lace making, weaving, braiding, embroidery, tobacco plant work, whitewashing, washing and plucking feathers were performed by women exclusively (totalling 2938 persons).

According to statistics, metallurgy was primarily a male occupation. Tinsmiths (60 persons), bell makers (41), whetters (43), tinkers (175), coppersmiths (81) were all men, and locksmiths (217 of 221 persons) and drill makers (370 out of 380) were also almost exclusively male. Most important, however, were the blacksmiths, 12,749 in total. Antal Hermann writes about them: *"The largest number are the blacksmiths who make up 36.5% of Roma men working in industry as well as 22.5% of all the blacksmiths in the*

*country (of whom 7146 were registered by the 1891 census under the heading household and popular industries and 47,710 as regular tradesmen). They have been performing this trade that is especially indispensable to farmers for centuries. In the cities the blacksmiths' guilds often quarrel against them, but in the villages, especially in poorer areas they are near irreplaceable. In many places they are the contracted blacksmiths of the municipality and live in the town blacksmith hall. Much more than the 379 women registered actually do blacksmith work, helping their husbands together with children from an early age. Besides musicians, blacksmiths are the most popular and likeable members of the Gypsies and they constitute the most useful and honest element too."*

The number of Roma blacksmiths was the highest in Transylvania, followed by the Trans-Tisza region, then the northern region of the country, and their number was the smallest in the areas between the Danube and the Tisza and the Trans-Danubian region. That is – as Antal Hermann had also pointed out – the more economically backward and the poorer a region was, the greater was the number and proportion of Roma blacksmiths there.

We may see a somewhat similar picture if we recall even earlier times. At the time of the 1782 census, that is, when the county was much poorer and much less developed economically than in 1893, the majority of the heads of Roma families, and in general the men, had been blacksmiths. During this period the number of Roma blacksmiths was almost four times that of Roma musicians.

During the 111 years between the two censuses, the number of Roma blacksmiths did not decrease but increased. It was not their number, but their proportion and significance that had diminished, as is apparent from the fact that during the same 111 years the size of the Roma population increased seven times, and the number of Roma musicians 10.5 times.

To the 13,000 blacksmiths we have to add those 1661 nail-smiths who, as Antal Hermann remarks, "were not always consistently set apart from the blacksmiths". According to the census the number of women among them was 36, though others also took part in their husbands' work, just as in the case of the blacksmiths. Most nail/smiths, incidentally, were registered in the northern counties.

The blacksmith's trade had been predominant among Hungarian Roma from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> This dominant role began to somewhat diminish in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the process of industrialisation had forced Roma blacksmiths and nail-smiths into the background, especially in the more developed areas.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Pál Nagy, *The History of Hungarian Gypsies in the Feudal Ages*. (Kaposvár, 1998), especially pp.182-186 l.

On the other hand, the tin man and tinker trades probably appeared among the Hungarian Roma in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These were imported by Vlach Gypsies, the *Kelderash* in particular. In 1893, 2077 such persons were registered (of whom 139 were women), primarily in the angle of the rivers Tisza and Maros, and in Transylvania. Half of them were permanently settled, one third were wandering Gypsies and a further one sixth were “persons with lasting residence”.<sup>7</sup>

The tub and wooden spoon makers whose mother tongue was the Boyash language first appeared in the Trans-Danubian region in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but they began to immigrate in greater numbers during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the time of the census there were altogether 5147 of them (3808 men and 1339 women). They arrived to historical Hungary from two directions: from Croatia to Baranya, Somogy and Tolna and from the Romanian principalities to Transylvania and the angle of the rivers Tisza and Maros, and later on to the counties adjacent to Transylvania. Antal Hermann writes about them: “*Using primitive tools they produce primitive wooden vessels and utensils to meet low cultural demands in forest regions, usually at the site of wood production. Their activity is of public utility inasmuch as in many isolated places from where it would be difficult to transport timber and logs without a loss, they are able to sell the produce of the forest, giving fair compensation to the owners and in general making an honest livelihood.*”

During the census woodworkers were classified into two categories: wooden spoon makers and tub makers. Antal Hermann writes the following about members of the latter category: “*Tub making favours residing in one place. An individual team, as an earning co-operative, usually keeps working at a suitable location until they have exhausted easily accessible materials and fulfilled the demands of the region for their products. The best wood and the best market for tub makers are offered by the right bank of the river Danube.*” Hermann also noted that there were no Roma woodworkers in the forest areas of the northern region of the country. He explained this by the fact that in these areas “the majority of the population (Slovaks and Ruthenians) performed their own domestic woodwork”.

In this respect we have to mention the proposition of Gábor Havas: in the course of the evolution of peasant commodity production and the formation of a peasant bourgeois class, “*amidst the circumstances of the strong differentiation of the social division of labour, Roma increasingly specialised in manufacturing the products and providing the services that had previously been taken care of by self-sufficient peasant farms.*”<sup>8</sup> Havas

---

<sup>7</sup> This category included those who because of their occupations ‘remained in the same place for weeks, months or even years, without permanently settling there’.

includes woodwork among such trades along with the manufacture of wicker and cane instruments.

Let us now take a look at these. In 1893 the number of mat and sack manufacturers was 74, there were 963 basket weavers, 1036 broom makers, 767 sieve makers, the total number of those dealing with wicker was 2840 (1633 men and 1207 women).

Much more significant than wood, cane and wicker work, right behind metallurgy came the various occupations related to construction: adobe and mud work, firing bricks and tiles and masonry.

At the time of the census 9385 men and 6010 women, a total of 15,395 people were involved in such work.

Roma had already been involved in mud work and adobe construction already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but their number and significance really increased during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The half century after the 1867 Compromise was a period of growth and construction. The growth of villages and small towns created a demand for the work of adobe builders. (Three quarters of the population of the country lived in settlements where construction materials were adobe bricks, wood and cane.)

Ferenc Erdei pointed out that adobe building was just as regular and industrial a venture as raising walls, laying cane and bricklaying,<sup>9</sup> but *“there is no prescribed period of apprenticeship for learning the trade, nor are there any examinations. In the same way as peasants learn agriculture, this trade is learnt by tradition and practice.”*

Adobe building is seasonal work, it can only be done from spring to autumn. As Gábor Havas writes: *“the place of residence could not present sufficient work opportunities even during this period, forcing adobe builders to constantly move during the season”*.<sup>10</sup>

During winter months, adobe builders had to make do with what they could save during the season. But often there wasn't enough work even from spring to autumn. Therefore adobe building was often supplemented or alternated with other jobs: with agricultural wage labour from the spring until the autumn and with various odd jobs during wintertime, such as basket weaving or work around village households and sometimes with playing music.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Traditional Trades”. In: *The Hungarian Roma*. Ed. István Kemény. (Press Publica. Bp, 2000) 88 l.

<sup>9</sup> F. Erdei, *The Hungarian Peasant Society*. (Franklin, Budapest, 1940) 127 l.

<sup>10</sup> “Former Gypsy Trades”. In: *Gypsy Studies*. (Budapest, 1982) 163–164. l.

It was in general characteristic of Roma families to create their livelihood from several sources and they had to adapt their income earning activities to the opportunities that opened up.<sup>11</sup>

The exception to this rule were the Gypsy musicians, at least those who were licensed, had secure livelihood and enjoyed respect. Antal Hermann also writes about them in a respectful tone: "*The musicians, who make up a considerable part of the Gypsies in the country, are in all respects the most noble, most intelligent and nationally most significant class.*" We may add to this that music offered the sole avenue of social elevation to Roma as is repeatedly stressed by Bálint Sárosi in his excellent work.<sup>12</sup> It was also he who remarked that respect for skilled Roma musicians was the highest in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

This, however, had not always been so. Little mention is made of the music of the Roma before the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it had played no significant role in their livelihood either. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Hungarian national movement demanded modern Hungarian and European music, and only that played on the violins of the Gypsies was suitable to meet this demand.

At the time of the Reform Age (the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), Roma musicians were closely related to the strengthening national movement. This was the time of the evolution of the Roma orchestra style known today. As musicians they also took part in the independence struggle of 1848–49. After the struggle for independence was defeated, "*occasions of tearful feasts gave rise to such feeling of solidarity between the Roma musicians and the gentry or bourgeois communities, that brought the former wide sympathy and – for the very best – even respect despite their subservient status.*"<sup>14</sup>

In 1893, 16,784 Gypsy musicians were registered (16,638 men and 146 women), but their actual number was much higher. The census had not included Budapest, which had the highest number of Roma musicians (three thousand), in several rural cities (Pécs, Székesfehérvár, Szabadka) only wandering Gypsies were registered, and the town of Győr only provided a general description about the Gypsies settled in the Roma district. It is very probable that the actual number of musicians was well in excess of twenty thousand.

Obviously, they did not form a homogeneous group. In addition to the small group of band leaders with international reputations and the good

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gábor Havas, "Traditional Trades". In: *The Hungarian Roma*. Ed. István Kemény. (Változó világ, 31. Győr, 2000) 89–90 l.

<sup>12</sup> *Gypsy music...* (Gondolat, 1971). *Instrumental Hungarian Folk Music*. (Püski, 1996)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* pp 53–54.



many musicians who lived in comfort and security, there were many who could only play and make money at local weddings and balls, or played only occasionally and were forced to alternate music with physical labour.

The 4453 merchants constituted 3% of Roma earners. 1978 of them were men, accounting for 2.3% of male earners and 2475 were women, 4.3% of female earners. 1475 of the men were horse traders. Geographically, the number of horse traders was the highest in the angle of the rivers Tisza and Maros (especially in Torontál County) and in the region between the rivers Danube and Tisza (mainly in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County).

All in all, at the time of the 1893 census the situation of the Gypsies was better than during previous decades or centuries. According to calculations by economic historians, the national revenue of the country had doubled or even trebled between 1867 and 1900, and this growth had a beneficial effect on the livelihood of Gypsies as well. Besides the previously mentioned examples of adobe building and bricklaying, the number of gentry, bourgeois and peasants who could afford to invite Gypsy musicians to weddings or celebrations was also continuously increasing.

Improving opportunities were unevenly distributed between the various regions of the country. In the region between the Danube and the Tisza 10.6% of the 7400 male earners were growers or day labourers (as compared to the nationwide 38%), 28% made a living in industry (as compared to the nationwide 39.9%), 8.7% dealt with commerce (as compared to the nationwide 2.3%), 52.5% were musicians (as compared to the nationwide 19.3% or – after the corrections detailed above are made – 23%). The ratio of blacksmiths was also only 5% in contrast to the overall figure of 15%. We may also mention that 23.4% of all Gypsy musicians in the country lived in the region between the Danube and the Tisza.

In the Trans-Danubian region the proportion of male earners who were growers or day labourers was 21.5%, industrial earners were 37%, merchants 4% and musicians 37%. The ratio of blacksmiths was 10%, higher than in the region between the Danube and the Tisza, but still lower than the national average. As in the region between the Danube and the Tisza, blacksmiths switched to playing music here, too, and simultaneously switched languages from Romany to Hungarian.<sup>15</sup> The musicians in this region accounted for 12.5% of the total of Roma musicians in the country.

In the region beyond the River Tisza, that is in Békés, Bihar, Hajdú, and Szabolcs counties and half of Szatmár County, 15.6% of the total of

---

<sup>15</sup> Gabriella Lengyel describes and analyses this double change in her study *The Musician Gypsies of Letenye* (Zalai Tükör, 1974) Vol. II. pp. 25–41. *Studies on the Social Situation and Culture of the Gypsies*. Ed. Katalin Kovács (BTF-IKA-MKM 1998) pp. 115–136.

6834 male earners were growers or day labourers, 56.6% were industrial earners, 2.9% were traders and 24.6% were musicians. In this region, the proportion of blacksmiths was 21.2%, well over the national average, as was the ratio of bricklayers, adobe builders and mud workers. The musicians in the region accounted for 10% of the total of Gypsy musicians in the country.

46% of the total of Gypsy musicians living on the territory of the country at the time dwelled in the three regions mentioned, and 51–52% lived on the territory that is present-day Hungary.

## *2. Between the two world wars*

Following the 1893 Roma census, the next comprehensive, though representative rather than full survey about them was conducted in 1971. 2% of the entire population was polled during this survey. The questionnaire contained an item about the “primary occupations of the father”, the answers to which provided a rough image about the distribution of the various occupations before the Second World War.

On the basis of the answers to the 1971 questionnaire about the father’s occupations, before the Second World War over one third of the Vlach Gypsies had made a living from trading horse and swine, carpets and other forms of commerce. Over a quarter lived from agricultural work, a fifth were copper-smiths or did other metal-working jobs, and less than one fifth were adobe builders and musicians.

Before the First World War the Boyash, whose mother tongue was Romanian, made a living from making tubs and other wooden vessels. As Gábor Havas has shown,<sup>16</sup> a large part were resettled by land owners from Croatian Slavonian estates. The other part of the Boyash came from Romania and moved near to Hungarian villages due not to resettlement, but out of their own free will.

As times passed, the “estate” Boyash also moved nearer to the villages. Both soon began to supplement forestry work with basket weaving, share harvesting and other agricultural occupations. Between the two world wars a third of their livelihood came from agricultural work and day labour.

As regards the Hungarian Roma, I would like to quote the 1971 survey: “...during the previous generation over one quarter of them made a living from agricultural work, more than one half supplemented adobe building with playing music, while the remaining part made their living exclusively from playing music.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> “The Baranya County Tub Making Gypsies”. In: *Gypsy Studies. Institute for Cultural Research*. (Budapest., 1982) pp. 61–440.

We have to add to this summary description that beside the ones listed above, other occupations, too, were often mentioned in the answers to the questionnaire, including blacksmith, digger, junk dealer, trader. It should also be added that some of the musicians supplemented playing music with agricultural work.

At any rate, the majority of Hungarian Roma surveyed in 1971 recalled their ancestors as being musician Gypsies and said that their families were musician families.

Just what was the number of Roma musicians between the two world wars?

On the basis of Miklós Markó's book about Roma musicians,<sup>18</sup> Bálint Sárosi writes that in 1927 there were over 12,000 Gypsy musicians living in Hungary.<sup>19</sup> He adds that at least one quarter of these were unemployed and that "*the majority of village Gypsy musicians are not included in these figures, because usually village Gypsy musicians were unemployed.*"<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he also states that after the First World War many musicians moved from the detached territories to the mother country. They, of course, increased the number of city musicians.

When interpreting this estimate we have to recall that in 1893 there were over 20,000 Gypsy musicians living in the territory of what was Hungary at the time, and of this 20,000 about 12,000 lived in the area that was to be the entire territory of the country after 1920. Both before 1893 and between the two world wars, all musicians were Romungro.

At the turn of the century there were 106,000 Romungro and 35,000 of them were working-age men, which means that a majority of them made a living from playing music. The proportion of musicians was even higher among those Romungro who lived within the territory to which the country later shrunk. (In this area the number of Romungro was 52,000, of whom 16,000 were working-age men.)

In 1927 the number of Romungro was approximately 100,000, of who about 30,000 were working-age men. The majority were born into Gypsy musician families and learnt to play from their childhood. To quote Sárosi once again: "*In the trade of Gypsy music, the fact that it is inherited over the generations and that they are more willing to enter this trade than any other despite the risky livelihood is worth more than any formal education.*"<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> *Report on the 1971 Research into the Situation of the Gypsies in Hungary.* The research was conducted by István Kemény. (Budapest, 1976) p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Miklós Markó, *The Feasting Hungary of Old.* (Budapest, 1927)

<sup>19</sup> Bálint Sárosi, *Instrumental Hungarian Folk Music.* (Budapest, 1996) p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 50

Of course it would be false to conclude that there were thirty thousand candidates for twelve or nine thousand positions. It is certain, however, that by the end of the inter-war period the number of those who wanted to make a living from playing music had doubled, while at the same time the number of job opportunities had decreased. The gentry that made use of the services of Gypsy musicians did not get any richer, on the contrary, they were losing their wealth, and the peasants who were able to invite Gypsy musicians to weddings were not getting any richer. The bourgeois public, on the other hand, began to turn towards jazz and modern dance music. The situation of the Romungro was deteriorating painfully throughout the entire period, as there were too many of them for the activity that was the basis of their existence. This deterioration did not affect everyone, for the best musicians were perhaps even more famous than their colleagues at the turn of the century. Those however, who lagged behind found themselves in a state of misery.

The situation of the Romungro also worsened in the field of those other activities that they undertook to supplement or replace music. In agricultural seasonal work the labour supply had previously surpassed demand and the situation deteriorated further in the inter-war period, with some improvement only during the second half of the thirties. The number of representatives of the most ancient and for centuries most important Roma trade, which already started to perish during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the blacksmiths, also diminished further and were entirely forced out of the economy by the end of the period. Nail smiths could remain in existence due to spike nails. Adobe making was another trade that could be carried on, though supply exceeded demand in this area, too.

The livelihood of the Boyash and Vlach Gypsies deteriorated similarly. Their living conditions significantly worsened due to massive immigration. Between 1893 and 1930 the number of Vlach Gypsies increased from ten thousand to thirty thousand, that of Boyash Gypsies from 4500 to 12 000. Even if opportunities had remained the same, this increase would still have made their living more difficult. However, the range of opportunities did not remain intact but became narrower. Demand for such products as tubs, wooden vessels, baskets, brooms, mats, sacks and cauldrons was continuously diminishing, as was the demand for tinkering, wiring or lathing. Obviously, what was said about seasonal work in agriculture applies to the Boyash and Vlach Gypsies as well.

The situation of all Roma, thus not only the Vlach and the Boyash but the Romungro as well, was aggravated by the change in the country's prevalent political principles and the implementation of these. After 1867

legislation had been based on liberal principles and this led to the evolution of a liberal system of institutions.

An example of such liberal principles which affected the Roma was the 1872 Trade Law which regulated the issuing of trade licences. The law provided that the authorities were to issue licences within three days of application, and if failing to do so, the applicant could perform his trade without a licence.<sup>22</sup> We know from László Pomogyi's work that certain authorities were in constant breach of this law, but we also have to be aware that even illegal measures could not prevent or hinder the activities of the Roma in their trade or commerce.

The conditions which became prevalent in post-1920 Hungary were entirely different. During the first few years constitutionalism was openly ignored, while later anti-democratic practices, especially toward certain strata of society were maintained under the guise of various pretences. In trade and commerce the principle of liberty was entirely replaced by that of regulation. We can encounter alarming examples of regulation and administrative despotism in Pomogyi's book and the collection of documents published by Barna Mezey in 1986.<sup>23</sup> Trying to prevent Roma from obtaining trade licences was a recurring phenomenon. Furthermore, as the Minister of the Interior ruled in 1931, if they did receive a licence, it had to be restricted to the county of their residence. And: *"In performing their trades they may only act alone and may not keep apprentices; peddler Gypsies cannot take their families with them nor use vehicular transport for their trade."* Another example among many is the Ministry of the Interior's 1928 order on Roma raids according to which Gypsies *"whether they are vagrant or wandering in search of labour will be held up by the security bodies wherever they are encountered and taken to the nearest police authority under armed escort."* This order provided for annual Roma raids by the county police authorities, but Pogonyi reports that in most counties such raids were held semi-annually. He has compiled a table about the October 1940 raid in Pest County when 131 Roma were arrested, and 9 carts and 10 hordes confiscated. (Ibid., p. 137.) Such crude actions obviously decreased the chances of survival. Actually, however, they were meant to demonstrate that things can be done to the Gypsies that could not be done to others.

The attitudes and actions of ministers, secretaries of state, vice-prefects, sheriffs and police officers had deteriorated to the outmost degree and so had the relationship between Hungarian society and the Roma. There

---

<sup>22</sup> László Pomogyi, *The Gypsy Question and the Administration of Gypsies in Bourgeois Hungary*. (Budapest, 1995) p. 162.

<sup>23</sup> *The Hungarian Gypsy Question in Documents*. (Budapest, 1986)

were only a couple of years left before truly anything could be done to the Roma, including genocide.

### *3. The socialist era*

The historical turn of 1945 brought Roma the chance of survival and escape from annihilation. The period of limited democracy between 1945 and 1947 changed the relationship of the Roma population toward society and the state. The pre-1944 authoritarian regime had not recognised the equal rights of Roma and applied racial discrimination against them, while the 1944 regime outlawed them entirely. Democracy proclaimed the principle of equality and forbade racial or ethnic discrimination.

On the economic level, however, the Roma suffered severe losses. To quote Zsolt Csalog: *“With the disappearance of previous consumer groups the market for traditional musicians simply ceased to exist (though it was partially regenerated from the sixties onwards), and history swept away the remnants of the other traditional occupations as well. This meant the destruction of the immense historic capital of the Gypsies, which they had struggled and suffered for... It proved to be an irresolvable contradiction that while the end of the Second World War put an end to the threat of the physical extermination of the Roma population and brought about proclaimed emancipation, it did not, at the same time, provide the conditions of their livelihood.”*<sup>24</sup>

The redistribution of land began in the spring of 1945, signalling the end of the economic and political rule of the landed class, and providing poor peasants and agricultural have-nots with land. Roma, however, were left out of the land distribution. Most of them did not apply, but – apart from a few rare exceptions – those who did were rejected. Land was scarce and the redistribution did little else than transform the country of “three million paupers” into one of two million. It was easiest to exclude the Roma, so that is what they did – even though a majority, over one third of Roma made a living from seasonal agricultural work.

However, due to the redistribution of land, the job opportunities offered to them by medium and large estates were lost.

The limitations imposed on them in respect of commerce by the orders and authorities of the previous era obviously lost their sense. In 1945 and 1946, however, due to the looting sprees of the Soviet soldiers, trading involved great risk and could only be performed with serious losses. It was the Germans who

---

<sup>24</sup> Zsolt Csalog, “The Gypsy Problem in Hungary before 1980”. In: *Bibó Memorial Volume*. Samizdat. Budapest, 1979. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest. European Protestant Hungarian Free University, Bern, 1991. II.ed. pp. 282–311.

took away the horses first; what they had left behind was taken by the Soviets. Swine were also taken away or eaten. Looting had ended by 1947, but then communist rule had started and Roma (and non-Roma) commerce was deemed to be harmful, dangerous and contrary to the interests of the communists and the people, and therefore those engaging in it were persecuted.

In the fifties, however, an opposite trend started which began to bloom during the sixties and the seventies, and lasted until the second half of the eighties. In the Budapest industrial region, the northern region and the Trans-Danubian region forced industrialisation first led to full employment then to a lack of manpower, and it thus brought about a steep increase in the employment of Roma.

By the time of the 1971 nationwide survey this process had reached a level where three-quarters of working-age (15–59) Roma males had full time jobs, a further 10% were independent, family members of temporarily employed earners, and 15% were dependent.

At the time of the 1970 census, 87.7% of working-age males were active earners in the country, while 12.3% were pensioners or dependent. The difference between Roma and non-Roma seemed to be very small – actually, however, it was rather substantial.

Of the working-age male population of the country 2.7% were inactive earners, i.e. health or disability pensioners. Among Roma men, however, the incapacity ratio was 7.3%, and most of these could not receive a health or disability pension because they had not been in employment for long enough.

8.2% of the country's population were students. The ratio of students among the Gypsies was 0.5%.

The following table summarizes these differences:

	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Roma</i>
Active earners	87.7%	85.2%
Inactive earners and disabled	2.7%	7.3%
Students	8.2%	0.5%
Other dependents	1.4%	7.0%
Total	100%	100%

During the sixties therefore, the life of Roma families underwent immense change: the employment ratio of males was almost 100%. The livelihood, living standards, security and level of civilisation of Roma families had greatly improved. This transformation made it possible for a large part



of Roma families to build "CS" – lower comfort – flats or buy old peasant cottages, to move into the villages and towns and leave the slums. A minority of Roma had the resources to build houses or purchase flats on their own, while the majority took loans to finance that. Permanent employment was a precondition of bank credit.

Full employment of Roma males prevailed in industrial regions, but not in agricultural areas. The ratio of dependent persons was 5.5% in the Budapest industrial district, 4.3% in the Trans-Danubian region and 3.8% in the northern industrial region, as opposed to 10.2% on the Great Plain and 15.2% in the eastern region. The ratio of disabled was 4.5%, 5.4% and 6.8% in the three industrial regions respectively, while it was 8% on the Plain and 10% in the eastern region.

There were much greater differences in the employment of women as compared to men. At the time of the 1970 census, 64% of working-age (15–54) women were active earners, 6% were pensioners and 30% were dependent. The 1971 survey, however, showed that among Roma women, only 30% were earners and 70% dependent. The survey report identified two major factors in the low employment rate of Roma women: the higher number of children and the fact that the villages offered less employment opportunities for women, especially uneducated women.

Another factor at the time of the survey was the lack of kindergartens and nurseries. Such institutions did not exist everywhere, and even where they did they remained closed to Roma children.

In 1971 the significant difference in income between Roma and non-Roma was due to two major causes: the high number of children and the low employment rate of women. As a result, Roma families had more dependents and fewer earners. To quote a few sentences from the survey report: *"The lower the income, the higher the number of children, and the higher the number of children, the lower the income. The decrease in the number of children is at once a result and instrument of the social elevation of Roma families, as some of them already show. ... Family planning is nonsensical in most Roma settlements due to the lack of nurseries and kindergartens and the shortage of job opportunities. Family planning, however, is spreading everywhere where Gypsies received CS flats, kindergartens and job opportunities for women."*

In 1971, 11% of Roma heads of families were skilled workers, 10% were semi-skilled workers, 44% unskilled workers, 15% blue-collar agricultural workers, 3% day-labourers, while 6% were independent, family helpers or sustained themselves from odd jobs.

The ratio of skilled workers was the highest among the Roma whose mother tongue was Hungarian. 15% of Hungarian Roma family heads were



skilled workers, while this ratio was 25% in rural towns and 35% in the capital. Among the Boyash and the Vlach Gypsies the ratio of skilled workers was minimal.

The difference between the various linguistic groups was substantial in the field of agriculture as well. 8.8% of Hungarian Roma family heads, 10.5% of Vlach family heads and 47.5% of Boyash family heads were manual workers in agriculture. In the previous chapters we have seen that before 1945 the role of agricultural work was much greater in the lives of the Roma. However, since the majority of Roma doing agricultural work were excluded from the redistribution of land, their ratio in the new agricultural co-operatives was already smaller than in pre-1945 agriculture. *"During the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties,"* writes the survey report of 1971, *"their ratio in agricultural co-operatives decreased further. They abandoned co-operatives partly because of the uncertainty of income and the new work opportunities now open to them, but also because the non-Roma members of co-operatives were usually hostile towards Gypsies. The work opportunities opening up in industry not only meant a possibility of a stable income for Roma – and non-Roma – but also a key to emancipation. They were accepted at workplaces that had previously been closed to them."*<sup>25</sup>

Before 1945 Gypsies performed seasonal work in agriculture or found permanent work as shepherds and keepers. In 1971, 15% of Roma family heads worked in agriculture, but only 5% were co-operative members. 1.5% were growers, the rest worked as day-labourers, growers, planters, forestry workers, shepherds, keepers and vineyard workers. 9% of permanently employed Roma earners, while almost half of those in temporary employment, worked in agriculture.

During the fifties and the sixties, therefore, Roma shifted from agriculture towards industry. Agricultural work that could mainly only be done during the summer never offered sufficient income to maintain a proper livelihood all through the year. Extensive industrialisation now offered the possibility of regular income, as well as the chance for Gypsies to become respected members of industrial society.

Seasonal agricultural work, however, continued to play an important role in the livelihood of the Roma. The most typical case was that the men worked all year round in mines, foundries or factories, while women did day labour or performed seasonal work in agriculture. Another frequent set-up was that the men also participated in agricultural seasonal work, with or without the permission of their full-time employers. During these years most

---

<sup>25</sup> *Report*, p.54.

Roma families had two (or more) sources of livelihood, but it is also true that Hungarian agriculture could not have done without Roma seasonal labour.

Seasonal work was not restricted to agriculture, but included all jobs performed by the village poor. Rural seasonal work opportunities opened up in the food industry (canned food, milling, sugar and brewing industries), in forestry, wood processing, sawmills, building materials, road and railroad construction and itinerant industry and commerce. Those who performed these jobs were certainly have-nots, but they were not agricultural proletarians. The report on the 1971 survey used the term “freely ‘moving proletarians’ ” to describe them. They worked in such sectors of the economy where the workplace often moves or changes and so does the workforce, though usually within a small area. *“This form of life, therefore, combined settlement with a certain amount of migration and involved long periods of absence of the family head.*

*“... During the Horthy era the relationship of the Gypsies and the freely moving proletariat differed across the various villages. In certain places a more or less homogeneous proletarian stratum was created, while elsewhere the ‘white poor’ kept apart from the Gypsies.”*<sup>26</sup>

The forced industrialisation of the fifties and the sixties reproduced and even made dominant the previously mentioned fatherless families, because of the necessity to commute to work. The difference was that the fathers usually had to travel long distances to the workplace.<sup>27</sup>

In the fifties and the sixties the dominant trend among the Roma was that of proletarianisation. For the musicians this involved a degree of loss of social status. According to statistics from January 1968, the number of Roma musicians employed was 3670, but Bálint Sárosi estimates that there were at least as many or even more Roma musicians for whom playing was a part-time job.<sup>28</sup>

*“Proletarianisation meant social decline for the traders as well. Gypsies were forced out of horse and swine trading during the fifties,”* the 1971 survey states, *“partly because the horses were slaughtered and partly because such trade was banned. During the last few years breeding and trading horses has revived to some extent, but only an insignificant part of Vlach Gypsies make their living from this. Two smaller groups of former horse traders became auto part dealers and cattle raisers, a somewhat larger group*

<sup>26</sup> Report, pp. 55–56. See also: István Kemény, *The Machine Grew Up Together with Them.* (Budapest, 1990.) p.107. István Kemény, *Sociological Writings.* (Szeged, 1992) pp. 127–129.

<sup>27</sup> On commuting workers and their families, see Gábor Havas, “Strategies of Changing Occupation in Various Gypsy Communities”. In: *Gypsy Studies.* (Budapest, 1982)

<sup>28</sup> Bálint Sárosi, *Gypsy Music...* (Budapest, 1981) p. 225.

*has switched to transportation (or deals with transportation as a side-job), while most of them found jobs in industry. Those few old families who kept their horses (that is legally deal with horse trading at the state company or have maintained activities confined to the area of a single county, working as a junk dealer or rag collector) keep tabs on each other. They keep aloof of other groups and believe that only they are 'Gypsies' in the true sense of the word.'*<sup>29</sup>

Certain counties strictly forbade trading while others allowed it to some extent, but only within the county boundaries. An example are the carpet traders who moved to Hungary from Transylvania in 1916 when the Romanian army invaded the region. The carpet traders who called themselves Székely Gypsies and spoke a different dialect of the Roma language settled in Somogy, Veszprém and Zala Counties, and in Budapest. They made a living from trading with textiles and also made rag carpets and blankets. Those who settled in Budapest found their place in the society of the capital. Those, however, who settled in Somogy, had their licences revoked and were moved from their Kaposvár urban flats to barracks. In 1971 they presented the image of a community hopelessly destined to perish.

If the possibilities of trading changed geographically, they changed even more over time. Periods of leniency toward private economy and trading alternated with periods of extreme hostility. This policy of loosening and tightening the reins finally led to a situation in the eighties that was more lenient than any previously. Gábor Havas published his examinations of the strategies of changing occupations in Roma communities which he called the "gathering-moving form of life".<sup>30</sup> As the markets for earlier Roma occupations diminished, they were replaced by other income sources requiring similar instruments, says Havas, such as collection of feathers and metal, and forms of trade that could be done with a horse and cart. Collected feathers and metal scrap were purchased by the state, while peddlers could sell their goods to the population. This gathering-moving form of life heavily relies on family relations. *"Involving the broader system of family relationships is indispensable to intelligence and the utilisation of current opportunities... Such communities became veritable large family centres – usually organised around the house of a grandfather with patriarchal authority – all this being reflected visually, too: the somewhat better quality brick houses were surrounded by the adobes of younger family members (children and grandchildren)."*

---

<sup>29</sup> *Report*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>30</sup> "Strategies of Changing Occupation in Various Gypsy Communities". In: *Gypsy Studies*. (Budapest. 1982)

In the middle of the eighties (between 1984 and 1986) Michael Sinclair Stewart studied the life of Vlach Gypsies living in a slum area in the town of Gyöngyös. He concluded that Roma involved in the trading of horses or other forms of commerce were living in increasing affluence, lived in large houses and enjoyed prestige in the non-Roma world as well.<sup>31</sup> In his book, however, he did not acknowledge what was said by Gábor Havas: “*Gypsies with this lifestyle are necessarily balancing on the borders of legality and therefore suffer much persecution.*”

Following the 1971 survey, forced industrialisation continued for somewhat more than fifteen years, not only maintaining, but actually increasing the shortage of labour and the number of open jobs, even in regions that were far from full employment in 1971. More job opportunities became available to women as well; therefore Roma women also began to take jobs that offered regular income. The ratio of earners among women approached 50% during the seventies, surpassing that during the early eighties (as opposed to the 30% registered in 1971).

#### *4. The period since political transformation*

During the middle of the eighties the direction of the trends of change reversed. Employment ratios began to deteriorate, slowly at first, but gradually gathering speed.

At the end of 1993 the employment rate for 15–59 year old men was 64% for the entire population and 29% for the Roma population. The difference was even greater in the case of women: at the end of 1993, 66% of all women in Hungary were employed, but the employment rate of Roma women was only 15%.

Decrease of employment entailed a rise in the number of unemployed or inactive people.

At the time of the 1993–94 survey Hungary had a rather high level of registered unemployment: between October 1993 and January 1994 the average number of registered unemployed was 640,000. This figure had been below 100,000 before the end of 1990 and peaked at 703,000 in February 1993. The rate has slowly been decreasing since: the figure was 496,000 in 1995, 477,000 in 1996, 464,000 in 1997 and 404,000 in 1998. A decrease in the number of registered unemployed, however, is not tantamount to a decrease in actual unemployment. A part of unemployed people not entitled to social security sees no point in registration.

---

<sup>31</sup> M. S. Stewart, *Brothers of Song*. (Budapest, 1994)

At the end of 1993 the number of unemployed Roma was 57,000, that is 8.9% of registered unemployed people were Roma. 37,000 of the 57,000 were men, that is 9.6% of the 386,000 registered unemployed men in the county; 20,000 were women, that is 7.9% of the country's 254,000 registered unemployed women.

At the end of 1993 the rate of registered unemployment was 12.84% among the non-Roma population and 49.68% among the Roma. The data for Budapest show a somewhat better picture (8.1% among the non-Roma and 31.8% among the Roma), while the rural figures are worse. The worst unemployment rates were registered in the eastern and northern regions: 17% among the non-Roma and 59% among the Roma population.

According to the ELAR survey of late 1993, the unemployment rate of the non-Roma population was 11.08% according to the ILO definition, or 13.15% if we include the passive unemployed, i.e. those people who would like to work, but have given up the hope of finding jobs. The unemployment rate among the Roma was 37.91%, or 48.19% if we include the passive unemployed.

We are also aware that most inactive persons are *de facto* unemployed – this goes not only for the Roma but for the entire population. In 1982 the number of active earners had still been five million (5,437,000 if we include active pensioners). By 1995 this figure had gone down to 3,700,000 (3,882,000 with active pensioners included). Of the 1.3 million difference, in 1994 632,000 were registered unemployed, 100,000 were passive unemployed and the rest qualified as inactive.

A part of previously active people became directly inactive during the years, escaping from the threat of unemployment into some form of pension. In this respect it is significant to note that the number of disability pensioners alone rose from 500,000 to 700,000 between 1989 and 1995. Another part of previously active earners severed all connections with the labour service and disappeared from registration once their unemployment aid and income support aid periods had expired.

A third part of previously active earners became inactive not directly but following some sort of transition. Such were those who went on maternity leave and once that was up, could or would not enter employment and so became unemployed, and once the period of unemployment benefits was up, they were transferred to the inactive category.

A fourth part of previously active earners became inactive by going to work in the shadow economy after having lost their jobs. These people, of course, are not, in fact inactive, but as they are not registered, they appear among the unemployed in official statistics.

Let us finally mention those young people who certainly could have entered employment in the sixties and the seventies but who today have no hope whatsoever of finding jobs, and therefore do not register themselves with the labour service.

These trends are even more marked in the case of the Roma, and they started earlier. This is apparent if we examine the ratio of employed, unemployed and inactive people across the various age groups among the Roma and non-Roma population. Let us first take the non-Roma on the basis of the late 1993 labour survey mentioned previously.

In the age group 30–39, the ratio of employed people was 75%, 11% were unemployed and 14% were inactive. Employment in the 40–45 age group was 72%, 9% were unemployed and 19% inactive. In the 55–59 age group 9% were employed, 3% unemployed and 23% inactive.

According to the 1993–94 survey the same trend were prevalent among the Roma, but the proportion of unemployed and inactive people was much higher. In the 30–39 age group, 28% were employed, 30% unemployed and 42% inactive. In the 40–54 age group 24% were employed, 20% unemployed and 56% inactive, while in the 55–59 age group 9% were employed, 3% unemployed and 23% inactive.

The transformation between unemployment and inactivity and the dominance of the latter is present among the younger age groups, too. In the 15–19 age group the ratio of employed people was equally 16% among Roma and non-Roma, 5% of non-Roma and 11% of Roma were unemployed while 79% of non-Roma and 73% of Roma were inactive. The difference is, nevertheless, fundamental. 70% of non-Roma youth were students: 55% in secondary schools, 5% at college or university and 6% in elementary school. The proportion of students among the Roma was only 25%, and the proportion of those receiving middle-level education only 3.4%. The true proportion of unemployment among Roma youth between the ages of 15 and 19 was 48%: 11% were registered unemployed and a further 37% were unregistered.

At the end of 1993, 58,000 Roma were employed and 57,000 were unemployed, while the number of inactive Roma was 151,000, that is, almost three times as much as the number of unemployed. 56.5% of the Roma population between 15 and 74 years of age were inactive, while the proportion of inactive people in the non-Roma population was 44%. These proportions were, of course, different among the men. The number of employed men was 37,000, the same as the number of the registered unemployed, while the number of inactive men was 55,000. That is, the inactive proportion of men between 15 and 74 was 42%, as opposed to the 36% among the non-Roma.

Differences were much greater among women. The number of Roma women between 15 and 74 was 136,000, of whom 95,000, that is 70%, were inactive (21,000 were employed and 20,000 unemployed). The proportion of inactive women among the non-Roma was 52%. When examining female inactivity, we have to take into account that Roma have many children.

When looking for the causes we have to note the lag in education. Before 1986, completing the first eight forms could get one a job; today even vocational (secondary) school is insufficient.. According to the Central Statistical Office labour survey conducted in the last quarter of 1993, the rate of unemployment among the non-Roma population was 12.84%; 2.94% among people with college/university education, 9.91% among people with secondary school certificates, 15.55% among those who had completed vocational school and 17.52% among those who had only completed the first eight years of elementary school.

The second reason concerns the place of residence of the majority of Roma. The unemployment rate is much higher in villages than in towns, especially in small villages. 60% of Roma live in villages, 40% in small villages. The unemployment rate is much lower in the Trans-Danubian area and the Budapest industrial region than in the northern, eastern and Great Plain regions where 56% of the Roma live.

The third reason is that Roma had found work mainly in those sectors of industry that quickly went bankrupt. As an example we could mention that in 1993 the rate of unemployment in the construction industry was almost twice as high as the national average, while in 1971 26% of employed Roma worked in the construction industry or on building sites. At the time their number was 25,000, constituting 10% of all construction industry workers.

However, even these three reasons taken together cannot account for the present rate of Roma unemployment. As a fourth reason discrimination should be mentioned, however, the effects of this cannot be quantified.

Between 1994 and 2000 the country experienced immense economic and social changes. A period of strong and lasting economic growth started with 1997 and this had an effect on employment in general and the employment of the Roma in particular. We have seen that the number of registered unemployed had actually decreased between 1993 and 1997 (from 663,000 to 464,000), but we have also noted that this was merely a decrease in the number of jobless people who registered with the labour centres. The decrease in the number of active earners had continued during this period as well, from 3,867,000 to 3,646,000. However, the number of employed people increased during 1998 (by 51,000 to 3,698,000) and 1999 (by a further 145,000 to 3,843,000). The proportion of Gypsies within this 200,000



increase is unknown, but we may estimate it somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000. It may also be seen that the increase in the number of active earners was steeper during 1999 than during 1998.

This trend of growth and the increase in employment will very probably last for at least a few years. However, the unemployment rate is still very high and we can safely assume that the employment rates of the seventies and the eighties will not be achieved again even in the distant future.

### *5. The invisible economy*

The situation of crisis we have described above is somewhat moderated by the effect of the invisible economy. We have already mentioned that a part of unemployed and inactive Roma are working in the grey and black economy, and it is certain that invisible incomes play an important role in the livelihood of Roma families.

Unregistered activities are present in all sectors of the economy. We shall first mention agriculture, including forestry, hunting, fishing, angling and food gathering. Roma usually hunt and fish without permits, therefore such activities cannot be registered. Certain Roma families achieve relatively significant revenues from the sale of game and fish, while others engage in this activity merely to ensure their survival. Hunting also includes the collection and sale of beaver-rats, hamsters and other furry animals. This can also generate substantial income, though lower revenues are more frequent. The gathering of snails, lobsters, molluscs and herbs can also generate larger or smaller incomes.

At the beginning of the eighties, Gábor Havas provided a comprehensive description of Roma food gathering that is still valid today.<sup>32</sup> Another authentic description of Roma gathering and collection may be found in the article by Péter Szuhay in the book *The Hungarian Roma*.<sup>33</sup> The same work describes actual examples of food gathering and fishing in the villages of Ároktő and Kétegyháza.<sup>34</sup>

In the first chapter of this study we have already mentioned that at the beginning of the century the Boyash made their living entirely from the forest, from processing wood, and creating and selling wooden artefacts. They began to switch to agriculture between the two world wars, though at the time the forest still had a greater role in their livelihood than the land. After the Second World War, half their livelihood was based on agriculture, but the

---

<sup>32</sup> "Early Gypsy Trades". In: *Gypsy Studies*. (Budapest, 1982) pp. 167–68.

<sup>33</sup> *The Gypsies in Hungary*. Compiled by István Kemény. (Budapest, 1999) pp. 141–142.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*



forest had a smaller role to play in the other half, giving ground to mining and industry. The forest, however, still has a role to play in ensuring the livelihood of the Boyash as well as the Romungro and the Vlach Gypsies, at least as regards firewood.

The study by Gábor Fleck, János Orsós and Tünde Virág<sup>35</sup> also points out that the forest has preserved its significance even today in the life of those Boyash communities which had previously made their living primarily or at least in half from woodwork. In the village of Partos during the previous political era the majority of working age men had permanent jobs at the nearby forestry and related enterprises. After the political transformation almost all these jobs were terminated (only six men could maintain permanent jobs). Since then the majority of the Boyash in Partos try to make a living from odd jobs, most of which are related to forestry and the forest.

Some odd jobs, however, involve domestic work among the village houses. "In general, they will dig the garden or clean the sties for food or clothes" for a village family. This type of activity and form of livelihood had also existed previously all over the country and is still present in most of the villages. Agriculture still has great significance in the life of all three Roma ethnic groups. It almost always takes the form of shorter or longer term temporary wage labour performed for the peasants, which neither the Roma nor the peasants register with the labour authorities. Here we should also include the gleaning after harvests.

In addition to wage labour, Roma also engage in agricultural production on their own. Household farming has an important role in survival and elementary subsistence. In 1994, 56% of the households engaged in such farming. For example, 27.5% of households produced a part of the amount of potatoes needed by the family, while 13.5% produced the full amount. The figures are similar for beans, onions, tomatoes and peppers. 13.3% of households killed one pig, 14.7% killed two or more, while 15.5% raised at least 30 chickens.

Especially among musician Gypsies, but also among the Boyash and the Vlach Gypsies, there are some families and communities that produce vegetables and raise animals not for households but for sale. The rate of registration is the same as among the peasants, i.e., statistics do not cover this form of commodity production.

We can still find Roma basket weavers, adobe builders and blacksmiths, but their number is insignificant.

---

<sup>35</sup> "Life in Bodza Street". In: *The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy*. Ed. István Kemény. (Osiris-MTAKI, 2000)

At the time of the 1971 nationwide Roma survey, 26% of employed Roma men worked in the construction industry and road building. Even more entered this sector during the seventies and their proportion compared to non-Roma also increased. The construction industry collapsed during the first half of the nineties and so these Roma lost their jobs. 1998 and 1999 brought a new period of growth in the building industry, but the level of production is below that of the seventies. What is certain is that wherever we find construction work we are also bound to come across Roma, and only a few of them will be registered workers. There are also a significant number of Roma among construction industry entrepreneurs, some of them with a nationwide reputation.

In the course of his research into Roma entrepreneurs, Ernő Kállai interviewed four building contractors,<sup>36</sup> one from Miskolc, one from Tarnaörs, one from Nagyecsed and one from Biharkeresztes. One of them is a Vlach Roma, the other three are Romungro. They themselves are, of course, not actors of the invisible economy, being legal small, medium and large entrepreneurs. However, most of their employees are “black” workers, members of the informal economy. One of them, for example, has 35 registered employees and 150–200 sub-contractors.

As is known, Roma trade in horses, pigs, cattle, clothes, tobacco, coffee, feathers, metal, flowers, peppers, used cars, real estate and antiques.

Kállai's research includes florists, greengrocers, sellers of peppers, clothes merchants, tool and electric appliance merchants, cassette traders, shopkeepers, trade entrepreneurs, restaurateurs and antique and second-hand car dealers.

Roma antique dealers are usually Vlach Gypsies, but the brothers Kállai interviewed are Romungro. Nevertheless, they learned the trade from their father who had been an unskilled worker and loader at BÁV (the state second-hand retail network) and who slowly learnt the trade and became an appraiser. *“He could tell at first glance the period of a piece of furniture or a painting, whether it was genuine or not and how much it was worth. We started to learn the basics from him. We aren't educated people, but we have read very many books on this subject... But all this technical knowledge isn't enough if you want to deal with antiques. What you have to understand is human nature. It is not the object you have to look at first when you go buying, but the seller. If we can decide whether we are up against a swindler or an honest man, that's half success. Even if we are convinced that a picture is*

---

<sup>36</sup> “Roma Entrepreneurs in 1998”. In: *The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy*. Ed. István Kemény. (Osiris-MTAKI, 2000)

*the genuine article and we'd be making a good deal to buy it, if we don't trust the seller; we don't buy."*

The T. brothers (let us refer to the antique dealers interviewed by this name) had a shop but they sold it. They found taxes too high, but the main reason was *"it's too conspicuous to have an antique shop."* The T. brothers weren't rich enough to pay for "protection" or to employ their own guards. Ten years previously, they said in 1998, their monthly revenue was 200,000–300,000 forints which had to provide for three families and 14 people. (One may ask, but never answer the question how much it would be now, had they kept the shop.) In 1998 they still made a monthly 200,000–300,000 from antiques without a shop or a licence, but by then they were mainly dealing with cars and flats. One of the brothers also confided that *"there is a certain circle"* whose members have *"very much money and they feel the need for paintings and nice furniture and are willing to pay a lot"*. But the purchase of antiques is a matter of confidence with them, too. *"They don't like to advertise who buys and keeps expensive stuff at home."*

Elza Lakatos has published a longer study about antique dealers.<sup>37</sup> According to this, some 100–120 Roma antique dealers have joined the National Association of Hungarian Art and Antique Dealers, but it is widely known that in actual fact many more deal in antiques. According to Csaba Nagy, the association's president, the number of Roma antique dealers in the capital alone exceeds 100. According to another, non-quantitative estimate, most Roma who live in the districts of Zugló and Kispest make a living from some form of antique dealing. This estimate was made by Zs. L. who was born into a Roma antique dealer family going back several generations, learnt the trade from his early childhood and became a successful businessman by his twenties. A general rule is that the boys learn the trade from their fathers, just as in musician families. Accordingly, it is very difficult to become one of the leading dealers. *"Most antique dealers try to make money in the narrow strip that divides legality and illegality,"* writes Elza Lakatos, so it is not easy the glean facts from them. In addition to antiques, they also deal with cars, flats, real estate, jewellery and clothes. Their fundamental value is wealth and they believe that luck and finesse are sufficient to achieve it. However, if we read the study with close attention, it will become clear that the most important traditional values of Vlach Roma ideology are freedom and independence.

Ernő Kállai also encountered a Vlach Roma dealing in cars and flats. B. (let us call him that) had originally wanted to be a greengrocer, but, as he said: *"In Pest this is all done by established dynasties and you can't break in*

<sup>37</sup> "They would go to the Ends of the World for a Deal". In: *The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy*. Ed. István Kemény. (Osiris-MTAKI, 2000)

*among them.” So, he made a living from odd jobs and collected enough money to purchase a council apartment. When he began to furnish it, a friend advised him not to do so, but spend his money on refurbishing the flat rather than furniture. Then he could sell it at profit. “And he was right.. ... I started to do it by myself, knocked the plaster off the walls where it was faulty and repainted and retiled. After renovation, I was able to sell the flat I had bought for 200,000 forints from the municipality in a sorry state to a Roma family moving to the capital for one million. This was when I knew that I shan’t be in want again. I bought the next flat, renovated it and sold it at several times the original price. Later, when I was making real profit, I bought several flats and began to employ jobless craftsmen. All black, of course... I began to deal with cars as a mater of chance. I went to the auto market with my brother to buy a good car. I selected a nice red Lada and bought it. But, by the time I left the market, I had already sold it at 50,000 forints profit. That’s when it hit me: with cars you don’t even have to work as much as with flats. ... I have no apartments in my name other than the one I live in. And you can’t see me at the auto markets, either. I have my men who take care of everything.”*

In his study, *Big City Gypsies* Endre Hajnal László examines the business activities and space usage of Vlach Gypsies living in Budapest.<sup>38</sup> Today there are no more fixed Roma slums in the capital; “slum” Gypsies have scattered throughout the various districts. In the country as a whole, the ratio of Roma whose neighbours are also mostly Roma is the lowest in Budapest.<sup>39</sup> Most Roma live in districts VII, VIII, IX and XX. There are hardly any Roma in districts I, II, V, XI and XII. For them the best and most prestigious region is suburban Zugló, the area surrounded by Mexikói Street, Queen Elizabeth Street, Öv Street and Csömöri Street, as well as the area around Miskolci Street and Szugló Street. Somewhat less prestigious but still very popular paces are the parts of Pesterzsébet, Kispest and Rákosszentmihály which are nearer the city centre.

The car is an indispensable tool of dealing. Roma dealers rarely use buses, trams or the metro. The car provides protection and safety. Friends and brothers sit together; the environment is not hostile. Speeding in their cars and meeting relatives in various parts of the city they use both traditional and mobile phones to collect the information necessary for dealing: who has gold, jewels, watches, antiques, cars, non-ferrous metal waste or clothes to sell, and who wants to buy.

<sup>38</sup> “Big City Gypsies”. In: *The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy*. Ed. István Kemény. (Osiris-MTAKI, 2000)

<sup>39</sup> Gábor Havas – István Kemény, “On the Hungarian Roma”. *Szociológiai Szemle* 1995/3. p. 15.

They are not comfortable with investments that require a lot of energy and time, and don't take to long-term strategies; you have to buy and sell quickly, use your money quickly to make more money. Most don't even have a bank account and pay no taxes or social security. They do not purchase equity and only accept cash for payment. According to the changes of the market they can quickly switch from metals to antiques, flats to cars or whatever is in demand. Making such changes is easy as they have no registered offices.

They are at home among the impoverished, struggling, helpless, alcoholic or drug addict groups of the city, and are therefore able to buy well below price. At the same time they have the necessary connections in the circles with the desire and ability to purchase. They have lawyers, acquaintances in public offices, municipalities and the police. In the afterword to his study, Endre László Hajnal points out that during the last few years market conditions have become more settled and would require that the Budapest Vlach Gypsies legalise their ventures. As yet most of them have not done so. Sooner or later, however, they will be forced to choose: either to give up their enterprises or become legal entrepreneurs who pay taxes and social security and have bank accounts.

There are other activities, too, that cannot be maintained for long. In many places Vlach Gypsies still make a living from acting as loan sharks for poor families living on aid. Another widespread practice is that people who start subsidised house building, borrow from them and repay the debt from social benefits. More intelligent laws, stricter supervision (today there is none) and improvement of the activity of the banks present in the field of housing might well eliminate this line of business or at least force it among legal limits.

Many Roma businessmen today make a living from mediating Roma labour for odd jobs, or employ fellow Roma in such roles as sub-contractors for minimum wages without social security and work safety. This activity meets a very real demand on both sides and is a useful service today. It will, unavoidably, have to be forced into a legal framework. However, elimination of illegal activities and the legalisation of those that today occupy the borderline between legality and crime will only be achieved when the rule of law is established in all fields of life.

# The School as Breakout Point <sup>1</sup>

GÁBOR HAVAS

In the wake of the political transformation two contrary trends became prevalent in the schooling of Roma children. The number of children entering the schooling system had been decreasing since the mid-1980s, a tendency the effects of which also became apparent in secondary schooling by the beginning of the 1990s. Meanwhile, a system of per capita financing of public education was introduced, which made secondary schools interested in enrolling – and keeping – the maximum possible number of students. These two factors increased the opportunities of children from socially disadvantaged groups (including the Roma), who were earlier unable to compete in the field of schooling, to enter secondary institutions, including high schools. At the same time they somewhat decreased the previously very high dropout rate. In many places the decrease in the number of students also brought about a significant improvement in the conditions of teaching: classes became smaller, leaving more time and energy for individual attention and the treatment of special problems. The further liberalisation of educational content allowed greater room for the development and introduction of alternative curricula and teaching methods.

After 1990, policy makers in the field of education became much more sensitive to the problems of small schools and altered the decades-old practice, which, by giving sole priority to economic rationality, regarded aggressive and ever increasing zoning as the only solution. Recognising the fact that the smaller number of students a school has, the larger the relative costs are, after 1990 the central budget began to allocate extra resources for the financing of small schools. In various forms this was implemented each year, contributing to their survival. Furthermore, at the end of the decade a number of small schools previously closed down were reopened. The special significance of this from the point of view of the Roma is that the proportion of them living in villages, many of them barely subsisting small settlements, is much higher than that of the general population.

---

<sup>1</sup> Revised version of the study published in the 2000 November issue of the periodical *Beszélő*.

The effects of these factors favourable from the point of view of schooling were somewhat reinforced by the fact that a slow shift had started in the attitude of the Roma population toward schooling. The shock of political transition, which affected large masses of Roma by forcing them out of the legal employment market, made it evident to many that without achieving a higher level of education there would be no possibility of regaining lost footing, nor even of halting the process of marginalisation. This, of course, was primarily recognised by those who had set out on the slow, but more or less straightforward route of social integration during the 1970s and 1980s, a period that was more favourable from this aspect. Learning trades, sometimes graduating from high schools and acquiring positions in direct production management, they were able to achieve appropriate housing conditions and more or less managed to stabilise their incomes and lifestyles. It was due to these factors that, following the political transformation, this group managed to avoid the situation of helplessness characteristic of the majority of Roma, and could – after smaller or larger setbacks – adapt to the changed conditions. They became the beneficiaries as well as the agents of the processes of differentiation going on within Roma society. It was primarily this stratum from where originated the leaders in Roma minority local self-governments and NGO's, who were able to achieve results not only in self-promotion but also in the representation of group interests, the formulation and implementation of programmes aiming at the improvement of the general situation. Undoubtedly it was this group that took the lead in promoting ambitions related to the schooling of children. By today, however, the motivation for increasing the level of education has become much stronger in the whole of Roma society, too. It has appeared in the traditional communities as well, which capitalised on the liberalisation of regulations and, building on tradition, managed to amass significant wealth from income generated in the various branches of commerce. These families also began endeavours to strengthen their social positions achieved by making use of traditional values through the schooling of their children. These examples, as well as the bitter experiences brought about by the present situation, heightened the motivational level of the worse-off groups of the Roma as well, especially those who, despite their lower education and lack of trade, had achieved significant results in the stabilisation of their lifestyles and social integration before the political transformation and who have managed to retain some of these results since then, despite deteriorating conditions. Clearly, there is a very big gap between the simple realisation that today one just cannot manage without at least secondary school matriculation and the evolution of a practice that effectively and actively supports the schooling of children. It is no less

evident, however, that the necessary shift in attitudes has begun. According to a poll conducted by the Institute for Education Research (OKI) during the academic year 1999–2000,<sup>2</sup> 38.3% of fathers employed as skilled workers and 24.5% of those employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers wished to see their now elementary school aged children through to at least secondary school matriculation, and even 14.7% of unemployed fathers had similar aims.

The discrepancy between desires and reality is, of course, evident if we recall that while on average 18.9% of parents would like their children to matriculate, only 8.2% said that they were willing to cover the costs of schooling.

*Plans after finishing school according to the occupation of the father (%)*

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Non-manual worker</i>	<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Skilled worker</i>	<i>Unskilled or semi-skilled worker</i>	<i>Inactive</i>	<i>Total</i>
High school matriculation	37.5	37.2	40.9	26.7	18.4	22.0
Trade	56.3	41.9	49.5	54.2	59.9	57.7
Employment	6.3	9.3	1.1	4.9	4.4	4.4
Doesn't know		11.6	8.6	14.2	17.4	15.9
Total	1.1	3.1	6.6	16.1	73.1	100
N (persons)	16	43	93	225	1024	1401

OKI research, 1999–2000

This is what gives extra significance to scholarship and other programmes aimed at supporting further studies (Public Foundation for the Hungarian Roma, Hungarian Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities, Soros Foundation). We have to add however that the state is not assuming sufficient responsibility in this area, therefore a lot depends on the actual financial situation and intentions of NGOs whose strategies are changing. (For example, the Soros Foundation is gradually reducing its scholarship programme to support the higher studies of Roma youth and is generally spending less on Hungarian programmes, including those aimed at furthering Roma education.)

<sup>2</sup> *Integration and Segregation in the Education of Roma Children* (Institute for the Research of Education, 1999–2000). The research was conducted with the support of the HSA Minority Research Workshop, the Ministry of Education and the Soros Foundation under the leadership of Gábor Havas, István Kemény and Ilona Liskó.



*To what level they would finance the child's education –  
according to the occupation of the father (%)*

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Non-manual worker</i>	<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Skilled worker</i>	<i>Unskilled or semi-skilled worker</i>	<i>Inactive</i>	<i>Total</i>
Elementary school	–	8.2	1.1	3.5	4.2	4.0
Trade school	18.8	8.2	17.0	23.7	25.3	23.9
High school matriculation	6.3	4.1	4.3	2.2	2.7	2.8
Vocational school matriculation	12.5	2.0	9.6	4.8	3.6	4.2
University diploma	12.5	6.1	5.3	1.3	1.7	2.2
As long as they are able to	18.8	16.3	9.6	11.8	18.0	16.4
As long as the child wants to study	25.0	49.0	45.7	41.7	29.0	32.8
Don't know	6.3	6.1	7.4	11.0	15.4	13.8
Total	1.1	3.4	6.5	15.9	73.1	100
N(persons)	16	49	94	228	1050	1437

OKI research, 1999–2000

As a result of the joint effect of the factors mentioned above, during the past few years the proportion of young Roma enrolling in high schools that issue matriculation certificates, as well as higher educational institutions, has increased significantly. It has to be acknowledged, though, that since 1993, when the collection of separate data on Roma children was banned due to privacy considerations, there have been no nationwide data available even about secondary level education. However, the results of a number of studies related to the subject and other indirect information clearly demonstrate this improvement.

According to the research conducted by OKI, in the 192 elementary schools of the sample 13% of Roma students having completed the eight grades were admitted to secondary schools (high schools or vocational schools) in 1997. In 1998 this ratio was 15.8% and had further increased to 19% by 1999. Compared to the 1994 data above, these figures indicate a steady, though extremely slow trend of improvement.

*Students entering further education as a percentage  
of those who completed elementary school*

<i>Type of further education</i>	<i>1996/97</i>		<i>1997/98</i>		<i>1998/99</i>	
	<i>non- Roma</i>	<i>Roma</i>	<i>non- Roma</i>	<i>Roma</i>	<i>non- Roma</i>	<i>Roma</i>
None	2.3	16.5	2.8	16.1	3.2	14.9
Technical school	4.4	8.6	5.4	10.4	3.2	9.4
Trade school	36.5	61.6	34.9	57.5	36.8	56.5
Vocational school	38.3	9.3	37.3	12.0	38.1	15.4
High school	18.3	3.7	19.3	3.8	18.4	3.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N(persons)	167	168	176	176	177	182

OKI Research, 1999–2000

This research has, apart from a few exceptions, only included such schools where the proportion of Roma pupils reached 25% or where their total number exceeded 100 during the 1992–93 school year. We may, therefore, suppose that within the part of the Roma population accessed by this research, the children of the most segregated and most marginalised Roma families, whose chances of further education are below average, were over-represented. It would be worthwhile to compare these results with those of a similar survey conducted by Delphoi Consulting in 2000, as they used a broader criterion for the sample, including those schools where the proportion of Roma children exceeded 8.5% in 1992. However, there appears to be no significant difference in the proportion of pupils going on to secondary school.

We can make an educated guess at the number of students advancing to higher education by examining the data of the various scholarship programmes supporting them. Recently some 400–500 young Roma have been awarded university or college scholarships annually. At the end of the 1980s this was the number who studied at secondary schools issuing matriculation certificates, therefore the improvement in the situation is obvious. All this, however, means little when compared with the respective figures for the entire population. Today 70% of those who complete eight grade elementary schools go on to high school, and half of those receiving their matriculation certificates continue to study in some higher institution. Thus, the divide between Roma and non-Roma has basically remained intact.

The consequences are further aggravated by the fact that even this relative improvement only affects a minority of the Roma population who have achieved or are approaching middle-class status and embrace the corresponding set of values. The majority suffer from the very same handicaps in schooling today as those highlighted by surveys and studies in the seventies and the eighties as being the main obstacles to raising the educational level.

*Where do they go to school?*

The continuously increasing school segregation of Roma children has especially severe consequences. This can be well indicated by looking at the data concerning the schools that were included in the survey sample of the Institute for Education Research (OKI). During the survey we visited 192 schools. This is somewhat over 5% of Hungarian elementary schools, attended by 4% of non-Roma and over 24.6% of Roma children. With a few exceptions, the research included those schools where the proportion of Roma pupils had been over 25% or where their number had exceeded 100 in 1992, though not all such schools were included in the sample. In the whole of the country 44% of Roma elementary school pupils attend schools that conform to the criteria mentioned (proportion over 25% or total number in excess of 100 in 1992). At the same time, only 6.3% of non-Roma pupils attend such schools. This pair of figures indicates in itself just how widespread is the school segregation of Roma children in Hungary today. The picture becomes even clearer if we examine the trends over time, since there have been significant changes since 1992 in this area as well. (In the construction of the sample we had to begin with 1992 information as that was the last year when statistics were prepared that distinguished data on Roma pupils.)

During the last ten years the numbers and proportions of pupils in the schools examined have changed as follows:

*Proportion and number of Roma children in the schools examined*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total no. of pupils</i>	<i>Non-Roma pupils</i>	<i>Roma pupils</i>	<i>Proportion of Roma pupils (%)</i>
1989	65,906	49,385	16,521	25.1
1992	59,368	41,945	17,423	29.3
1999	55,878	33,255	22,623	40.5

OKI Research, 1999–2000

The proportion of Roma within the total number of pupils has increased very significantly (over one and a half times), while the total

number of pupils, and especially the number of non-Roma pupils has significantly decreased. These changes cannot, however, be accounted for by national demographic trends. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of Roma elementary school pupils in the entire country only increased by 4.5%, while in the schools examined this increase was 36.9%. During the same period, the number of non-Roma pupils in the entire country decreased by 24.4%, but in the schools examined this decrease was 32.7%. The differences between the nationwide trends and those prevalent in these schools are even more significant if we compare the 1999 situation with the 1992 data. During this period, the number of non-Roma pupils in Hungary decreased by 14.1%, while this decrease amounted a significantly higher 26.1% in the schools examined. Conversely, the number of Roma pupils in the country only increased by 5.2%, while their increase in the schools of the sample amounted to 29.8%. Roma pupils formed a majority in 31 of the 192 schools included in the 1992 sample, while today this is true for 64 schools. Accordingly, on a nationwide scale the number of such schools increased more than twice from 61 to 126 during these seven years.

The differences between the nationwide trends and those in the schools examined mean that while in 1989–1990 18.6% of all Roma elementary school pupils attended the schools in the sample, 10 years later this proportion had increased to 24.6%. While in 1992 every twelfth or thirteenth Roma pupil attended a school with a Roma majority (7.1%), today this number is every fifth or sixth (18.1%).

The data, therefore, clearly prove that the tendency of the school segregation of Roma pupils has increased very significantly during the last few years.

Naturally, this process is closely related to changes in the situation of the Roma following the period of political transformation, the marginalisation of masses of Roma, the increasing crisis symptoms leading to rising intolerance within the majority society and the general strengthening of segregation mechanisms that give rise to countless forms of negative discrimination, including ethnic discrimination every day and in every facet of life. These are present within the regulation and implementation of the social benefit system, on the labour market, in health care, the selection of residence and the measures of the authorities related to dwelling just as in schooling.

### *Residence and school*

During the last few years, partly due to spontaneous migration, partly because of the conscious discriminative efforts on majority society's part,

the trend of the residential segregation of the Roma population has once again gained impetus. This, for example, is a major factor in the rapid increase of the concentration of Roma pupils in a given set of schools. The first representative Roma survey of 1994 had already proved that despite the elimination of the majority of old Gypsy slums earlier, by the beginning of the nineties 60% of the Roma population were living in heavily segregated circumstances. In part this was due to the manner of the elimination of the slums that itself contained the seeds for the formation of new types of segregation.

A few examples from the statements taken during the survey:<sup>3</sup>

*"In the old days there was a Gypsy slum area, but they demolished it. Most of the Gypsies still live in a single block at the Szerencs end of the village."*

*"The old Gypsy slum was in Árpád Street and the area surrounding it, near the town's outskirts in the direction of Sárospatak. This was pulled down and today only a few families live there. Most Gypsy families are concentrated at the other end of the settlement, near Bihari and Virág Streets. There is a classic slum on Bihari Street, where small buildings of just a room and a kitchen stand facing each other."*

*"The area was finished at the end of the sixties when they took down the shacks and built CS [low comfort] flats right beside them, that's how the narrow bend of Táncsis Street came about. Later they built some houses with social support here, too. At the end of the seventies they opened a new street at the other end of the village (Árpád Street) that still hasn't been paved. Here, too, it was almost only the Gypsies that built houses."*

*"The old Gypsy slum was in the part of the settlement towards the town of Karcag, between the railroad and the former Soviet military air base. Elimination of the slum started at the end of the sixties; the last shack was taken down in 1982. Most of the Gypsies in the slum area moved to the far end of the village where CS houses were built in the same street, but during later years Gypsies moved into the peasant cottages in the neighbouring streets. Today only Gypsies live in Bibó Street, in Tópart Street which is parallel with it and in the New Row, which is the extension of the former. Recently the majority of social benefit houses were also built in this area."*

*"In the sixties and the seventies there was 'the Ditch' about 1 km from the village, beside the railway tracks. Some ten families lived there, 50–60 people in total. The old slum was eliminated by "C" building projects, the*

<sup>3</sup> The descriptions quoted in the study were prepared by the "field team" of the research: Gábor Bernáth, Péter Bernáth, Péter Breitner, Viktória Burka, György Diósi, Gabriella Janni, Zsuzsa Gyorgyevics, Ernő Kadét, Lajos Kardos, Miklós Kóródi, Andrea Kovács, Gábor Kresalek, Gabriella Lengyel, Iván Mándl, János Pálincás, Péter Szuhay, Bálint Vásárhelyi, Tünde Virágh, Balázs Wizner, Zsolt Zádori and János Zolnay. I wish to express my gratitude for their valuable work.

*new blocks of flats were built in an old, remote area of the village. The new project is about 3 km from the village, the children commute with the bus. They have to buy their own bus passes (Ft400/month), the school won't pay for them. Almost only Gypsies inhabit this new project which is actually the old part of the village, living in old peasant cottages, social benefit and OTP bank loan houses. There are no paved roads anywhere, though the larger streets have gravel."*

The partial survival and the newer revival of residential segregation, however, cannot only be accounted for by the contradictory and often hypocritical implementation of the programme of eliminating the slums. Totally new forms of residential segregation had evolved by the sixties and mainly the seventies. The massive exodus of the population from the smaller villages shaken by the forced collectivisation of agriculture already began in the sixties. This process was further intensified by the regional policy that liquidated local institutions and made infrastructural developments impossible. The houses that had thus been abandoned mainly became inhabited by Roma families from the local slum or the surrounding area, for whom even these dwelling conditions meant an improvement compared to their former residences. The influx and increasing presence of Roma families in turn led to the even faster leaving of the non-Roma ones.

*"According to the local notary, the decline of the village began in the middle of the seventies. Many villagers moved to Dombóvár, Szekszárd or even further, to Budapest or Érd. In Dunakeszi there is a whole colony of ex-villagers from Gy. The Gypsies purchased the abandoned houses in the village."*

*"Many moved into the towns during the sixties to avoid forced collectivisation. This exodus and the influx of the Gypsies has been continuously going on since then. Among this year's 24 first graders there is only one child who is not Roma on at least one side of the family," the school headmaster said with indignation."*

*"The prosperous period of the village may be seen in that it had reached its maximum population by 1960 – the census registered 1050 inhabitants. Since then socialist heavy industry has collapsed, the co-operatives weakened and were later liquidated, and the population decreased dramatically. The organisation of the co-operatives in the sixties, and later the migration of the workforce into industry decreased the traditional peasant population. They are mainly replaced by Gypsy families."*

From the end of the 1980s economic recession and unemployment started a new wave of this "population switch" in the settlements concerned. During this period, it was the urban poor – many of them Roma – who accounted for an ever increasing part of the families moving in. They were

trying to hold on to the possibility of purchasing a cheap house after having lost their jobs, fleeing from the dramatic increase of urban rents and general existential despair. Their appearance and the fact that they created a demand for the houses prompted even more “natives” to leave.

*“The unanimous and equal social image of the Roma of Zádorfalva has changed during the last 15 years due to the immigrants. This opinion is professed by both the mayor and the school headmaster. They believe that the newcomers are the cause of every evil. The decline of the Zádorfalva peasant population and their desire to leave, which started in the sixties and strengthened during the seventies, brought down the price of real estate. Newly unemployed Roma families from Ózd and Kazincbarcika began to move into these houses in the hope of creating a livelihood here.”*

“Strange, but there are Roma who moved here from Ózd and Miskolc, some 10–15 families. Others came from Nyíregyháza and Debrecen, hoping to make a somewhat better livelihood here by farming and raising animals. One of the women from these families said: ‘We came with two cars and a set of cupboards, like gentlemen, but now...’. By now they have sold off the furniture and have a single wreck of a car remaining that has no certificate of road-worthiness. They are sinking into an ever growing state of poverty. They came from Debrecen where the man had a cleaning company, but he got fewer and fewer orders and had more and more overdue bills. Here they were able to buy an adobe cottage with water and the adjoining plot of land as well.”

A necessary consequence of this process is the gradual ageing of the remaining non-Roma population. From these settlements, it is usually the younger element of the non-Roma population which moves away, while the older ones tend to remain. Over time this trend increases the difference between the age structure of the Roma and the non-Roma population, so that the proportion of Roma among school pupils here becomes much higher than among the entire population.

*“In the near future the village could become a homogeneous Roma settlement as the Sokac and the Swabians grow old, die out or move away. The mayor believes this is mainly due to the building restrictions imposed during the sixties and the seventies which induced non-Roma young people to leave the village.”*

*“There are about 500 Gypsies, lately they have mainly come from Borsod and Szabolcs counties and the nearby villages. The number of Gypsies moving in began to increase from the beginning of the sixties. I haven’t even seen any non-Roma young people, only the elderly who sit in the pub and mumble curses against the Gypsies. One or two middle-aged non-Roma men could be seen when the afternoon bus arrived from Pest; probably they*

*are the only remnants of the many commuters. If they were able to, younger people moved away for good. I spoke with four women between the ages of 60 and 70 who had moved to Pest in their youth and now came for the funeral of another woman who had stayed in Kálló. They didn't even have any relatives here with whom they could have stayed the night, so they took the bus home after the funeral."*

"The local notary and the financial manager she called in told with despair and no small amount of cynicism that in their village the minority problem is a problem of the Hungarians, not the Roma, since by now they have become the minority. This is partly due to the fact that 90% of children born are Roma – last year there were only two Hungarian births – and also to the fact that younger people leave the village if they possibly can."

*"Sixteen local peasant children attend the school while the number of local Roma children is six times as much. This shows that though the proportion of the peasant population within the entire populace is still 50%, these people have grown old. After 1960 new houses were almost exclusively built by Roma. The Hungarians buy land and build houses in Edelény and Szendrő."*

One of the consequences of the demographic and segregational trends we have depicted is that 30% of Roma elementary school pupils attend schools in small villages whose population is below 1000. Here their average proportion is over 50%, while only somewhat less than 6% of the general Hungarian population lives in such settlements.

During the last few decades, and especially from the mid-seventies onward, processes similar to those prevalent in small villages have also taken place in the slum areas, former worker sections of cities and larger townships. Either because of deteriorating conditions (underdeveloped infrastructure, low standard flats, building restrictions and the lack of maintenance) or due to the possibilities offered by social rise (higher education, mobility in employment), the former tenants increasingly tended to move out and were replaced by poor families, with an ever growing number of Roma among them who were migrating from the wound-up slums into industry. Those non-Roma families that still remained and were in a somewhat better position, reacted to this with an even more intensive exodus from these districts.

*"During the seventies," recalled the headmistress, "the school was attended by the children of the surrounding working-class families. The parents worked in the factories of Csepel and Erzsébet, most of them as skilled workers and only a smaller part as unskilled workers. The main objective for the children was, of course, to learn some skilled trade or other. At the time there were only a couple of Roma children in the school who 'blended in'*



*with the others. They started building the project on the other side of Török Street at the beginning of the eighties and wanted to carry on with it on this side too. So, there was a building restriction on this area up till the end of the eighties – you even had to apply for a permit to build a fence, but never got it, of course, because the project was coming anyway. People started moving out from the old, run-down houses, trying to sell or exchange their flats. Real estate had no value. It was around this time that the Gypsies started to move in. The first families came from Nógrád County, then from Szabolcs and Borsod. A lot of them were illegal occupants, so there were several evictions, too, in which they tried to involve the school as well.”*

*“A significant part of the Gypsy population lives in a single block in the project around the school in May 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Due to families moving in from the surrounding villages the proportion of the Gypsy population is continuously increasing here. Behind the project there is a small forest, the project itself is run-down, there are huge heaps of trash around the waste containers.”*

*“The ‘Jungle’, a miserable three-block workers’ unit is in the catchment area of the school. During the last decade the ‘Jungle’ has received special attention from the district’s social policy department and now it has its own aid institution. The ‘Jungle’ has long since been Romafied, the families coming to live here mainly from the eastern parts of the country.”*

The newest and most tragic form of the “Romafication” of former workers’ districts evolved when, from the middle or late eighties onwards, the mines and factories, for whose workers these districts had been built, were closed down. At the time these flats had been acceptable, but due to the lack of comfort and amortization, they lost much of their value later on. The closing down of the related industrial establishments also meant the end of local employment opportunities offering a livelihood. Those who were able, fled from these areas, and the usually extremely deteriorated flats that became vacant, offered a misleading opportunity for the poorest and most miserable families in the area to establish roots.

*“There are two former slums in the settlement that were built at the turn of the century. One of them is the Vajosbánya slum on the right side of Nádasdi Street, the other is the so-called Low End beside the industrial tracks. Today, the majority of the population of both areas are Gypsies; they are the ‘immigrants’. Most of them came from Arló, but families have moved here from Hangony and Domaháza as well.”*

*“The blocks of former miners’ flats are completely run-down and lack comfort, and the tenants have no money for maintenance. The inhabitants of these flats are mostly Gypsies, many of them illegal tenants.”*

“After the exhausted mines were shut down, the majority of laid-off miners left their flats in the district. They were replaced by the Arló Gypsies.”

Obviously, these processes, which developed in larger townships and cities spontaneously yet in strict keeping with the laws of social change and which have led to a significant intensification of segregation, also have tangible effects on the schools in the area. It is partly due to such reasons that there has been a drastic increase in the number of Roma pupils attending certain schools in the Pest part of the capital around the Nagykörút (the Great Boulevard), especially in schools of the Józsefváros and Ferencváros districts. In the twelve Budapest schools included in the sample used for OKI's research – primarily in the VIIth, VIIIth and IXth districts – the proportion of Roma pupils more than doubled (from 22.7% to 49.1%) in the ten years between 1989 and 1999. During the same brief period the changes in proportion were even greater in the provincial schools operating in former miners' areas or other slum districts.

“The miner's district was one of the most beautiful areas of the city of Pécs. Buildings from the previous century – a well-kept, intact fire station, a couple of miners' flats and the school – as well as the public buildings (for example the hospital) erected between the two world wars and the Széchenyi Pit buildings bear witness to the once prosperous condition of the area. This prosperity, incidentally, had been created by the Danube Steam Shipping Company, providing its employees with security throughout their lives. Thanks to the fact that mining prospered under socialism, we find sizeable family houses and blocks of one or two-room miners' flats beside each other. By today the district has deteriorated and is left behind by more and more of its former families. They say that surface mining will provide employment until 2002, but only for far fewer workers than the earlier deep working had. Adults who are employed, go to work in the city. Unemployment is widespread and almost all the Gypsies are out of jobs. The change of the population is well indicated by the fact that 25 years ago this school had about 300 pupils of whom none were Gypsies, while today 120–130 children attend the same school, almost half of whom are of Gypsy origin.”

The effects of the spontaneous social processes and the new segregational patterns that evolved in the wake of the programme of the elimination of the slums further intensified – already under the Kádár regime, but especially during the last ten years – by the strategic answers given by majority society and the conscious measures taken by local authorities. Though the various segregational attempts are often directed not only at the Roma (and, let us add, mostly the poor Roma), but all other, non-Roma yet

backward and marginalised groups of society, nevertheless the procedures related to them work as instruments of ethnic segregation as well.

*“The slum ended in the seventies when they began to build CS flats in Gyüre. At the time the authorities thought that the neighbouring Nagyvarsány should be cleansed of Gypsies by relocating them to the ‘modern’ houses built in Gyüre. As a result, according to the school headmaster, there is not a single Roma pupil in the Nagyvarsány school today.”*

*“In 1983 in Hajdúhadháza they eliminated one of the largest Roma slums of the country, but in such a way, that the flats built from OTP loans preserved the segregation and the majority of the Roma still live on the outskirts of the settlement in heavily segregated conditions.”*

*“After a time the municipality allotted land and gave or built houses for the Gypsies in Békés. Almost all of these projects have it in common that relocation was done in the vicinity of the former slum or in contiguous blocks.”*

*“The railroad basically cuts the town in half. The area north of the railroad – roughly one third of the entire town area – is the Roma district. I don’t know, and probably there are no data as to what percentage of the town’s Roma population live here, but there is no doubt that the vast majority does. This is also shown by the fact that when we asked twenty addresses from the Fáy Street school, only about four weren’t in this area. The district has no special name, everyone refers to it as ‘where the Gypsies live’”.*

*“Roma families started to buy houses outside of the slums from the beginning of the eighties, but the villagers took care to restrict these purchases to the streets neighbouring the slum. By today hardly any Hungarian families have remained in these streets. Such caution is characteristic of the people of Verpelét to this very day. Roma families cannot buy or build houses on the other side of the main road.”*

*“The Gypsy row is called Dobó II. This name has preserved the memory of the Roma slum demolished not so long ago. The slum existed until 1991 and, due to its proximity to the street that was then called Dobó I, people called it ‘Dobó’. Once they had eliminated the old ‘Dobó’, they created a new street there called Dobó, which is only inhabited by Gypsies. This is Dobó II.”*

*“This summer the Tarna flooded again and two houses collapsed in the Dankó slum. Using the flood-relief aid the local council purchased two houses with the help of the Roma minority local self-government. (That’s when they found out that several houses that collapsed hadn’t even existed officially, they had no owners, no deeds.) There was a house on sale in the other half of the village, near the school. The Roma minority self-government had already negotiated the price, but when the neighbours found out*

*who the new tenants were going to be, they raised the money and bought the house themselves just to keep Gypsies from moving in there."*

"Though several Roma families live among the Hungarians in the inner districts of Berettyóújfalu, many Roma have complained that following protests of the neighbours, the local self-government tries to keep further Roma families from moving there. We have met people, who bought a house in the township, but – upon the neighbours' request – the local council won't issue a permit for occupation of the building, so now they are trying to sell their newly bought house."

*"The mine was closed down in 1992 and the majority of the inhabitants of Farkaslyuk found themselves out of a job. Social aid miners' flats had been built earlier for the old miners in Ózd, and the flats they left behind mainly became inhabited by Gypsies. The town of Ózd had already at the time been obviously trying to move as many Gypsy families from their rented city flats out to Farkaslyuk as it could and to try to move non-Gypsy families into the city."*

"In my experience this phenomenon is twofold. On the one hand there is a tendency of scattering, of diaspora, but, on the other, the trend of residential segregation is at least as powerful. Though the basis of this latter trend is not necessarily ethnic (what is happening is that the poor are forced into lower comfort areas) it still has an elementary effect on the backward, miserable groups of the Gypsy population (who may well be the majority). The poor Gypsy areas in the town are: the Old Rókus area (near Hunyadi Square), where the conflict is further sharpened by the fact that there are valuable real estate properties there, so investors would like to pacify the area and evict the some 500 illegal resident Gypsies, in which the local self-government is their strong ally; the neglected cement blocks of the airport on the western outskirts of the town (there are maybe 100 inhabitants there); the old apartment blocks and small houses of Móraváros; and the mostly municipality owned temporary flats of Cserepes Alley (about 70 families live there)."

### *The migration of non-Roma children*

In addition to residential segregation and the drastic increase of the proportion of the Roma population in certain settlements, areas or city districts, another important factor in the intensification of schooling segregation is majority society's strong isolationism. This is supported by the fact that in Budapest and in the county centres, where several elementary schools are within reachable distance, the distribution of Roma children among these various schools is extremely uneven.

This uneven distribution among different schools is essentially brought about by the same mechanisms that intensify residential segregation. In certain schools, due to the migration processes (moving out/moving in) prevalent in the area, the proportion of Roma pupils starts to increase. Majority families react to this by trying to enrol their children in other schools, whereby the proportion of Roma students increases to a much greater extent than the change in the structure of the residential population would justify. In the Budapest schools included in the sample of OKI's research, the proportion of Roma pupils was already 22.7% during the 1989–1990 school year, while in the case of the schools not included in the sample this figure was just 2.8% in the same year. In the county centres the proportion of Roma pupils in 1989 in the schools included in the sample was 26%, while in the other schools of the same cities this figure was only 3.1%. Therefore, even at the time, there was an eightfold difference between the schools included in the sample and the other schools in Budapest and the county centres. Since then, due to absolute freedom in the choice of school and the advent of 6 and 8 grade secondary schools which brought a different structure with them, the distribution of pupils has become even more uneven. In the sampled schools the proportion of Roma children below the age of 10 has increased to 49.1% in Budapest and 53.2% in the county centres. In Budapest, for example, in one of the schools the proportion of Roma pupils increased from 20% to 60%, and from 40% to 100% in another, while in the same areas there are schools within visible proximity that are entirely "Roma-free" or are attended by only a minimal number of Roma students.

In Budapest, as well as in the county centres and larger cities, those families who do not wish to see their children attend schools where the proportion of Roma pupils exceeds the level they find "tolerable", are now in an easy position since they have a wide range of choice.

Budapest, VIIIth district: *"They had English as a subject as early as the beginning of the eighties. According to the headmistress (she has been working here since 1984), at that time this used to be a definitely elite school. The proportion of Gypsies was 7% then. Later this figure started to slowly rise, and began to increase drastically from 1995. Today it is almost 50%. According to the headmistress this sets off such processes that, though they are doing their best, the school cannot withstand: more ambitious families take away their children. The abler students transfer to six year secondary schools after completing their sixth grade (this year, 11 of the 13 sixth graders have submitted their transfer applications)."*

A county centre in western Hungary: *"There are 349 pupils attending, 179 of them are Gypsies. Incidentally, the whole school is in mortal fear of*

*being written off by the city for good. Year by year they see that from the three kindergartens in their neighbourhood, about twenty children are enrolled to other, better schools."*

A northern Hungarian town: *"Presently there are four state-owned and one denominational elementary schools in the town, each with about 400 pupils. The parents' choice of school is influenced by the proportion of Roma pupils. The headmaster told me that one of the parents went to each school, and decided to enrol the child to Esze because that was where she saw the least number of Roma pupils."*

In larger settlements, those schools that have no or have few Roma pupils, themselves often do their best to meet social pressures for the effective exclusion of Roma children, and thus preserve the good reputation of the school. The following is taken from an interview with the headmistress of one of the "Romafied" schools in a county centre on the Great Plain:

*"I can sense absolutely no support from society. Even though this would be in their own interest. I am against selection in elementary schools, even among first graders. Yet selection already starts there, and not on the basis of the children's abilities. We try to pretend so, but that is not the real basis of selection. Even though entry examinations are not allowed in elementary schools, there can be so-called entry conversations, nobody ever goes there to check just what these consist of. Just like anything else, this can be done covertly too."*

– Are you suggesting that Roma children are eliminated at this point?  
– *They can do so, if they want to. There are no consequences. Or, if they do admit the Roma child, they treat him like all the others and give him no help to overcome his handicap. The handicaps remain, because left alone the child cannot overcome them. So, sooner or later the gap widens as the other children make faster progress than he does. Over time, the child is less and less able to meet the requirements, so before the end of term the parent is told that the child has underachieved again and they cannot let him pass. Then, the parent will bring the child to us. Yet, it doesn't serve children to be selected into the elite forms. I see it on the street, and there are more and more such conflicts too, when a child who is used to a sheltered environment happens to see a Roma child on the street, and you can smell his fear from miles away. So, obviously, the other kid will pick on him. The road to integration would be to have every kind of child attend every school, so they can see what there really is. Because, society itself is not such that you have the elite here, the middle there and the low-down over there. In such a small country as this, everyone meets everyone else. I know from my own experience that if you have experiences with Gypsies in your childhood, you won't be hostile to*

*them. The child is not anti-Roma from birth; Roma and Hungarian children play together and have no problem with each other, right until the moment they ingrain into him that sonny, you have to be afraid of them.*

– *This is ingrained rather early on, isn't it?*

– It is. Even unintentionally they form an attitude in the child which prevents integration. If we make the child conscious of the fact that the other one's skin has a different colour, then this is something he will never be able to take out of him. He will never accept someone who is different. That other one may be ten times better, he will never acknowledge it, not even that they are equal. And this is what I feel to be the greatest tragedy. If it stays this way, we won't make progress."

In schools that have been "hopelessly Romafied", the teachers themselves often give up resisting the inevitable and accept society's negative judgement.

Budapest, a school in the VIIIth district: *"It happened that the teacher told a bright Roma sixth grader to go to another school if he wants to go to secondary, because if they hear he came from here, he'll never be admitted."*

However, "voting by going", that is enrolling children in other schools, is everyday practice even in those settlements where there is only a single school. Thus a change of school means the child will have to go to a different settlement, which involves extra time, energy and investment. From among the 192 schools visited during the survey, we found clear evidence in the case of 38 that during recent years, due to the high proportion of Roma pupils and the related problems of educational quality, the number of non-Roma children enrolled or transferred to schools in other school zones reached a significant percentage of the total number of pupils. Twenty-eight of these operate in settlements where they are the only school. We should note, that among those who go to school in other zones we may often find the children of the most ambitious Roma families, too, but this only goes to prove that social elevation requires the denial of ethnic, and indeed general social solidarity.

In 1992, half the pupils of a school in a small village in Borsod County were Roma. Today all non-Roma pupils go to school in another village with a single exception, the child of an alcoholic father. That is, the village school became a 100% Roma school while there are still non-Roma children living there. Because of the school migration of the children, the per capital cost of maintaining the school increased considerably, so the mayor wanted to close the institution. He had to give up this plan, however, because none of the schools in the region was willing to accept the Roma children.

Perhaps not in such an extreme manner, it is nevertheless true for many settlements with a single school that, due to the "exodus" of the children, the



Roma/non-Roma ratios within the school age population and in the local school are significantly different.

“Non-Gypsy parents started to take their children away during recent years. Eight junior school students living in Nagykónyi go to school to Tamási (the nearest town). Twelve go to 8-grade secondary school in Tamási and two to Dabas, and even from Értény (which is a village that belongs to the same school zone, but less accessible than Nagykónyi) 5–6 children go to school in Tamási”

*“In K. I chanced upon a very interesting type of segregation. Even though on the questionnaire I did not mark the K. school as a segregated Roma school, 87% of students are Roma. Their proportion is even higher in kindergarten. These numbers are shocking, given that only 47% of the village population are Roma. It is worthwhile taking a look at the composition of the individual grades:*

*1. grade – 26 pupils; of which 25 are Roma*

*2. grade – 25 pupils; of which 25 are Roma*

*3. grade – 17 pupils; of which 17 are Roma*

*4. grade – 22 pupils; of which 18 are Roma*

*5. grade – 18 pupils; of which 16 are Roma*

*6. grade – 20 pupils; of which 13 are Roma*

*7. grade – 15 pupils; of which 12 are Roma*

*8. grade – 20 pupils; of which 13 are Roma*

*In the two auxiliary grades there are 18 pupils, 17 of them are Roma.*

“This high proportion cannot be accounted for by demographic reasons only. Those who can, take their children away, mostly to the neighbouring villages of B. or T., or the six-grade secondary school in Heves some 20 kilometres away. According to the headmaster, the Heves six-grade secondary school takes away all children with good abilities. In this year’s sixth grade there are 7 Hungarians and 13 Roma: all Hungarian children are preparing to go to Heves, but some of the Roma want to try it, too. Most children are taken to school to B., which is 11 kilometres away. B. is a larger village and the proportion of Roma both in the village population and among the school pupils is below that in K. According to the headmaster, at least one full class of children go to B. Most of them are Hungarians, but there are some Roma among them too. This type of selection or change of schools has only become common practice in the past 3–4 years, but now even the teacher working in the K. school takes his child elsewhere. Recently, many children even start kindergarten elsewhere.”



“Of the 123 pupils attending the school, 116 are Gypsies. There are 38 other school-age children in the village, they go to school to the nearby V. or Gy.”

“More and more Hungarian parents enrol their children in 6 or 8-grade secondary schools, if possible in Nyíregyháza, to keep them from being together with minority children.”

“The differences between the two schools go back to when the former village council members decided there won’t be any more Gypsies in N. From that time on, the reputation of the Gy. school became worse and worse, and when it became possible, some parents began to enrol their children in schools other than the local one which had Roma pupils. The difference grew further when a few years ago the school in N. became a general cultural centre as well. According to the headmistress, the quality of the school in N. is not a bit better – they even have older computers than in Gy., and the teachers are no better qualified either – but there are no Gypsies there.”

Changing schools became a self-generating process in many places. The migration of Hungarian children increases the proportion of Roma pupils in the local school. Teachers are less and less willing to work there. This brings down the quality of education, which in turn induces further parents to take their children to other schools. The Roma families that are better off and more ambitious also do the same, because they do not want to give their children an insurmountable handicap, and so the local school becomes an ethnic ghetto of poor Gypsies once and for all.

One of the most severe consequences of the selection between schools and the evolution of schools where all or most pupils are Roma is that it goes hand in hand with a strong selection of teachers. Most teachers do not wish to work in Roma schools or ones that are in the process of “Romafication”. They are afraid of the special pedagogical and educational programmes. They feel such schools will not reward them with a feeling of success and that teaching there involves a serious loss of prestige. A good many of them are prejudiced against Roma and believe that educating Roma is a hopeless task. OKI’s research has shown that while the decrease in the number of children threatens teachers with unemployment in many places, there are still many unqualified teachers working in “Romaified” schools. There is a (homogeneously Roma) school where 4 of the 7 teachers have no qualification other than a secondary school matriculation. Many people only go to work at “Roma” schools as unqualified teachers, because this way it is easier for them to be admitted to teacher training – once they receive their diplomas, they go to another school.

A village school, where the proportion of Roma children is near 90%:  
*“Those children, who are A-grade pupils here, face serious learning difficulties*

*when going to another school. Sometimes a teacher comes to work drunk; sometimes they just don't go to class. This latter case was mentioned several times: the maths lesson simply consisted of the headmaster coming in, writing two exercises on the blackboard for the children to solve, then no teacher came until the lesson was over. In such lessons, children listen to tape recorders or play. Children at senior school have forgotten the multiplication table they once used to know well. Many lessons are not held. The headmaster mentioned that nowadays there are many lessons where the teacher has to be substituted, but he didn't speak about just what happens during such substitutions. Many parents complained that there are no study groups or afternoon lessons; day care is only available in junior school, senior students don't even have a study room. In my opinion, the school inspector should take a close look at the school in K."*

*A practically homogeneous Roma school in another village: "The inside of the school is a rather sorry sight as well. There are only class photographs on the walls, there is almost no decoration in the classrooms apart from a few drawings on the pin-up board. Furniture is run-down, there are no computers and few demonstrational materials. One can sense that the school doesn't belong to anyone, nobody cares how it looks or what happens in there. Part of the reason for this is financial, since the village is very poor and maintaining the school is a great burden, but the total lack of care is also a problem. The headmaster is sixty years old, he has a primary school teacher's diploma. He didn't work here between 1993 and 1996 because of personal conflicts with the municipality, the mayor, which even led to legal action. One of the reasons for the conflict was the financing of the school; the other the headmaster's excessive drinking. The school's budget is not independent – to such an extent that the headmaster has no idea of how much they spend on anything. He just submits the planned budget at the beginning of the year and that's it. He has to ask for money for every singly pencil they buy. While we were there, the postman brought a parcel that cost Ft400, but he didn't even have this sum, and said he would ask for it from the local council. As I have mentioned, rather severe conflicts had led to this humiliating situation. Some forms are joined: classes 1.–2., 3.–4., 5.–6. and 7.–8. Seven teachers work there, but only four have secondary school matriculation certificates. In senior school, Hungarian, history, geography, chemistry, German, art, technology, physical education and maths, that is, almost all subjects are taught without qualification. There is a qualified mistress in form 1.–2. and form 3.–4., but she has no qualification to teach the special subjects in the latter. Because of all this, the level of education is low. The headmaster also mentioned that they work on a minimum level, one reason for*

*which is the attitude of the families. They say that children switching to other schools from here know nothing at all. Fluctuation is very high – when they hear that only Roma children attend the school, many immediately withdraw their application.”*

### *Selection within the school*

In those schools, especially the ones with a large student population, where the proportion of Roma children is high, but the school can still avoid becoming a purely Roma institution in the long run, non-Roma families place intensive pressure on the school's management in order to avoid having their children attend the same class as the Roma children, especially those who come from bad family circumstances. The most frequent instrument of such pressure is the threat of switching to another school either within the locality or, if that is not possible, elsewhere. Many headmasters and teachers admit that the reason why they were compelled to use various segregational techniques in their schools and create parallel classes with different functions was that the exodus of non-Roma children had begun, and if they wanted to avoid the acceleration of this process, “they had to take measures”.

“The migration of our pupils has stopped. This has been achieved by the co-operation of all parties concerned. There are professional developments behind this too. Small group language teaching, higher level mathematics groups and of course the fact that we launched smaller size classes with different curricula.”

The procedures serving the segregation of Roma children within school have decades-old traditions in the Hungarian schooling system. When they feel necessary, the schools still use these traditional techniques. Usually, the basis for segregation is not ethnicity alone, but a mixture of pure racial discrimination and the elements of more general social selection that are well-documented in the literature. On the one hand, this means that special classes with special services are created to ensure the higher level of the education of children from families with a higher social status. In exceptional cases Roma children may be admitted to such classes when they come from the most integrated, better-off families. On the other hand, non-Roma children from uneducated families with low incomes and social status can also be placed in the classes that have been created for the purpose of the segregation of the Roma. We may add that due to the processes of migration, residential segregation and the selection between schools, a part of schools become institutions exclusively for the children of poor, marginalised and backward social groups. In such schools, internal selection has little function.

Here, the proportion of Roma students is always very high, but in this respect there is no significant difference between the individual classes.

In a significant number of schools, however, internal selection plays an important role. We have examined in detail the extent of the differences between the composition of the individual classes in the schools included in the sample and established six categories of classes: homogeneously non-Roma classes, classes where the proportion of Roma students is below 25%, those where it is between 25% and 50%, those where it is between 50% and 75%, those where it exceeds 75%, and finally those classes that are attended by Roma pupils exclusively. We defined extremely uneven distribution the case of schools where there was a difference of at least three categories between concurrent classes. (For example, while there were homogeneously non-Roma classes, there were also others where the majority of students were Roma.) We have class-level data from 178 schools of which 90 display such extreme conditions

We found 23 such schools where there were both homogeneously non-Roma and homogeneously Roma classes. In a further 30 schools, besides the homogeneously Roma classes there are others where the proportion of Roma children is below 25%. In nine schools there were both classes where the proportion of Roma children was in excess of 75% and others that were attended only by non-Roma children.

It is worthwhile comparing these figures with the composition of the entire student population of the schools. In 23 schools the total proportion of Roma children was below 25%. Of these 23%, 10 displayed extreme differences in the compositions of classes.

In 96 schools the proportion of Roma children was in the 25%–50% range; of these 10 displayed extreme differences in the compositions of classes. There were 37 schools with a 51%–75% proportion of Roma children, in 25 of them the differences in the composition of classes may be said to be extreme. Finally, even among the schools where over 75% of the pupils were Roma, we found two where such extreme differences in the composition of classes could be seen, even though this is almost physically impossible.

On the basis of the research data we have made estimates about nationwide figures. According to these, in all the 8-grade elementary schools of the country there are about 1230 such classes where the proportion of Roma pupils is over 50%. These are attended by about 13,300 Roma children. There are about 740 classes where the proportion of Roma pupils exceeds 75%, attended by about 10,300 Roma children, and about 770 homogeneously Roma classes with some 9000 Roma children.

This means that somewhat over one third (32,600 from the total 93,000) of Roma pupils, who constitute 10% of the total elementary school population of the country, attend classes with a Roma majority.

How did such polarisation evolve? Primarily by the creation and operation of the different types of classes. As one of the headmasters rather crudely put it: “If we don’t want to see all Hungarian pupils leave the school, we have to accept the differences between the abilities of Hungarian and Roma students”. It is the schools where internal segregation can still be significant that mostly operate specialised, higher-level classes on the one hand, and auxiliary, or other special curricula classes for lesser-ability children on the other. The justification for the creation and maintenance of the latter is always that the children placed in these classes cannot meet the requirements of the normal curriculum, cannot keep up with the other children because of socio-cultural handicaps related to family socialisation and lack of kindergarten education, and therefore require special pedagogical treatment and methods to overcome their disadvantage. In practice, with a few exceptions, these classes work with much lower requirements and pedagogical level and assume that their pupils are less able and therefore have to know less. Thus, the difference between them and the other children not only not decreases, but actually keeps getting wider all through elementary school.

“Both lessons were maths. When introducing ourselves to the teacher, we told her we were afraid we wouldn’t understand anything from the material. We were reassured that in the ‘remedial’ classes, only the most basic topics are taught: in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade the subject is simple equations, while 6<sup>th</sup> graders learn the four basic arithmetical operations and percentages. The deputy headmistress quipped in: ‘Why should we teach them anything more? They won’t need it anyway.’”

*“Actually, they are using a different teaching method, that is, they don’t teach the children everything. As an example they said they don’t teach Roma children Pythagoras’s Theorem, because it doesn’t matter for them. Even if they go on to further education, they’ll only go to trade school, but even that is rare. Such things are not needed there, so there is more time to dwell on more basic subjects.”*

The fate of a rather significant number of the schools included in the OKI research sample has been sealed as schools for the poor, therefore the number of both higher and “special” curriculum classes is relatively low. In the school year 1999–2000, these schools had a total of 2722 classes according to the following distribution:

Normal	2048 classes	75.2 %
Auxiliary	225 classes	8.3 %
Remedial	133 classes	4.9 %
Specialisation in physical education	83 classes	3.0 %
Specialisation in languages	70 classes	2.6 %
Specialisation in music	70 classes	2.6 %
Specialisation in maths	30 classes	1.1 %
Other specialisation	63 classes	2.3 %
Total	2722 classes	100%

The distribution of Roma and non-Roma students, however, still makes it evident that the creation and maintenance of the different types of classes serves, among other goals, the purposes of ethnic segregation.

The larger the proportion of non-Roma pupils and the smaller the proportion of Roma pupils in a class, the more probable it is that this class provides above average level education and extra pedagogical and educational services either in the form of specialisation in a subject or otherwise. At the same time, the smaller the proportion of non-Roma, and the larger the proportion of Roma students, the more probable it is that the class will make smaller demands on the pupils from the outset, reasoning with the lack of necessary skills and/or abilities or insufficient family socialisation that the school cannot correct. On the basis of the nature and content of the pedagogical work and the level of requirements, with some simplification classes can be divided into three categories. Classes that specialise in a subject offer and demand more than average. In normal classes the basic requirements have to be met. In special (remedial, auxiliary, etc.) classes the requirements are admittedly lower, sometimes much lower than basic, and the work and attitude of the teacher often adapts to these lowered demands. This also lends special significance to the proportion of Roma and non-Roma pupils within these three categories. Obviously, the specialist knowledge, dedication and commitment of teachers can play a balancing role, but there is no denying that the distribution between the three types of classes has a basic effect on educational opportunities.

The low proportion of Roma pupils in classes specialising in special-ability subjects is particularly noteworthy. In one of the county centre schools there is an extremely talented Roma child who often raises the school's reputation by excellent results in various sports competitions. Nevertheless, the school does not merit him with admission to a class specialised in PE.

*The proportion of Roma students in the various types of classes:*

Classes specialised in physical education	14.1 %
Classes specialised in music	16.1 %
Classes specialised in maths	16.2 %
Classes specialised in languages	17.5 %
Normal curriculum classes	45.2 %
Remedial classes	81.8 %
Auxiliary classes	84.2 %
Average proportion	0.5 %

The ethnic aspect of the selection between the classes is even clearer if we examine the distribution of homogeneously Roma classes among the various types:

Classes with subject specialisation	3 classes	1.0%
Normal classes	123 classes	39.5%
Special curriculum classes	185 classes	59.5%
Of which: remedial	57 classes	18.3%
Of which: auxiliary	128 classes	41.2%
Total	311 classes	100%

If we also take into account that even the three classes with subject specialisation are not specialised in subjects in which specialisation in Hungary has long traditions and therefore established curricula and methodology (maths, languages, music, physical education), we may say that homogeneously Roma classes are practically excluded from subject specialisation.

On the other hand, in many places remedial and auxiliary classes have been created with the express purpose of segregating Roma children. Correction would theoretically mean that, using special skill development methods, teachers try to lessen the socio-cultural handicaps because of which children from poor, socially marginal families cannot keep up with the others, even at the start of their school careers. However, in most schools maintaining remedial classes there are no special programmes, nor do they use methods that would effectively address the problems and palpably lessen handicaps. For the most part, the teachers themselves are not aware of what their task should be, what instruments are offered by the various trends of reform pedagogy, the methodological schools that have developed solutions to these problems. They can only sense that the

achievements of Roma children are often low, so they cannot go on with the curriculum at the necessary pace. Remedial classes are taken to be a solution because here demands can be adapted to their abilities, which, of course, leads to a continuously increasing lag. The effort of bringing the children up to normal level usually means no more than doing more exercises and coaching, but without changing those pedagogical methods that have proved to be unsuccessful. The dead-end of remedial classes is obvious from the fact that in many schools these exist even in the higher grades – thereby ensuring the segregation of senior school Roma pupils as well.

The intention to segregate plays an important role in the creation of both remedial and auxiliary classes. There is, however, an important difference. While in the case of the former, children can go over to normal classes in senior school, as more than 60% of them do, in the case of the latter there is minimal chance of this.

Auxiliary classes in normal schools are mostly only maintained in small settlements where the proportion of Roma pupils is relatively high. (In larger settlements, children regarded as retarded are taught in separate auxiliary schools.) Their number increased continuously from the beginning of the sixties to the end of the eighties in parallel with the increasing schooling of Roma children. Since then it has somewhat gone down, because the democratisation of the country forced schools to be more cautious in applying this method. A significant part of Roma parents have always objected if one or more of their children had to go to an auxiliary class, but in the party-state era they had little possibility of influencing the decisions of the school. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly frequent that local NGOs, minority-group self-governments or the parents themselves take action against the practice of sending children to auxiliary classes. We could say that social control over the decisions of schools has become tighter. At the same time, in many places it is the pressure from the side of majority society that forces the maintenance of the various forms of segregation, including the maintenance of auxiliary classes. Therefore, the number of auxiliary classes in normal schools is still significant, and the proportion of Roma children in these classes is immeasurably higher than that of non-Roma.

Despite the fact that the conditions for redirection to auxiliary classes have been made stricter in many places, wherever the intention of segregation is strong, and the local powers that be make it possible, solutions will be found. It often happens that the experts responsible for redirection are told by the local kindergarten teacher which are the children who won't be able to meet the demands of normal education, and the committee bases its decisions on these recommendations without examining the individual children.



Many experiences suggest that discriminative intentions are often present in redirections.

There are also several examples of schools placing Roma children in auxiliary classes in whose cases the committee recommended otherwise.

“The teacher of the joint class said she only has a pedagogical counselor’s expert opinion on a few children. She believes the rest were put into this class on the basis of the recommendation of kindergarten teachers. The four first graders in her class are all repeating first grade, because they had almost never attended kindergarten before coming to school.”

It happens than normal, but 100% Roma classes and auxiliary classes appear as alternatives to each other. There is a school that had maintained normal curriculum Roma classes for years. Then they stopped these, but soon started auxiliary classes – once again with Roma children. Elsewhere several Roma children were redirected to the town’s auxiliary school. The parents protested, however, and managed to ensure that their children could study in the normal classes of the local school, where there are no problems with them. This calls into doubt the professionalism of the previous decision to redirect them.

The justification for the existence of auxiliary classes is also called into doubt by their operative characteristics and the technical level of the work done in them. In the schools examined, teaching two different grades together never happened in the case of classes with subject specialisation and was a rare exception in the case of those with normal curricula. At the same time, joint study groups are very frequent among auxiliary classes; sometimes the entire junior or senior school group is taught together. In many places children going to auxiliary classes have to complete the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the auxiliary school of another – often far away – settlement, because the local school cannot or will not undertake their education.

Among teachers in auxiliary classes, the proportion of those with no qualification is higher than average; at the same time only a very few of them have qualifications in special pedagogy.

“What is auxiliary education in practice? The children are at school for one or two hours a day and hardly learn anything. These children are so neglected that they have no chance of further education. Instead of having much more lessons than in normal education, they get much less. There is a little girl who has only been going to the school in K. for a few weeks. When she has no lessons in the auxiliary class, she sits in with the others to listen to normal lessons – but she is never called out by the teacher.”

# The Neglected Public<sup>1</sup>

## On the Media Consumption of the Hungarian Roma

GÁBOR BERNÁTH – VERA MESSING

During the past few years several studies have examined the image of the Hungarian Roma in the majority media.<sup>2</sup> The conclusion of these is that, although the Roma appear in the media with significantly more weight than previously, the majority of portrayals remain within the framework of a set of massive stereotypes. At the same time, there have been no inquiries into just how satisfied the Roma themselves are with this image, how do they, themselves “vote” when selecting programmes, what they watch, listen to or read most often. Another certainly important question is whether their media consumer habits really justify the opinion that is widespread among the decision-makers of the majority media, namely that their programmes have no significant Roma audience.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this research was certainly not to establish some kind of particular pattern of media consumption, all the more so, since looking for relevant differences in this direction may easily lead one into the maze of the same old stereotypes. Rather, the results counter a number of widespread myths. For example, despite the fact that the majority media is full of stereotypical representations, that there are almost no Roma personalities in the various entertainment programmes on TV, notwithstanding the total absence of Roma journalists on the editorial staff of newspapers, and even despite the often extremely negative opinion of the Roma themselves about this majority media, it still has a large and very active Roma audience, and most of them are conscious in their preferences. Then again, these results also prove a very trivial, yet often neglected truth, namely that the Roma are not only Roma as such, but also women and men, young and old, urban dwellers or villagers, etc., who all have different interests. If at all, the only presupposition we relied upon during our research was

<sup>1</sup> A revised version of the study published in the April 2000 issue of the periodical *Beszélő*.

<sup>2</sup> Lilla Vicsek, “Image of the Gypsies in the Press”. *Amaro Drom*, 1996/12.; Vera Messing, “Image of National and Ethnic Minorities in the News Reports of the Hungarian Press during late 1996 and 1997”. *Jel-Kép*, 1998/4.; Gábor Bernáth–Vera Messing, “*Short Cuts, always without Sound*” – *Roma in the Hungarian Media*. (Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities, Budapest, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See: Bernáth–Messing, *op. cit.* During the course of the survey published in the book we interviewed 12 editors of the majority media, the producer of the two most popular Hungarian TV series and two representatives of large advertising firms.

that the Hungarian Roma community is a large, active media consumer audience that has mostly been abandoned and that is not treated according to its true significance by either the public service or the commercial media.

The research data were collected by a supplementary questionnaire targeting the representative Hungarian Roma sub-sample of the research on east-central European poverty/ethnicity conducted by Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi in 1999–2000.<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted between November 1999 and June 2000 in three stages. The sample consisted of 458 Roma persons above the age of 18.<sup>5</sup> Wherever possible, we have compared the information collected about the Roma with the data gained about the general population at the same time. These latter, however, had usually been obtained with a different methodology, therefore the comparative tables indicate major trends rather than exact differences.

### *Television and radio consumption*

Even though the proportion of households without television is three times as high (8%) among the Roma than the general population, those Roma households that do have a TV set, watch television more intensively than the general populace. (*Table 1.*)

Roughly two-thirds of the subjects watch the programmes of TV2 and RTL Klub for several hours a day, while about a quarter watch M1. While the difference between the Roma and the entire population is negligible with respect to terrestrial broadcast TV stations (M1, RTL Klub, TV2), significant differences exist in the case of those channels to which access is impossible or

---

<sup>4</sup> The demographic composition of the subjects of the most recent representative Roma research conducted by István Kemény, Gábor Havas and Gábor Kertesi, and that of the subjects of the present poll is significantly different from several aspects. The primary reasons for the differences are the methods of sampling and the differences in the definitions of “Roma/Gypsy”. The sample used for the 1993 research included those people who were regarded as Roma by the majority environment. The basic elements of research were households selected by multi-level stratified sampling with the help of public administration, educational and social institutions. The research conducted in 1999–2000 by Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi used a different sampling method. During the course of this research, a large, 18,000 sample representative of the adult (18+) population were presented with a filter questionnaire which also inquired about the subjects ethnic identity. In addition, the interviewer also had to determine whether or not the subject was Roma. In 1999–2000 the sample used was selected by this method. Theoretically both sampling methods are representative of the Hungarian Roma population, however there is significant difference between the demographic structures.

<sup>5</sup> The age and gender distribution of the sample was somewhat different from that of the demographic characteristics of the Roma identified by filtering the sample of 18,000. We have corrected this by weighting data. As we could only ask a few questions about media consumption in the questionnaire, we had no opportunity to produce data as exact as those produced by viewer measurement or logging method.

Table 1. *Audience of the various TV channels among the Roma population (N=459 persons)*

	<i>Several hours a day</i>	<i>Several hours a week</i>	<i>Less frequ- ently/never</i>	<i>Has no TV / Declined to answer</i>
MTV1	25%	27%	40%	8%
MTV2	7%	8%	75%	9%
Duna TV	3%	5%	82%	10%
TV2	61%	14%	18%	7%
RTL Klub	65%	11%	16%	8%
TV3	7%	5%	77%	11%
HBO	2%	1%	87%	10%
Spektrum	4%	6%	81%	9%
Msat	1%	1%	88%	10%
Local (municipal) cable	1%	6%	83%	10%
Foreign language broadcasts via satellite	1%	5%	84%	10%

would require substantial investment – cable, satellite dish – in the small settlements where masses of Roma live.

*Table 2.* depicts the total audience of national channels. Looking at this table we can at least make an educated guess at the daily audience of the individual channels among the Roma and the general population, even if the difference in measurement methods makes any further conclusions impossible.

We can notice significant differences if we examine the intensity and frequency of watching television alongside the information on the size of the channels' audiences. Despite the different methodologies employed, the data on the daily audience of the individual channels suggest that members of the Roma population watch TV very intensively. All channels have a significantly higher daily rating among the Roma than among the general population. This means, for example, that 40% of those who choose RTL Klub watch this channel every day, while this ratio is 65% among the Roma. The popularity indices of the TV channels are similar among the Roma and the general population: the two commercial channels are the absolute leaders in very close contest with each other.

Table 2. *Total and daily reach of television channels among the Roma and general population* <sup>6</sup>

	<i>Total audience</i> <sup>7</sup>	<i>Daily audience</i> <sup>8</sup>		
	<i>Roma population</i>	<i>General population</i> <sup>9</sup>	<i>Roma population</i>	<i>General population</i> <sup>10</sup>
TV2	82%	90%	61%	39%
RTL Klub	81%	89%	65%	36%
MTV1	76%	86%	25%	17%
MTV2	31%	42%	7%	2%
Duna TV	25%	43%	3%	2%

In order to increase the depth of our analysis, we have examined the intensity of the audience of the three most popular channels using a system of categories.<sup>11</sup> (*Table 3.*)

These data also indicate that the proportion of intensive TV viewers is very high within the Roma community. Almost one fifth of those asked spend 5–6 hours watching TV each day. A further 42% watch the programmes of at least one of the two channels several hours a day regularly. In total, it is certain that more than half the Roma population spends more than four hours watching TV each day, and only a minority – one fifth – is satisfied with a daily 1–2 hours of selective viewing.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, we cannot assume that this

<sup>6</sup> The data on the entire population have been reproduced from the item entitled “TV, My One and Only” published in the “Media” supplement of the periodical *Kreatív*, 8–11 April 2000.

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of those who watch the given channel with any regularity.

<sup>8</sup> The method of defining the daily reach of the individual channels (i.e. the proportion of those who watched the channel on an average day) was done using a different method for the Roma and the entire population. In the case of the general population the method used was the filling out of a TV log and asking the question “which channels/programmes did you watch yesterday?”, while in the case of the Roma population we included in this group those who answered “several hours a day” to the question “which channels do you usually watch?”.

<sup>9</sup> *Kreatív*, “Média”, 8 April 2000. (Source: Szonda Ipsos)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Very intensive: watches each nationwide terrestrial channel for several hours a day; intensive: watches two channels several hours a day; average: watches only one channel with daily regularity and never or only occasionally watches other channels, or, conversely, those who watch several channels, but none with daily regularity; occasional: those who watch one or two channels a couple of times a week, non-viewers: never or only occasionally watch television..

<sup>12</sup> In comparison: according to AGB, the only audience measurement company using technical measuring instruments, the time spent on watching television by the general population is between 4 and 4.5 hours on average, depending on the season. The poll conducted by the Central Statistical Office – which was more like our survey – only determined one half of this value, a daily 2.5 hours. *Kreatív*, “Média”, 10 April 2000.

Table 3. *Intensity of TV consumption according to gender and age*  
(N=428 persons)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	<i>Total</i>	
	<i>(%)</i>		<i>N (pers.)</i>						
Very intensive	43	57	15	16	19	6	34	17	71
Intensive	50	50	45	42	42	45	26	42	180
Average	47	53	17	23	20	25	26	21	90
Occasional	57	43	7	9	8	9	—	7	33
Doesn't watch TV	58	42	15	10	12	15	11	13	54
Total	50	50	139	112	86	53	38	100	428

high ratio of watching television is simply due to background television. The high proportion of those who purchase programme listings magazines in contrast with the low proportion of those who “aren’t choosy” about the programmes indicates that the ratio of conscious viewers is rather high.

Projecting data over demographic characteristics, we find tendencies that are similar to those prevalent in the general population. The proportion of very intensive television viewers is higher among women, while those who never or hardly ever watch television tend to be men. The proportion of the members of the oldest age group is twice as high among the most intensive consumers than within the entire sample. This is similar in the case of the general population as well: according to AGB data, pensioners spend six hours a day on average watching TV. At the same time, while in the case of the general population, members of the 18–29 age group spend the least time watching television, within the Roma population the ratio of those who watch a lot of TV is not lower in this age group than among those who are over fifty. This is surely related to the high level of unemployment. Villagers are strongly over-represented among those who watch the most TV, while among those who rarely watch television, the proportion of Budapest citizens is twice as high (17%) than that of the inhabitants of rural towns and villages (8% and 5% respectively).

*Preferred channels and programmes*

The structure of preferences for the various channels is also similar to that among the general population. The audience of public service television is much below that of commercial TV in both groups, though more so among the Roma population. This also indicates that the public service media, which one might assume would create a larger and more stable Roma audience by providing public service information or broadcasting special Roma programmes (as prescribed by law), is unable to make use of this possibility. The situation is similar in the case of *local television stations* as well, which are usually maintained by local authorities, partly from local tax revenues, and which in theory, therefore, have public service duties. Their low audience seems to prove the suspicion that the majority of local media has not lived up to their undertaking to broadcast minority programmes, or has done so, but in a manner that does not meet the requirements of the local Roma community.<sup>13</sup>

The answers to the question about preferred programme types that people watch whenever possible, were once again similar among the Roma and the general population. (*Table 4.*)

These data indicate that alongside entertainment programmes – shows, soap operas, series and feature films – it is the news programmes that most attract the Roma audience. (Among the general population the five programmes that had the highest rating were always shows, soap operas or feature films.<sup>14</sup>) There are two types of programmes whose popularity is not significantly influenced by any demographic factors: feature films and crime programmes are equally popular in all groups. At the same time, as in the case of the entire population, soap operas are more popular among women, while shows are primarily preferred by older or less educated people. A higher proportion of those who watch a lot of television watch entertainment programmes, while the non-fiction genre is more often selected by those who watch less TV.

---

<sup>13</sup> Undertaking this was an advantage in competing for local frequencies, and the National Radio and Television Board also supports with concessions those broadcasters that have undertaken to help national, ethnic or other minority objectives according to the Board's annual audit. NRTB could not provide information about which local companies agreed to air specifically Roma programmes; their number is estimated at 10–15. (The Ombudsman for Minorities started negotiations two years ago to have NRTB supervise whether these broadcasters actually perform their undertakings, but no studies have been prepared.)

<sup>14</sup> AGB measurements. See for example: *Kreatív*, “Média”, 8 October 2000. or <http://www.agb.hu>.

Table 4. Preferred television programme types among the Roma<sup>15</sup>

	<i>Selected (persons)</i>	<i>Not selected (persons)</i>	<i>Popularity rate (%)</i>
News	333	80	81
Children's programmes, cartoons	157	255	38
Games	237	176	57
Shows	320	92	77
Infotainment	187	226	45
Soap operas	279	134	68
Other series (e.g. crime)	283	130	69
Feature films	283	130	69
Minority programmes	164	248	40
Magazine programmes	115	296	28
True crime	289	123	70
Sports	171	242	41
Religious programmes	83	329	20

#### *Radio listening habits*

Radio<sup>16</sup> is less widespread among Roma households. As opposed to the 85% of households in the general population which possess a radio set, this figure is only 71% among Roma households.<sup>17</sup> Radio is more popular among those above the age of 60, and those who have higher than elementary education. (Table 5.)

According to these data, about one third (37%) of the Roma audience listen to no radio at all. On the other hand, one quarter of those asked mentioned more than one radio station they frequently listen to. The majority (17%) indicated several commercial channels, while 8% indicated both commercial and public service channels. We can certainly say that these two groups consist of intensive radio listeners. The rest of the sample said they only listened to one radio station frequently: 11% mentioned public service radio, while 27% mentioned one of the commercial stations. Radio listening habits correlate with

<sup>15</sup> Distribution of the answers to the closed question: "Of the following programme types, which are those that you watch whenever you can?"

<sup>16</sup> We examined radio listening habits with open questions, asking subjects to name the radio stations they most often listen to.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Szonda Ipsos. We wish to express our thanks to Szonda Ipsos for the data they have provided.



Table 5. *Radio listening habits according to major demographic characteristics*

	18–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60 –	Budapest	Town	Village	Total (%)	Total (N. pers.)
	age group (%)									
Doesn't listen to the radio	32	41	42	38	29	30	38	37	37	149
Only listens to public service radio	1	5	13	17	49	4	9	14	11	43
Only listens to commercial stations	62	45	33	35	14	58	45	40	44	179
Listens to both public service and commercial stations	5	9	13	10	8	7	9	9	8	34
Total (N. pers.)	131	108	79	52	35	46	173	186	100	405

age and dwelling. Those who don't listen to radio at all are mostly middle aged. Similarly to the general population, public service radio is more popular among older people, while the Roma audience of commercial stations consists mainly of members of the younger generation and the middle aged. If at all, those who below the age of 30 almost exclusively listen to commercial stations.<sup>18</sup> The audience of public service stations primarily consists of Roma living in rural areas, usually smaller villages, while commercial stations are more preferred among Budapest citizens.

Table 6. shows the audience figures for radio stations with nationwide or almost nationwide broadcast among the Roma and the general population.

On the base of these data, the popularity of commercial radio stations is by and large identical among the Roma and the general population.

<sup>18</sup> This is also true for the entire Hungarian population: only 8% of Radio Kossuth's audience is below the age of 30, while almost half of the audiences of the commercial stations Juventus and Danubius consists of this age group. Data indicate that over 40% of the audience of the public service station, Radio Kossuth are over 60 years old.

Table 6. *The audience of major radio stations among the Roma and the general population*<sup>19</sup>

<i>Stations</i>	<i>Mentioned by members of the Roma population</i>	<i>Summary categories after eliminating cross-listening (public service, commercial)</i>	<i>Daily audience among the general population</i>
Kossuth (AM, FM)	12%	18%	31%
Petőfi	11%		13%
Danubius	29%	46%	29%
Sláger	23%		25%
Juventus	9%		12%

The only significant difference is that the size of the audience of the public service station, Radio Kossuth is less than half among the Roma than among the general population. Only 18% of those surveyed selected public service channels among their favourite stations (Kossuth and Petőfi were selected more or less equally), while about half of those surveyed named a nationwide commercial channel (46%). Despite the fact that the term public service includes serving the needs of various minorities, these data indicate that Hungary's "official" radio cannot entirely fulfil this task. The audience of regional radio stations is extremely low: only 1% of those surveyed mentioned the regional broadcasts of public service radios, while 6% mentioned other local stations. (All this despite the fact that a large proportion of local radio stations, similarly to regional TV channels, also undertook to produce Roma programmes.)

#### *The consciousness of media consumption*

The questionnaire also examined the level of the consciousness of media consumption as opposed to "non-selective" background radio and TV among the Roma audiences. This can be measured from the answers to the question

<sup>19</sup> While in the case of the entire population the percentages show the proportion of the public reached on an average day, in the case of the Roma public the question was not about an average day but rather about what their favourite stations are that they listen to whenever they can. However, we may well suppose that people do not listen to their favourite station much less often than once a day.

as to where the subjects of the survey get information about the starting times of the various radio and television programmes. (*Table 7.*)

Table 7. *How do you get information about radio and TV programmes?*

	<i>N (pers.)</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
Newspaper	177	39%
Radio and TV promos and trailers	100	22%
Simply knows when his/her favourite programmes start	35	8%
Nowhere, doesn't choose	126	28%
Other	13	3%

According to the answers given, the majority of the Roma audience is conscious in selecting programmes; 39% actually choose their programmes from the newspapers. Therefore it is certainly not given that the Roma watch TV or listen to radio regardless of what programmes are on air. In fact they constitute an audience that could and should be addressed.

#### *Newspaper consumer habits*

During the course of a set of interviews we conducted with leaders of the editorial staffs of the most popular papers in the majority media in 1998,<sup>20</sup> most editors said they did not believe their paper had a significant Roma readership. "I don't believe many Roma read us," said the editor of one of the tabloids. They mostly explained this fact with the almost general state of poverty among the Roma population, saying they would not be able to spend on papers ("the people who read us have higher investment desires than the Roma"). A number of editors of the Roma press professed a similar opinion too: the level of the consumption of printed press is low among the Roma population. Our present research has refuted these widespread notions – more than half of the Roma population read newspapers with some regularity.

The following table summarizes the Roma population's printed press consumption habits, comparing them with those of the general population. Given however, that the figures describing the two groups are quite different in type, comparison should only be made between the structures, but not the rates of consumption.

<sup>20</sup> Bernáth–Messing: *op. cit.*

Table 8. *Newspaper consumption*

	<i>Mentions</i>	<i>Percentage</i> <sup>21</sup>	<i>Total population RPI</i> <sup>22</sup>
Reads no papers	202	44%	—
National political dailies	19	4%	14%
Local political dailies	76	17%	32%
Tabloid daily	30	7%	8%
Political weekly or monthly	20	4%	6%
Women's weeklies and magazines	75	6%	40%
Other weekly or monthly paper	28	6%	—
TV/Radio programme magazine	102	22%	47%
Other	63	14%	—

These results show that, although printed press consumption is much lower than among the general population, its structure is nevertheless similar, and even if we eliminate cross-reading, 24% of the Roma public reads (daily or less frequently, national or local) political papers,<sup>23</sup> and almost one fifth read dailies. While the readership of national political dailies is low compared to the general population's stratum which is in a similar economic position (only *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Hírlap* were mentioned), regional (county) political papers are very popular.<sup>24</sup> As in the case of the general population, the most popular publications are TV and radio programme magazines, romances (*Romana*, *Tiffany*, *Kisses and Tears*, etc.), and women's magazines (*Kiskegyed*, *Nők Lapja*, *Meglepetés*).<sup>25</sup> Newspaper reading habits primarily

<sup>21</sup> The section on the consumption of printed press contained an open question ("Please list the papers you usually read"). Answers to this type of question produce lower results than in the case of directed inquiries (e.g. "Do you read *Népszabadság*?").

<sup>22</sup> Szonda Ipsos data from 2000. (Reader Per Issue): the proportion of readers who have read the last issue.

<sup>23</sup> A single person can read local or national political dailies, weekly magazines, etc. The 24% does not contain this type of multiplicity (so-called "cross-reading").

<sup>24</sup> Even despite the fact that these papers deal much less with local Roma communities than the national press does, and usually depict the Roma in fewer roles. A good example of this is that in our content analysis in 1997 we found a local newspaper where more than half the articles concerning the Roma were about crime.

<sup>25</sup> This is no different from the references of the general population where after programme listings magazines, women's magazines have the highest circulation: *Kiskegyed* has some

correlate with education and dwelling. The correlation with education is trivial: those who haven't completed elementary school read the least, while the proportion of newspaper readers increases with the level of education. At the same time it may well be related to problems of distribution that villagers read the least, and Budapest citizens read the most papers. In the small settlements where most of the Hungarian Roma live, it is difficult or virtually impossible to purchase papers from newsagents rather than subscribe to them. A third correlation (one that implies that a part of the Roma public gains information almost exclusively from television) is that the proportion of those who don't listen to the radio is the highest among those who don't read newspapers.

The opinions of the editors are put in doubt not only by the number of mentions, but also by the frequency of reading. Nearly half of those surveyed (43%) said they read all issues of the paper mentioned, a further 37% said they read the selected paper often, and only one fifth said they rarely read the newspaper they mentioned. The majority of regular readers also purchases their newspapers. On fifth of newspapers are delivered by subscription, 57% are purchased at newsagents, shops or the post office, but the proportion of "second hand" newspapers is also rather high: almost one quarter of the newspapers mentioned were received from someone else.

### *Information and intelligence*

An often recurring element of the interviews conducted with Roma leaders in 1997 was that a part of the Roma public has no access to the most basic public service information related to schooling, aid and employment. The interviews with the editors of Roma TV and radio programmes also showed that in formulating their editorial principles, they had to devote a part of their otherwise rather limited air time to conveying such information. This, however, would just as much be the task of public service media or those programmes in commercial media that are labelled as public service, as it is the responsibility of majority institutions or minority self-governments.<sup>26</sup> Experience shows that often local authorities or certain dedicated institu-

---

one and a half million readers, *Nők Lapja* is read by 1.3 million people, while the readership of the most popular political weekly, *HVG* is only a fraction of these figure. (Szonda Ipsos Media Analysis, 1st half of 2000.).

<sup>26</sup> Though no studies were conducted about the performance of majority institutions in such matters, that of minority self-governments has been researched. The 1997 survey of minority self-governments in Baranya County supports the general experience about the information access of the Roma population: the relationship between most minority self-governments the local council is rather weak, but so it is even between the national minority self-governments and their own minority communities. *Minority Self-Governments* (HAS Centre for Regional Research, Pécs, 1998).

tions (schools, doctors, labour centres) fail to fulfil this responsibility. To examine this lack of information, we posed the question as to where the subjects gained information about a problem that concerns masses of Roma – social benefits and how to apply for them.<sup>27</sup>

Table 9. *How did you get information about the social aid you applied for?*

	<i>Case</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Newspapers	8	4
TV, radio	32	17
Acquaintances, family	59	32
An office of some kind (e.g. local council)	120	65
Some kind of social institution	30	16

These data imply that the institutions providing information most effectively are those which are also responsible for providing the given form of aid. Most often these are local authorities. The role of informal channels of information is also significant: a third of those who answered the question had got to know about social aid from acquaintances or relatives. At the same time few respondents mentioned television and radio as their source of information about such possibilities.

During the course of the survey we have also tried to examine the handicaps caused by a lack of information. Eighty-four people, roughly every fifth subject responded affirmatively when asked whether they had ever failed to receive some form of support because they hadn't known about it.

### *Opinions about the majority media*

The media not only inform, but also carry and influence the image society has of itself. There is no avoiding the question in relation to Hungarian majority media either: does it offer such roles through which members of the majority can look upon the Roma as integral parts of society, allowing, at the same time, the Roma to proudly assert their identity or, on the contrary, does it force them to hide or suppress this identity. Today not only the Roma, but actually all minorities are missing from the entertainment programmes of the Hungarian media. Minority personalities never or very rarely appear in Hungarian soap-operas or talk shows. With two exceptions

<sup>27</sup> Of the 459 subjects, 164 said they were receiving some form of social benefit at the time of the survey.

there are no Roma presenters in majority television, and they are also missing from the columns of newspapers where “the man in the street” is given a chance to express an opinion. The interviewees of our 1998 survey of leaders of Roma organizations and institutions were almost unanimous in their conviction that the Roma appear rarely in the majority media, and that when they do it is almost always “in the context of problems”. The media does not portray Roma people as natural actors of majority society. One of our interviewees summarized the possible effect of this image on the Roma as follows: [most news items in majority media are] “usually experienced by Roma communities such that once again some scandal or piece of bad news has been shown on TV. If they speak of them, they only mention their negative characteristics or create a feeling of humiliation.”

Now, for the first time, we were able to get a representative image about just what Roma think of their image in the majority media. To explore this we used a number of questions about opinions that we had been using in earlier research. The questionnaire contained two sets of questions: one inquired about the interviewee’s personal opinion about certain propositions concerning the majority media, while the other set asked whether, in the interviewee’s opinion, the majority of Roma agree or disagree with the given proposition. (*Table 10.*)

The data indicate that the Roma public is mostly dissatisfied with the dominance of negative, conflict-oriented reports in the media. Eight people out of 10 agree that television only shows Roma people in connection with problems, while nine-tenths of the subjects believed (and even more assumed that the majority of the Roma so believe) that “TV should also show the good things in the life of the Roma”.

Interviews with the editors of Roma media also attest to the fact that beside the strong assimilation pressure, there are prejudices and related continuous and forceful stigmatisation of Roma identity in the majority media or, more widely, in the majority environment. To put it a bit strongly, it is only the stories published in the Roma media that provide the rare “oases” where the Roma can look upon themselves with pride. The interviewees confirmed the necessity of media personalities who could do away with stereotypes (a Roma TV presenter, for example), which has been emphasized by Roma organizations for years. Three quarters of the subjects found this important.

The widespread opinion that the media does not regard the Roma as a target audience is further strengthened by the fact that nearly two-thirds of the subjects asked feel that the media does not pay sufficient attention to the questions concerning the Roma. Four fifths of the subjects assume that this sentiment is general within Roma society.

Table 10. *Opinions about the media image / assumptions about the opinion of the majority of Roma*

	<i>Ratio of those totally or mostly in agreement with the proposition</i>	<i>Assumed ratio of the agreement of the Roma with the proposition</i>	<i>Difference</i>
There should be Roma TV presenters.	73%	87%	+14
Radio, television and media do not pay enough attention to the difficulties of the Roma.	62%	83%	+21
TV programmes only show Roma people when there is some problem with them.	81%	90%	+9
TV programmes depict the Roma as they actually are.	46%	38%	-8
It might be true that the Roma are poor, but TV should not show this to the whole country.	53%	69%	+16
TV should also show the good things in the life of the Roma.	91%	96%	+5
TV depicts the Roma realistically.	48%	42%	-6
The manner in which TV depicts the Roma is offensive.	49%	66%	+17

According to the majority of the Roma, television does not present a realistic image about them. The 48% and 46% agreement rates, however, also show that negative descriptions are not without influence on a part of the Roma public. Probably those who belong to this group are more inclined to make generalizations from, and identify with, the image presented by the media. At the same time, the ratio of the presumed agreement of the majority of the Roma is significantly lower in relation to these propositions: only a little more than one third of the subjects believed such to represent the opinion of Roma in general.

One half of those asked feel the way television depicts the Roma is offensive. That is, one half of a group of half a million people is facing an image presented by television that they feel to be offensive! The extent of the



frequency of this opinion in the everyday conversations of Roma communities is clearly shown by the fact that two thirds of the subjects believe that this is the general sentiment among the Roma. On the basis of this opinion, the humiliating nature of the image depicted by the media has even more weight within Roma public opinion than by virtue of what the individuals themselves experience. This is also suggested by the fact that the assumption of the agreement of the majority was always higher in the case of very negative opinions. This belief indicates that public opinion is even worse than the – also depressing – personal experiences of the individuals.

### *Roma programmes and newspapers*

The survey also contained questions about the Roma programmes of the public service media and the Roma newspapers. Apart from a few uncertain estimates we had no information on whether these media actually reach their target audience or not.

According to the Media Act, the public service media has to provide the opportunity for the production and broadcasting of the programmes of significant national and ethnic minorities. The “only just sufficient” conditions and “only just viewable” air-time provided by the media companies, however, only formally guarantees the right of minority communities to receive information and preserve their identities.

The questions in this block were open: we asked subjects whether they know of any radio or TV programmes that are specifically addressed to the Roma population, and, if so, then how often they watch or listen to them. Using open questions tends to underestimate actual media consumption, since a lot more people would answer yes if asked whether they know the programme *Roma Magazine*, than would spontaneously mention this programme.

*The Roma programme of Hungarian Television.* Public service television broadcasts the 25-minute programme *Roma Magazine* weekly; first on Monday early afternoons on M1, then a repeat on Saturday mornings on M2. Over one fifth (21%) of the subjects said they watched the programme more or less regularly, and a higher proportion, almost one third, knew about the programme. The rather unfavourable air-time of the programme is indicated by the fact that one fifth of the latter group said they never watch the programme. According to AGB data, in the early afternoons on average weekdays M1 is only able to attract 13% of its rather small number of viewers,<sup>28</sup> that is, within the present structure the potential audience of *Roma*

---

<sup>28</sup> AGB data for 2000 1<sup>st</sup> quarter. *Kreatív*, “Média”, 10 April 2000.

*Magazine* hardly exceeds one per cent of the entire population, i.e. 100,000 viewers. What's more, the magazine is bound to be unavailable to those working Roma in rural areas, who cannot receive M2.<sup>29</sup> Thus, although public service television formally fulfils its task of broadcasting a minority programme as prescribed by law, it does not meet the requirements of serving the actual needs of the minority group. During the past few years the editors of the programme were unable to achieve better operating conditions or such air-times when the programme would not be inaccessible to significant groups of the Roma population.

*The Roma programme of the Hungarian Radio.* The data indicate that the Roma programme of the public service radio, *Gypsy Half-Hour*, which goes on air on Fridays at 11 a.m. is less known among the Roma public. Six per cent of the subjects said they knew of radio programmes specifically addressing the Roma population, while 4% attested to listening to the programme with more or less frequency. All in all, this amounts to an audience of some 20,000 Roma, that is 7% of the Roma who possess a radio set or 42% of those who listen to the public service radio station, Radio Kossuth.<sup>30</sup> When assessing these data, we also have to bear in mind that a large part of the Roma audience primarily or exclusively listens to commercial stations, while Radio Kossuth is only listened to by 12% with more or less frequency. On the basis of these data the programme *Gypsy Half-Hour* is unable to effectively address young Roma people.

According to the 2000 results of Gallup Institute's regular logged audience research on the entire population, the size of the programme's audience has not changed significantly since 1998. This research puts the programme's audience at 195–280,000.<sup>31</sup> This implies that only one tenth of the audience of *Gypsy Half-Hour* are Roma.

The demographic structure of the audience has not changed much either. The programme is more popular among the elderly (about 7%) and those with lower education (around 4%). At the same time, the data show that practically no younger people listen to the programme and the size of its

<sup>29</sup> As for 1998 the programmes of M2 are only available via satellite dish or cable. In the villages where the majority of Roma live, these facilities are only available to 40% of the population. Antenna Hungária information, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> In our 1998 study, "*Short Cuts, always without Sound*", we tried to estimate the number of Roma listeners of *Gypsy Half-Hour* from audience data about the entire population and their demographic characteristics (over-representation of villagers and people with low education). At the time we concluded that a large proportion of the programme's audience must be Roma, but this has been falsified by the present survey which shows that only 7–10% of the audience can be Roma.

<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, we have to note that the measurement of 2.3%–3.3% runs a high risk of error. On other weekdays Radio Kossuth's audience in the same time frame is similarly low, fluctuating between 2.5% and 4%.

audience is negligible within the 30–49 age group as well (around 1%). We have to note, that the size of *Gypsy Half-Hour*'s audience is not outstandingly low compared to Radio Kossuth's other programmes. Even the most popular programmes, such as the morning and noon news only make 9–12%, the daily magazine, *Napközben* achieves 5–6%, while the audience for the rest of the programmes is between 1% and 4%.

*Roma newspapers.* The familiarity with, and readership of Roma newspapers shows an even sadder picture. Familiarity with the papers is very low: *Lungo Drom*, the paper with the largest and broadest circulation (it is distributed free of charge to the local Roma minority self-governments that operate in a large part of settlements) was only known to 20 from the 458 people interviewed, and only 11 attested to reading it more or less frequently. Nine people were familiar with, and 4 were readers of the (now defunct) *Phralipe*. The familiarity with and readership of the third major Roma newspaper, the quality *Amaro Drom*, is similarly low.<sup>32</sup> (Table 11.)

Table 11. *Familiarity with Roma newspapers*

<i>Name of paper</i>	<i>Knows about it</i>	<i>Reads it</i>
Lungo Drom	20	11
Phralipe	9	4
Amaro Drom	6	1
Kethano Drom	2	1
Cigány Hírlap	6	2
Cigányfűró	1	—

The data confirm what the editors of Roma newspapers said during our interviews. All of them believe that the difficulties of circulation present the greatest problem. On the basis of the circulation data provided in 1997 to the major supporter of these publications, the Hungarian Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities, and taking the size of the Hungarian Roma population to be half a million, *Amaro Drom* was purchased by 0.26% of the Hungarian Roma, *Lungo Drom* by 0.3% and the now defunct *Phralipe* by 0.07%. The data provided by the papers are similar to the situation indicated by the ratio of those who gave positive answers in the survey. These sorry results are no better for the fact that the circulation and readership of the newspapers of most other minorities are similarly low.

<sup>32</sup> The first issue of the magazine of the National Gypsy Self-Government, *Világunk* (Our World) had not yet been published at the time of assembling the questionnaire.

At the same time, the results we have gleaned with respect to the consumption of the majority press cast doubt on the opinion professed by certain editors, namely that Roma communities can only be addressed via the printed press to a lesser degree. Even though it is true that the audience of television is by far the highest, there is a significant group which regularly reads political newspapers, albeit that the Roma papers cannot reach them either.

*(The research was supported by the British Know How Fund for Hungary and the Open Society Institute.)*

# Local and International Views on the Migration of the Hungarian Roma

ANDRÁS KOVÁTS

During recent years the migration of the Roma has often aroused the interest of the Hungarian public. In the beginning there came the reports and – for the first time in Hungary – survey data about those who asked for Canadian asylum. Later it was the Zámoly Roma's plea for asylum in France that sparked off a wide-ranging professional, political and social debate that soon turned into a general discourse on the situation of Hungary's Roma population. This debate is still going on today with constant reference to the issue of migration.

When dealing with Hungarian society and politics, experts cannot avoid facing the situation and problems of the Roma population. Migration is only a very small part of this extremely wide and complex field, albeit one of great significance from several aspects. Despite the fact that the system of democratic institutions seems to be stabilising, Hungary has, for over half a decade, appeared in international statistics as a country that produces refugees. Such refugees call public attention to an urgent social problem that is deteriorating in parallel with the evolution of the market economy, namely the situation of the Roma population. As the time of joining the European Union draws nearer, pressure is increasing to find lasting, long-term solutions to the problems of the Gypsies. We can only join the Union together with our fellow citizens of Roma descent – recognition of this fact is essential not only to the political and economic institutions but to each and every member of society.

## 1. BACKGROUND

From the mid-nineties onwards, Roma people have been continuously moving from east-central European countries to members of the European Union as well as to Canada and the United States with the intent of settling there. In the vast majority of cases they apply for political asylum, arguing their pleas with reference to the persecution and negative discrimination they have suffered in their countries of origin. The major sources of refugees in the region are the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. A large number of Kosovo Roma are also migrating to EU

countries; however, they are fleeing from the wars and ethnic purges of the region and their situation is significantly different from that of those who arrive from the countries listed above.

One of the big – if not the biggest – losers of the economic and social transformation going on in the countries of east-central Europe is the Roma population. Poverty, the deterioration of health and demographic indices, exclusion from the labour market and the schooling system, has had a more marked negative effect on them than on any other group of society. The strong discrimination that accompanies and is related to these processes on the part of the majority population against the Roma further deteriorates their chance of catching up. If at all, it is only to a very limited extent that plans to improve the situation of the Roma population appear in the government policies of these states and, lacking adequate political will and popular support they have very little hope of success.

The fact that an increasing number of Roma hope to resolve their problems by emigration<sup>1</sup> is by no means unrelated to their social and economic situation, and the discrimination directed against them. Because of their disadvantageous position on the labour market, acquiring refugee status is the only possibility for them to remain in the target countries. The injuries suffered in their countries of origin are converted to social capital during migration. Even though Roma origin and the related persecution and negative discrimination is often sufficient for acquiring refugee status and international protection, we have to take into account the fact that the immigration of masses of Roma may lead to significant social tensions in certain countries, and such tensions will have an immediate effect on diplomatic relations, too. During recent years the temporary or permanent reinstatement of the compulsory visa system has often been applied by EU members and overseas countries against east-central European states. In countries that are candidates for EU membership, the migration of the Roma is taken as one of the delaying factors of accession. This, however, does not provide motivation to improve the situation of the Roma, but rather, it initiates the mechanism of finding scapegoats. Those responsible for the negative image of the country and the delay of membership can now be named, thereby further aggravating the tension between majority society and the Roma population. The factors that do or could actually delay membership are, of course, by no means negligible – the extremely bad social situation of the Roma and the lack of government efforts to improve it or the pressure of migration on EU member states which, even though numerically not really significant, could lead to serious internal tensions in these states, where the Roma are not welcome visitors.

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the present study we shall use the concepts of “emigration-immigration” in the everyday sense rather than in the strict legal sense of leaving and entering a country.

When considering EU membership, the problem of the migration of the Roma appears in another context as well: with the liberalisation of the labour market and the free movement of persons, large masses of east-central European Roma may appear in the present member states of the European Union. Impoverished, unqualified workers from the east could create tension in the lower segments of the labour markets of the states of the Union. Even though research forecasts about the migration of workers have not supported this belief, we can often come across it in the views of politicians.

Similarly to other east-central European countries, Roma people have been emigrating from Hungary for years, primarily to Canada. Even though emigration to and in certain cases, recognition as refugees by Canada has been going on for years, Hungarian politics and public opinion has paid relatively little interest to the process. The turning point in the attitude toward Roma emigration was brought about by the case of the Zámoly Roma's plea for political asylum in Strasbourg in July 2000. The emigration of the Zámoly Roma and the recognition of some of them as refugees in March 2001 caused a significant upheaval in both domestic and foreign politics. The government is extremely doubtful whether the act of emigration and the granting of refugee status was justified and legal. Meanwhile Roma interest groups and opposition intelligentsia greeted the decision of the French authorities which has, in their view, highlighted the impossible situation of the Roma in Hungary. As yet the extent to which the affair has or will have an effect on Hungary's accession negotiations with the Union is not clear. However, the reaction of the government (criticism of the French authorities, depiction of the Zámoly Roma as criminals and provocateurs, and at least the allusion to conspiracy theories) is certainly not conducive to a timely settlement of the dispute. The fact that the Zámoly Roma were recognised by the French as refugees encourages other groups to apply for asylum in the member states of the European Union. Even though fears that masses of Hungarian Roma people will take to the road to find their livelihood in one of the member states of the EU have proved to be unfounded, there have been, and still are some who follow the example set by the Zámoly Roma. On the other hand, Roma emigration to Canada has not diminished. Though lacking exact data it is certain that in 2001 a record number of Hungary's citizens who proclaim themselves to be Roma applied for asylum overseas.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> According to spring 2001 data, over 6000 Hungarian citizens had applied for refugee status in Canada since 1997 and over 500 were successful. (Source: ICMPD 2001; and Lee, 2000.; Data sent by the Canadian Immigration Bureau to the Roma Press Centre and the Budapest office of IOM; refugee statistics published by UNHCR and the author's personal information.)

A part of the present study examines the views of important international and Hungarian forums on the general situation and the migration of the Hungarian Roma. In describing these views we shall refer to the official documents of the organisations as well as interviews conducted with their representatives during spring 2001. Following examination of the documents, we shall briefly describe the results of an empirical survey conducted in December 2000, which examined popular attitudes toward Roma migration.

## 2. VIEWS OF HUNGARIAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND POPULAR OPINION ON THE QUESTION OF ROMA MIGRATION

Even though the migration of the Roma population has influenced the domestic affairs, foreign and minority policies of east-central European states since the mid-nineties, the number of official positions on the matter has been very limited. Nor have any comprehensive strategies been formulated to deal with the problem of Roma migration. It is either treated on the level of the minority and Roma policy of the source country, or as an element of the migration and refugee policies of the target countries. Usually there are two aspects which are emphasised in the foreign policies of the source countries: one is the restitution of the compulsory visa system on the part of the target countries receiving the Roma seeking asylum, while the other is the possible delay of EU membership due to the situation of the Roma.

Especially since the Zámoly Roma applied for asylum in France, the problem of Roma migration has come to the forefront of public attention in Hungary. It is most often mentioned within the framework of the discourse on domestic policy, in connection with the government's efforts to improve the situation, while the question of EU membership is only secondary in this respect. Condemnation of the Roma leaving the country is widespread both in general and as regards the personalities of the actual emigrants. Part of the accusations raise the question whether the act of emigration is indeed justified or could the present government efforts effectively resolve the problems of the Roma population in Hungary, while another part are concerned with the extent the emigrants could influence the international assessment and international image of the country.

### *2.1. The position of the European Union and other inter-governmental organisations*

#### 2.1.1. THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMISSION

The annual country reports issued by the Commission of the European Union have been monitoring the situation of the Roma population in Hungary since the start of accession negotiations. Accession requirements are based



on the Copenhagen Criteria which state that a precondition to EU membership is that “(...) *candidate states maintain the stable operation of the institutions ensuring democracy, constitutionalism, human rights and the recognition and protection of minorities.*”<sup>3</sup> Another condition of membership is that candidates ratify the General Agreement on the Protection of Ethnic Minorities. Hungary did so in 1995.<sup>4</sup>

Agenda 2000, the first document to evaluate the situation of Roma in Hungary was published by the Commission to assess the application of accession when the series of negotiations opened.<sup>5</sup> The report identified no major problems in the situation and rights of minorities, nevertheless it called attention to certain shortcomings.

Parliamentary representation of minorities (and therefore Roma) is not granted in Hungary.<sup>6</sup> Referring to a government report from the spring of 1997, the document asserts that Roma are victims of regular attacks and negative discrimination, and forecasts that this situation will probably further deteriorate over the coming years. The same report mentions that the current Hungarian legal system does not ensure the efficient prevention of ethnic conflicts directed against the Roma.

The Commission highlights the inequality of opportunities between the Roma and members of majority society: the educational, employment and life expectancy indices of the Roma population are significantly below those of the majority.<sup>7</sup> However, the report acknowledges the progress achieved by government measures that have already been introduced or are planned.

The 1998 country report mentions that the government accepted a comprehensive action plan in July 1997, with the aim of improving the situation of the Roma in the following areas: education, employment, agriculture, social affairs, health and housing. The positive element of the programme is that it contributes to the dialogue between the Roma and the rest of society. However, the central budget is only able to provide very limited funds for its implementation. The country report identifies education as the most critical problem related to the Roma, quoting in detail the report of the Ombudsman for Minorities rejected by the government.

---

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Braham et Braham, 2000. p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Registered by Parliamentary order no 81/1995. (VII. 6.)

<sup>5</sup> Commission Opinion, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Even though this has been declared anti-constitutional by the Constitutional Court in 1991, the problem has still not been resolved.

<sup>7</sup> The unemployment rate is four-five times higher than the national average and life-expectancy some ten years shorter than in the case of the non-Roma.

According to the general assessment, Hungary conforms with the requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria, but should nevertheless devote special attention to improving the situation of the Roma.

According to the Commission's 1999 report, the situation of the Roma minority had not changed. Because of everyday prejudices and discrimination the Commission perceives the situation of the Roma as much worse than that of the Hungarian population in the fields of education, employment and access to public services, as well as in the field of public health and housing. The report calls special attention to the statement of the Ombudsman for Minorities, according to which Roma suffer negative discrimination in the labour market. On the positive side, the report mentions the completion of the medium-term Roma action programme and the fact that, by doubling the number of minority local self-governments, Roma participation in public affairs has increased. Despite all these changes, however, the situation of the Roma has remained very difficult. In parallel with the implementation of the medium-term action programme, special efforts have to be taken to decrease prejudice against the Roma and eliminate discrimination from public institutions.

According to the general assessment, the country had remained in conformity with the Copenhagen Criteria, though the Commission stresses that the government will have to provide adequate budgetary resources for implementation of the medium-term Roma programme.

The country report of the year 2000 welcomes the launching of the medium-term action programme, and especially the fact that the government has allocated the sum of 19 million Euro for its implementation.<sup>8</sup> However, it also adds that we may only expect palpable results in the longer term, and meanwhile the situation of the Roma population will remain difficult. The report mentions the low life expectancy of the Roma, the poor educational indices (the ratio of people with higher education is especially low among the Roma, at a mere 0.24%) and negative discrimination which is present in all areas of life. The report addresses in detail the problem of the unrealistically high proportion of Roma children in auxiliary schools and welcomes the appointment of the Ministerial Commissioner for Educational Rights, who will hopefully deal with the matter.

According to the general assessment, Hungary has maintained its conformity with the Copenhagen Criteria and has started the implementation of the medium term Roma action programme in keeping with its short-term accession partnership priorities. At the same time, the report emphasises that

---

<sup>8</sup> This is the Ft4.8 billion (later Ft7.2 billion) sum that government officials often referred to in their statements to the press to prove that the government is indeed doing all it can to improve the situation of the Roma population.

the programme will have to be carried through consistently to achieve palpable results.

In addition to its annual country reports, the European Commission also published a general assessment at the beginning of 2001<sup>9</sup> which addresses the situation of the Roma population in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The chapter on Hungary restates the critical remarks already known from the country reports, mentioning the racist attacks against the Roma that the authorities do little to prevent and in which they are at times participants themselves. The assessment also mentions the occasional xenophobic speeches in Parliament. In the field of education, the report refers to auxiliary schools as instruments of the segregation of Roma. Discrimination in the field of employment with the active participation of employment centres and the various advertising forums is also mentioned. The report notes that nearly one third of the Hungarian Roma population dwells in ghetto-like segregated areas, and the eviction policies of municipalities as well as the prejudices inherent in housing policy have played an important role in bringing about this situation. Besides sharp criticism, the report recognises the government's efforts in the implementation of the medium-term Roma action programme. Despite the existence of the system of minority local self-governments, the report states that the level of representation of minority interests is inadequate, as is the practical implementation of anti-discrimination measures. The document also calls attention to the lack of a comprehensive anti-discrimination act.

As may be noted, the problem of Roma migration is not mentioned in the country reports and other documents of the Commission. At the same time, the reports repeatedly call attention to the difficult situation of the Roma and urge the government to take effective measures. It would probably be rather difficult to discuss the question of Roma refugees on the level of the country reports: EU member states only recognise a very small proportion of those who apply for asylum from east-central Europe as refugees, and consider most Roma applicants as economic migrants. Acceptance or rejection of asylum pleas, however, remains the internal affair of the member states: a unified right of asylum is not, as yet, part of the Union's *Acquis Communautaire*. Nevertheless, the opinions of the member states about those countries that emit refugees may well be influenced by Roma migration: the population's fear of immigration affects the political support concerning delay or derogation of accession.<sup>10</sup> At the same time it is probable that the outstanding nature of the Roma issue will have no immediate delay-

---

<sup>9</sup> See: European Commission, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> For further details, see: Braham et Braham, 2000. pp. 102-104.

ing effect on negotiations. Despite the fact that the country has been the target of the Commission's criticism for years, the creators of the country reports are well aware that the situation cannot be improved overnight and that lacking appropriate budgetary support, the implementation of strategic programmes is impossible. Overemphasising the problem of the Roma can easily start the mechanism of creating scapegoats: public opinion and – as the example of the Zámoly Roma shows – the government itself lays blame on the Roma themselves for the criticisms against the country and the delay of accession.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2.1.2. OTHER INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Hungary joined the Council of Europe's General Agreement of the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in 1995 and ratified it with a parliamentary act in 1999.<sup>12</sup> The general agreement contains voluntary obligations regarding the protection of minorities, including the Roma, about which the government has to regularly report to the Council. The last such report was prepared in February 1999, with a detailed commentary from the Roma Civil Rights Foundation.<sup>13</sup> The report and the commentary deal with the problems familiar from the documents of the EU Commission and make no mention of Roma migration.

The European Committee against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), acting under the auspices of the Council of Europe, published its second report on Hungary in the summer of 1999.<sup>14</sup> In this the situation of the Roma is addressed under the heading "Causes for special concern". The report identifies such causes for special concern in two fields: one is education, the other employment. In the opinion of the ECRI, Hungary today cannot grant equal opportunities in education and the Roma are also being discriminated against in the labour market. To promote the resolution of the problems, the report proposes the more effective implementation of existing legal measures and the creation of a comprehensive anti-discrimination act.

The Council of Europe's Specialist Group for Roma Affairs held its 10<sup>th</sup> meeting in Budapest in autumn 2000. The group monitors the trends of Roma migration and regularly consults with other international organisations about the subject. During the Budapest meeting, the Group held a public hearing about the situation of the Roma, where migration was also men-

---

<sup>11</sup> Based on an interview with Ron Korver, an officer of the EU Commission's Hungarian Delegation.

<sup>12</sup> Act XXXIV 1999, on the Announcement of the Council of Europe General Agreement on the Protection of Minorities, Strasbourg, 1 February 1995.

<sup>13</sup> See: Hell – Horváth, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> See: ECRI, 1999.

tioned. The president of the group “*found it unacceptable that citizens of a democratic country have to seek political asylum in other states.*”<sup>15</sup>

At a meeting the European Organisation for Security and Co-operation (EOSC) in October 2000 the participants stated that the countries which emit the most Roma refugees are precisely those that receive the largest financial support from the European Union. Roma organisations participating in the meeting proposed the suspension of financing until the appropriate utilisation of funds has been ascertained. The participants proposed a meeting between EOOSC, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the Roma organisations to examine the utilisation of funds and its effects on Roma migration.<sup>16</sup>

The report published by EOOSC in spring 2000 on the situation of the Roma and Sinthi population of the member states mentions Roma migration in one respect only: the organisation criticised the British media for the prejudicial treatment of Roma seeking asylum from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In general the report remarks that such phenomena have occurred in other target countries as well.<sup>17</sup> Even though the report makes no mention of Hungary in relation to Roma migration, the country – as having one of the largest Roma populations in Europe – is often mentioned in the analyses of educational, employment, health and housing problems, as well as in connection with racist phenomena.

In February 2000, the UN Economic and Social Council published a report on the situation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary.<sup>18</sup> The report is based on 1999 September data and criticises Hungary from several aspects. Besides government sources the report makes extensive use of data provided by NGOs as well. The document speaks of covert institutional racism directed against the Roma which is very difficult to prove. It mentions the case of the Zámoly Roma as an exception, when the illicit behaviour of the local council could actually be clearly proved. In addition to the well-known handicaps, the report emphasises negative discrimination against Roma on the part of the police and the judiciary. Relying on the criticism offered by NGOs, the report offers a detailed analysis of the government efforts to improve the situation of the Roma. It proposes measures for the government in four key areas: stronger court action against racist crimes committed by individuals and organisations; creation of a comprehensive anti-discrimination act; development of programmes to eliminate school seg-

---

<sup>15</sup> See: Meeting Report, 2001. p.26.

<sup>16</sup> Source: Meeting Report, 2001. pp. 3–4.

<sup>17</sup> See: OSCE, 2000. pp. 48–49.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, 2000.

regation; and the launching of programmes to help the social integration of the Roma in rural areas.

UNHCR has also become concerned with the problem of the migration of the central and east European Roma. Previously the organisation had been monitoring the situation of the Kosovo Roma in the asylum proceedings in European states, as well as in Macedonia and the former Yugoslav republics. UNHCR has spoken against negative discrimination against the Kosovo Roma several times, calling on local and international communities as well as the target countries to cease persecution and negative discrimination. In a statement issued in August 2000, UNHCR mentions the Roma fleeing from east-central European countries beside those leaving Kosovo. *“Even if only a small number of central European Roma are granted refugee status in other European states, their pleas for asylum often contain indications of persecution and injustices suffered which, lacking the possibility of adequate legal remedy, may constitute a case for the fear of prosecution as understood by paragraph 1. of the 1951 Geneva Convention.”*<sup>19</sup>

In October 2000, UNHCR published a detailed analysis of the situation of the Roma seeking asylum.<sup>20</sup> Though the document declares that, despite their obviously handicapped situation, the Roma arriving from east-central Europe should not automatically (*prima facie*) be granted refugee status; the individual assessments of the pleas often show that discrimination has reached such an extent as to be qualified as persecution or that the sum total of the different forms of negative discrimination in the various fields of life amounts to what may be classified as such.<sup>21</sup>

As can be seen, inter-governmental organisations are critical of the situation of the Roma population in east-central Europe, Hungary included. Despite the differences in wording and emphasis, the directions of such criticism are always similar: Roma citizens suffer severe discrimination in many areas of everyday life, in education, on the labour market, in health care and housing, as well as from the part of the police and the judiciary. However laudable, government efforts to date have not proved to be sufficient for the resolution of the problem. The migration of the Roma – even though it is a phenomenon directly related to their social situation – has not received much emphasis in the assessments of the situation. However, it is clear that during recent times, international organisations have paid much closer

---

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, 2000(a). p.3.

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR, 2000(b).

<sup>21</sup> Such interpretation of the justified fear of persecution is made possible by the Manual on the application of the Geneva Convention according to paragraphs 53–54. Cf: Manual, 1998. p.12.

attention to the problem of Roma migration than previously, as the documents examined here show: most of the studies, research reports and political statements cited were issued in 2000. Even though some European states and Canada are seeking to decrease Roma migration, which is viewed unfavourably by their governments and public opinion, by altering their immigration and refugee systems and implementing short-term projects, the significance of the phenomenon lies more in that it calls attention to the situation of the Roma population in EU candidate countries. The import of social problems and ethnic conflicts may only be avoided by the comprehensive and lasting improvement of the situation of the Roma, something that requires serious effort from both the European Union and the governments of candidate countries.

## *2.2. Hungarian government institutions*

The government and its institutions seem to have no single, uniform strategy for the treatment of Roma migration. As can be seen from the press excerpts in the Appendix, the different governments have mostly tended to keep silent about the subject. Between 1997 and 2000 government efforts were primarily directed at avoiding or at least delaying the introduction of a mandatory visa system by Canada. In the light of the situation, achieving this was a considerable success in itself, though it is unclear to just what extent it was due to Hungarian diplomacy and what role economic lobby interests had played. Apart from EU member states, in Europe only citizens of Hungary, Slovenia, Norway and Switzerland are not required to have a visa to travel to Canada. [Since the time of writing the Canadian government has introduced a visa requirement for Hungarian citizens – Ed.] Simultaneously, the government has implemented several measures during the past few years which indirectly influence the assessment of Hungarian Roma seeking asylum. To mention only the most significant such measures: a government order provided for the implementation of the medium-range Roma action plan<sup>22</sup>, an Inter-Departmental Committee for Gypsy Affairs has been set up to oversee the project<sup>23</sup> and the institution of the Ministerial Commissioner for Educational Rights was established. However symbolic they may be, government measures aimed at the improvement of the situation of the Roma can still suggest that the asylum pleas of the Hungarian Roma have no basis. The group of specialists collaborating with the Canadian Immigration Bureau, which had has

---

<sup>22</sup> Government order no. 1047/1999. (V.5.) On the medium-term action package for the improvement of the living conditions and social situation of the Gypsy population.

<sup>23</sup> Government order no. 1048/1999. (V.5.) On the Inter-Departmental Committee for Gypsy Affairs.

been invited by Canada via the Hungarian government, has also strengthened the impression that the Roma in Hungary are not the victims of persecution in the sense defined by the Geneva Convention.<sup>24</sup> Despite all shortcomings, the Roma policy of Hungary is still looked upon as the best among the candidate states, which would theoretically imply that the rate of recognition of refugees from Hungary by EU states should be lower than in the case of its neighbouring countries.<sup>25</sup> In such circumstances, the Zámoly Roma's plea for asylum understandably came as a shock to government institutions, particularly since the French authorities granted refugee status to several of the Zámoly immigrants. Since, according to the official position of the government, Roma do not suffer persecution in Hungary today, and nobody is forced to leave the country because of his or her Roma origin, the officials concerned are forced to try to explain away all facts that are contrary to this position. Before the Zámoly Roma affair, it had been relatively easy to leave the country, as public opinion showed little interest toward the Roma, and (apart from debates around the issue of ethnic certificates) Roma civil rights groups usually refrained from taking sides in the matter. The emigration of the Zámoly Roma, however, radically changed the situation. The depiction of their emigration as an act of political protest and the immense media coverage of the case forced the government to act: it had to simultaneously provide an explanation to satisfy public opinion, to take measures to pacify the Roma communities intending to follow the example of the Zámoly Roma, and it also had to take a stand in the professional-political discourse which evolved in the wake of the matter and soon encompassed the situation of the Roma in general. Due to the influence of the French lobby groups supportive of the case of the Zámoly emigrants, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and European public opinion in general also turned towards the case and thereby towards the situation of the Roma in Hungary. Thus, the government had to take a stand at international forums as well.

Reviewing the press coverage of the period following June 2000, as well as on the basis of interviews conducted with representatives of government offices, the following strategy seems to take shape.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Zámoly Roma and any other groups that leave the country for good, the official message

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf.: IRB, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> The high proportion of the recognition of refugees in Canada as compared to Europe is, according to experts, more a result of the difference in the application of the right of asylum than because Hungarian pleas are more justified than those of Roma from other east-central European countries. Cf.: ICMPD. 2001. p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> On the press: Bognár-Sik, 2000.; Bognár-Kováts-Sik, 2000.; and *Mozgó Világ* 12/2000. Interview with János Báthori, head of the National and Ethnic Minorities Bureau and Béla Szombati, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' European Integration Secretariat.



is one of total marginalisation and moral condemnation. In their statements to the press, ministers, secretaries of state and senior officials depict the Roma seeking asylum either as economic migrants consciously acting in bad faith, often as criminals wishing to escape from justice, or as the misled and helpless victims of forces that intend to discredit and harm the country. In the case of the Roma who are contemplating emigration, the task is to convince them to stay at all costs. The National Gypsy Self-Government (NGS), as a member of the Inter-Departmental Committee for Gypsy Affairs and therefore as the only body the government accepts as legitimate in the discourse with the Roma, takes an active part in achieving this task. The position of the NGS on the question of Roma migration is somewhat confusing. On the one hand they regard the fact of emigration as clear proof of the impossible situation of the Roma population in Hungary and declare that emigration is an understandable though unacceptable act, emphasising that the problems of the Hungarian Gypsies have to be solved in Hungary. On the other hand, however, the attitude of the NGS towards the actual emigrants themselves is rather negative, and accuses the Zámoly Roma of being simple criminals as well as declaring that emigrants to Canada are either economic migrants or non-Roma con-artists.<sup>27</sup> In co-operation with the minority local self-governments, the NGS is actively involved in maintaining the discourse with Roma communities who contemplate emigration, as well as in finding rapid temporary solutions to their problems wherever possible. Representatives of the NGS hoped to address the press conference related to the case of the Zámoly Roma organised by French opposition parties to provide a view on the situation of the Hungarian Roma population that is different from the position of the officially invited Roma Parliament.<sup>28</sup> However, they were not allowed to speak at the conference.

As is apparent from the above, the government's communication toward the international political scene and public opinion is contradictory. On the one hand, they attach importance to depicting the situation of the Roma as part of the country image,<sup>29</sup> on the other hand, however, the position is critical towards governments that recognise Hungarian emigrants as refugees, assuming that the relevant authorities have acted out of ignorance or even in bad faith. In the long run this strategy could lead to a deterioration of international relations which could very probably have a more detrimental effect on the country's EU membership than Roma migration itself.

---

<sup>27</sup> Source: Interview with Béla Osztojkán, vice president of the NGS and the studio conversation between Béla Osztojkán (NGS) and Antal Heizler (National and Ethnic Minorities Bureau) in the programme "Háttér" broadcast by Radio Kossuth on 9 March 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Their travel was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs..

<sup>29</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs finances research projects and foreign language publications intended to acquaint foreign public opinion with the situation of the Hungarian Roma.

### *2.3. International and Hungarian civil rights organisations, Roma NGOs*

NGOs often make their voices heard concerning migration of east-central European Roma. Their presence exemplifies the institutionalisation of the process of migration. In the target countries they form a system that supports the Roma seeking political asylum, while in the source countries they try to create political capital from the fact of migration, usually lobbying for the improvement of their situation, but occasionally giving active help to the organisation of emigration. According to the position of these NGOs, the emigration of the Roma is clearly a consequence of the discrimination and persecution they suffer in their home countries. At the same time, international organisations not only criticise the source countries, but often condemn the policies of the target countries as well. Besides immigration and refugee authorities, the local government authorities and the population of the towns accepting refugees are often hostile to the Roma arriving from east-central Europe.<sup>30</sup> In a statement made in October 2000, the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Centre<sup>31</sup> strongly criticised the discriminative practices directed against Roma from east-central Europe and the Balkans who apply for refugee status. The document finds special reason for concern in the fact that several European states do not guarantee the fair assessment of such applications. These include the states that have introduced a mandatory visa system against source countries because of the masses of immigrants, thereby withdrawing the possibility of international protection even from those emigrants whose fear of persecution is justified. NGOs have reported from several countries that refugee authorities hand out pre-printed “template” rejection verdicts to Roma applying for refugee status, which practice is contrary to the spirit of the Geneva Convention. It is also problematic that refugee applications are rejected in several countries with reference to the alternative of internal refuge. Several states – as we have already mentioned in the case of Canada – try to stop the immigration of Roma seeking refuge by employing sanctions against airline and transport companies. Others – among them Belgium, Finland and Canada – have changed their refugee practices because of Roma immigrants. In Belgium the level of social care that immigrants seeking refuge are entitled to has been drastically lowered. Finland shortened procedures, while in Canada a new practice was set up: by establishing so-called lead cases, the proportion of positive verdicts decreased.

---

<sup>30</sup> For further details, see: Matras, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> ERRC, 2000.

In Canada it is especially this last practice that has been heavily criticised, and in summer 2000, as a result of an appeal, the court ordered that the IRB conduct a new proceeding related to two so-called lead cases. Once these verdicts were annulled and the proportion of positive decisions again increased dramatically. Canadian civil rights organisations also severely criticised the expert opinions lead cases were based on, as they believe that such opinions originated from Hungarian government representatives rather than from independent experts.<sup>32</sup>

In Hungary the two Roma NGOs that most often speak out in connection with the situation of the Roma are the Roma Civil Rights Foundation and the Hungarian Roma Parliament. The Roma Civil Rights Foundation has refrained from formulating a strategy concerning Roma emigration. Though it by no means welcomes the phenomena, it is willing to fully acknowledge the position of those who decide to emigrate. The Foundation looks upon emigration as a consequence of the discrimination against Roma, and holds that those who seek asylum are seeking refuge from the atrocities and persecution they have suffered. The Foundation does not issue certificates of ethnic origin, but does provide those intending to emigrate with legal aid and documents attesting to the injuries they have suffered. According to the Foundation, it is unlikely that Roma migration will have an effect on the country's EU membership, nor that once Hungary becomes a member of the Union, Roma migration towards the West will increase significantly.<sup>33</sup>

The Hungarian Roma Parliament plays a much more active role in the migration of the Roma. József Krasznai, the spokesman for the Zámoly Roma, is the vice-president of this organisation. According to the organisation's position: "*... the Roma who have fled to Strasbourg are struggling for the human and civil rights, and equal dignity of those, too, who stayed at home.*"<sup>34</sup> The organisation looks upon the Zámoly Roma who left the country as heroes, whose action started a new chapter in Hungary's Roma politics. Despite its supportive attitude,<sup>35</sup> the Roma Parliament regards emigration as no more than an instrument serving to improve the situation of the Roma, and believes that the main tasks are the creation of an effective system for the representation of minorities and the achievement of labour market integration.

---

<sup>32</sup> For further details on the Canadian situation, see: Lee, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Source: Interview with Aladár Horváth, president of the Foundation.

<sup>34</sup> Krasznai, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Since the beginning of emigration, the Roma Parliament has been issuing certificates of ethnic origin on demand.

#### *2.4. Hungarian public opinion on the situation of the Roma and Roma migration*

Roma migration has moved to the centre of public attention, especially since the Zámoly Roma left for France. The affair has had extremely broad press coverage and the various opinions about the case have become part of the domestic political discourse. Senior public officials, government representatives, party politicians, Roma and non-Roma civil rights activists, as well as researchers and intellectuals, have all commented on the phenomenon.

In December 2000, a TÁRKI Omnibusz public opinion poll included a number of questions related to the matter. The poll intended to examine the adult<sup>36</sup> population's opinion about the major positions apparent within the socio-political discourse on Roma migration.<sup>37</sup>

The first such often heard position is that "Western countries should admit the Roma who seek refuge there". Almost half the population fully or partially rejects this proposition. Somewhat over one quarter are in partial agreement and partial disagreement with it, while the remaining one quarter agrees substantially or fully.

During analysis of the results we have examined the distribution of different opinions according to social groups.<sup>38</sup> People who are citizens of small townships, whose level of education and income is below average tend to agree more with the opinion that the West should accept the Roma who seek asylum. Agreement with the proposition is below average among those who dwell in county centres, have completed high school and whose income is above average.

An often heard proposition in the debate concerning Roma migration is that "a good solution for the problems of Hungarian Gypsies would be if they were accepted as refugees by Western states". Popular opinion on this is more uniform than in the case of the previous statement: somewhat less than one quarter both agree and disagree, while the proportion of those in agreement and those disagreeing is almost equal among the rest.

The proportion of those who believe that emigration would be a solution to the problem of the Hungarian Roma is above average among rural citizens, people with lower income, old people, people who profess to belong to the working class and those who believe their financial situation is poor or

---

<sup>36</sup> The sample is representative of the Hungarian population over the age of 18 according to age, gender, settlement type and education.

<sup>37</sup> Members of the sample had to assess each proposition on a scale of five: full agreement, partial agreement, both agree and disagree, more disagree than not and entirely disagree.

<sup>38</sup> Within the various dimensions we examined the changes in the ratio of those who fully or partially agree with this proposition.

very poor.<sup>39</sup> The proportion of those who agree with this is lower than average among citizens of the capital, people in their thirties, people who claim to belong to the lower middle classes and people who are satisfied with their financial situation.

Over half the population fully agrees with the proposition that “the majority of the Roma applying for refugee status abroad have not been persecuted in Hungary”, while a further one quarter is more in agreement than disagreement with it. Less than one tenth of the people asked had an entirely different opinion.

The proportion of those who believe that the majority of Roma have suffered no persecution in Hungary is above average among old people, people with lower education and those who profess extreme opinions about the actions of the government.<sup>40</sup>

If we take a look at the Roma migration of the past few years, a possible conclusion is that “the situation of the Gypsy population in Hungary is so bad that they are forced to seek refuge in Western states”. The majority of the population disagrees with this opinion: over half of those asked rejected it entirely and a further one quarter is more against than in agreement with it. Less than one tenth of the people asked agreed with this proposition. The proportions of those who do not agree with the above proposition differ most according to age groups: the conviction that the situation of the Hungarian Gypsies does not justify their seeking asylum in the West is below average among young people (below thirty).<sup>41</sup>

The Zámoly Roma who left for France in July 2000 have often been accused of “having gone to Strasbourg and sought refugee status with the conscious intention of defaming the country”. Over two-thirds of the population accepts this opinion and agrees with the proposition. About half the rest say they partially agree, while the remaining half fully or partially disagrees. Acceptance of this proposition is above average among rural citizens, older people and those who profess extreme opinions about the actions of the government.<sup>42</sup> Acceptance of the proposition is below average among citizens of the capital, people with college education and people below the age of thirty.

---

<sup>39</sup> Similarly to the previous proposition, we examined in the various dimensions the changes in the ratio of those who fully or partially agree.

<sup>40</sup> In this case we examined the proportions of those in full agreement with the proposition in the various categories.

<sup>41</sup> Now we examined whether the proportion of those who wholly reject this proposition changes across the individual categories.

<sup>42</sup> In this case we have once again examined the proportion of those who fully agree with the proposition over the various categories.

*Table 1. Opinion of the Hungarian population concerning five propositions related to Roma migration (%)*

	<i>Fully agree</i>	<i>Agree more than not</i>	<i>Both agree and disagree</i>	<i>Disagree more than not</i>	<i>Fully disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Western countries should accept the Roma seeking asylum.	11.5	13.6	6.4	22.9	25.6	100 (N=1365)
If Western countries were to admit the Hungarian Roma as refugees, that would be a good solution to their problem.	6.7	20.3	23.9	19.6	19.5	100 (N=1351)
The majority of the Gypsies seeking refuge in the West were not persecuted in Hungary.	56.9	24.5	9.8	5.7	3.1	100 (N=1346)
The situation of the Gypsy population in Hungary is so bad that they have to seek refuge in Western states.	2.1	4.8	10.5	25.3	57.3	100 (N=1421)
The Zámoly Roma went to Strasbourg and sought asylum because they consciously intended to defame the country.	41.2	22.7	18.6	10.6	6.8	100 (N=1306)

One of the most frequent topics in the debate about refugee migration is whether those seeking asylum are forced to leave their homelands because of persecution or atrocities suffered there, or whether they are economic migrants, striving to achieve resident status in economically more developed countries in the hope of a better livelihood. The question why they seek asylum in the West is raised in connection with the Hungarian Roma, too. Only 3% of the Hungarian population believe that those who seek asylum in the West have left the country due to persecution and negative discrimination. The vast majority (85%) of people asked believes that the Roma take off to the West and seek asylum there in the hope of better living conditions. Seven

per cent believe both factors motivate refugees, while 5% believe the cause of emigration is something entirely different.

## 5. SUMMARY

As is apparent, the refugee migration of Hungarian Roma is a politically extremely sensitive affair. Any information offered immediately becomes a political statement; there is no agreement among the actors of politics even in relation to the actual numbers, the successes or failures, nor as to whether the act of emigration is justified or not, or regarding the actual fate of those intending to emigrate.

On the basis of the rather fragmented empirical studies that have been conducted, it seems appropriate to draw a few conclusions that may help refine the interpretation of the phenomena.

As regards migration of its Roma population, Hungary is neither better nor worse off than its east-central European neighbours. The number of Roma people leaving or intending to leave the country is increasing, despite the efforts of government bodies. As a consequence of the operative characteristics of migration networks, deceleration of the process in the near future is unlikely.

The motivation of the Roma leaving the country is extremely complex. Simplified interpretations offered within the framework of political discourse are clearly inadequate, and the social programmes that are based on such will probably remain ineffective.

A significant, though slow change may only be brought about by the drastic change in the immigration and refugee policies of the target countries. Even in such a case, however, we have to take into account the fact that after a period of temporary disruption, the system of migration will soon recover and adapt to altered conditions, either by finding other target countries or changing the manner of immigration.

The assessment of the European Union about the situation of the Hungarian Roma is of key importance to Hungary's membership. Even though the Commission has not yet raised the question of Roma migration officially, the Union is monitoring events, and too great a risk of migration might have a detrimental effect, especially as regards the reactions of the member states.

The government's efforts in relation to Roma migration do not appear to be effective in the long run. Neither the extent of migration, nor the proportion of those who are granted political asylum have decreased, while the political discourse about the matter has led to both diplomatic and domestic political tensions.

Public opinion about Roma emigration demonstrates the Hungarian population's prejudicial and negative attitude toward Gypsies. The majority of society is not supportive towards the Roma; most believe that emigration is not justified, while at the same time they would be glad to be rid of their Roma fellow citizens. To find a long-term solution to the problem, these seem to be the areas where serious and lasting change is most urgently needed.

LITERATURE:

- 1998 Regular Report from the Commission on Hungary's Progress Towards Accession.* <http://mfa.gov.hu/euint/keydoc2B1.html>
- 1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Hungary's Progress Towards Accession.* <http://mfa.gov.hu/euint/keydoc3.html>
- 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Hungary's Progress Towards Accession.* [http://mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu\\_en.html](http://mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu_en.html)
- Katalin Bognár– Dorka Sik: Roma Migration in the Hungarian Press, September, 1997 – January 2000. (IOM Research Report, manuscript, 2000)
- Katalin Bognár – András Kováts– Dorka Sik: Roma Migration in the Hungarian Press, February–September, 2000. (IOM Research Report, manuscript, 2000)
- Braham, Mark – Braham, Matthew: Romani Migrations and EU Enlargement. In: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. XIII/2, spring/summer 2000. pp. 97–116.
- Commission Opinion on Hungary's Application for Membership of the European Union* (Agenda 2000), 1997. <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/dok/www/agenda.htm>
- ECRI – European Committee against Racism and Intolerance: *Second Report on Hungary*. ECRI (2000) 5, Strasbourg, March 21, 2000.
- ERRC: *Protecting Romani Refugees around Europe: A Position Paper* by the European Roma Rights Centre. October 19, 2000.
- European Commission Directorate-General Enlargement: *The Situation of the Roma Minority in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia: An Overview*. PL D (2001), Brussels, 28 February 2001.
- István Hell – Aladár Horváth: Commentary on the Government Report. In: *Polgárjogi Füzetek*, I. évfolyam 1. szám. 2000. pp. 54–61.
- ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development): *Current Roma migration from the EU Candidate States*. Vienna, February 2001.
- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board: *Roma in Hungary: Views of Several Specialists*. Research Directorate, IRB, Ottawa, Canada, February 1999.
- Manual on the Criteria for the Determination and Assessment of Refugee Status according to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol* (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, 1979. – In translation: Menekültügyi és Migrációs Hivatal – Menedék – Migránsokat Segítő Egyesület, Budapest, 1998.
- József Krasznai: Heroes or Traitors? In: *Amaro Drom*, January, 2000. p.4.



- Lee, Ronald: Post-Communism Romani Migration to Canada. In *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. XIII/2, spring/summer 2000. pp. 51–70.
- Matras, Yaron: Romani Migrations in the Post-Communist Era: Their Historical and Political Significance. In: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. XIII/2, spring/summer 2000. pp. 32–50.
- Meeting Report of the Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies (MG-S-ROM) Tenth meeting. MG-S-ROM (2000) 20, Strasbourg, 8 January 2001.
- Mozgó Világ*, 2000/12. (press collection): “Spreading unjust and untrue news about one’s homeland is not a part of patriotism. ”
- OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, High Commissioner on National Minorities: *Report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*. The Hague, 10 March 2000.
- UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation: *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. E/CN.4/2000/16/Add.1. 7 February 2000.
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: *Statement to the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Thematic Discussion on Roma*. 15 August 2000(a).
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: *Roma Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Internally Displaced*. Geneva, October 2000(b).

# REVIEWS



# The Gypsies – the Roma and Scientific Research

Some thoughts about the role of Gypsy intelligentsia in the wake of the “Who is a Gypsy?” debate

IMRE VAJDA

In all countries where they are present, Gypsies, as a minority without a mother nation, possess a lifestyle, cultural, social and economic characteristics that are different from those of the majority population. The Gypsy population's position, political and economic weight, labour opportunities and state of health and culture are not only far worse than those of the given country's majority population, but are also much below those characteristic of the countries' so-called national minorities. Thus, the fact that the some 7–8 million European Gypsies have no written history is also due to their peripheral situation and exclusion from the various social systems. The documents about them have, for the most part, preserved the opinions and value judgements of majority societies about the Roma.

During the last 20–25 years, however, all over Europe a Roma intelligentsia which accepts its Gypsy identity has evolved. They demand a place for themselves and their ethnic group in political public life as well as in the field of science. Today we are witnessing the awakening of the Roma to the fact that they have no written history and that they now have to face the task of creating it.

In recent decades – quantitatively – a lot has been published about us, the Roma, in the form of articles, studies and researches. In my opinion, however, most articles and studies about the Gypsies do not inform, but rather provide misinformation. My opinion is similar about the so-called experts dealing with the Gypsies: many of them write studies about the Roma without ever having visited Gypsy dwellings or met live Gypsies, or done any field work at all. As a consequence, they generalise from particular cases. The danger inherent in such studies is that they are based on secondary experience, hearsay, and inadvertently conserve or generate prejudices. This problem is further aggravated by the fact that the media provides these experts with publicity.

I believe that these contradictions and the studies and research about the Gypsies that reflect them can only be understood by examining the relationships of politics and scientific policy.

Thus, if we review the Gypsy policies of the past centuries, we have to say that even though social systems have changed, Gypsy policy has remained intact inasmuch that the Roma were only accepted at the periphery of society – literally, in a village outskirts status – and this only if society at large or the local leaders didn't happen to be looking for scapegoats.

The mentality of the Gypsy policy of "existing socialism" was based on deriving the backward situation of the Gypsies from the historical past and claiming that centuries old problems cannot be solved overnight. Of course, no Roma organization or politician expected this to be so – all they wanted was to be granted the civil rights all citizens are entitled to.

Unfortunately, this mentality is still prevalent today. The central question of the debates about the Gypsy issue is whether to treat this problem of society as an ethnic or a social matter. Many derive this question from the politics of equal rights and equal differences. The politics of equal rights professes that there are no first and second-class citizens and that all people are equally entitled to human and civil rights. However, to exercise these rights people need appropriate – mainly intellectual – resources. On the other hand, the objective of the politics of equal differences is to accept the unique identity of groups or individuals. Socialism did not accept this principle and even believed it to jeopardize the social integration of the Gypsies.

What is the situation today, a decade after political transformation? My proposition is that it has not changed much. True, the Gypsies, just as all national minorities, were granted cultural autonomy, but, due primarily to financial difficulties inherent in the Minority Act, this autonomy does not really seem to be functioning. The Minority Act does not classify the Roma as a national minority. It declares that national minorities are those groups of the population, which possess their own language and culture and – co-existing with the Hungarians – have a mother nation. As opposed to these, ethnic minorities (in Hungary, the only such being the Gypsies) are those groups that are distinguished from the majority population by their culture or language, but have no mother nation.

The following brief excerpt from the 1996 Roma Day in Parliament is rather telling of how an MP belonging to the country's political leadership views the situation of the minorities in Hungary: "In Hungary in the field of culture it is basically Hungarian culture that must be granted priority. We cannot say Hungary is a multi-ethnic country. There are many nationalities living in Hungary, but this priority, I believe, is beyond doubt."

In view of this, the relationship between political power and social sciences is hardly surprising. In theory, the task of politics would be to find remedies for the “illnesses of society” as diagnosed by science. In actual fact, however, social science has always been at the mercy of political power, since the latter – as the primary provider and disburser of funds – is, in most cases, only willing to allocate financial resources to such research projects which bring proof for the hypotheses suggested by the powers that be. What politics believes science’s task is in respect of the Roma is clear therefore: to examine whether the Gypsies have a cultural system of their own and, if so, is it worth preserving, or, in general, can this cultural system be made to fit the framework of expectations and prescriptions of majority society, and, furthermore, whether politics should, for utilitarian reasons, grant the Gypsies autonomy. Reviewing the expert studies on the Roma written during the last few decades we can see that this outlook, based on the expectations of politics, is prevalent among the majority of them.

As mentioned previously, a thin stratum of Gypsy intelligentsia has evolved, nevertheless the vast majority of works on our ethnic group have been written by non-Gypsy experts. This I could understand – after all there are few sociologists, jurists and economists of Gypsy origin – if these non-Gypsy experts were at least able to reach agreement as regards the resolution of certain aspects of the Gypsy question. Yet, there is no agreement as to the social status of the Gypsy population, no unanimous position concerning the assimilation or integration that is expected from the Roma population, nor is there consensus as regards the setting of priorities in the resolution of the problem between education, employment, health-care and housing. The debate – sometimes overtly, covertly at other times – is going on between non-Gypsy experts and politicians; it is they who make up the various theoretical trends.

Setting aside the extremist view that primarily blames the Roma minority itself for being unable to “fit into” society, we can discern three opposing “experts groups” in the scientific debate on the Roma in Hungary today. These are the social group, the multi-cultural group and the third group that simply looks upon Gypsies as a group of society and not as an ethnic group at all. Members of this third group even call to doubt the sense of the term “Gypsy”, formulating the theory of “relative Gypsies” (an underclass).

It is partly a result of this situation that a basic dilemma of Gypsy studies is to decide who can be classified under this term. There are some researchers whose opinion is that the term “Gypsy”, which in Hungary has rather pejorative connotations, has been applied by majority society to denote this group of people from the start. Thus, in order to avoid pejorative

content, they accept the terminology of Rom and Roma. Others call this ethnic group a “socially impaired stratum”.

As regards the opinion of the ethnic group itself: those who have linguistically assimilated with majority society mostly call themselves and other members of the ethnic group “Gypsies”. Those not linguistically assimilated yet only accept the ethnonym Roma, and reserve this for themselves solely, since the group that has linguistically assimilated became Rom-Ungro (Hungarian Gypsy), because they lost their mother tongue.

The significance of this basic question of research is well borne out by the fact that it has led to very serious disputes between outstanding sociologists. We can find a brief summary of this among the chapters of a recently published volume of studies.<sup>1</sup> The two basic standpoints can easily be discerned from the debate that has gone on during the second half of the nineties.

The various methodological principles were formulated in the wake of János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi posing the question “Who is a Gypsy?”. According to the opinion of Ladányi and Szelényi there can be no scientific answer to this question, nor to that regarding the number of Gypsies and their ratio to the entire population: “the definition “Gypsy” can only be relative, as it depends on which side of the arena of stratification we are looking at it.” This also entails that Szelényi and his team also call into doubt István Kemény’s results and estimates about the size and proportion of the Gypsy population in Hungary which have been officially accepted. In keeping with the basic principles of the 1893 census of the Gypsies, in their 1971 and 1991 surveys Kemény and his co-workers regarded as Gypsies those who were so regarded by their surroundings or whose form of life differed from that of the majority. Basically they had no alternative, since during the 40 years of the party-state the Gypsies did not exist as an ethnic group and one could only speak about a socially impaired group leading a Gypsy lifestyle.

The major issue in the debate among the researchers, therefore, is whether the non-Gypsy environment is unanimous in deciding who is a Gypsy. According to Szelényi this can only be a matter of subjective judgement since “in the research conducted by Kemény, actually what being classified by the environment meant was that the local authorities and the experts of local social and educational institutions classified the families in the selected regions as Gypsies or non-Gypsies. This selection is bound to regards as Gypsies those families that present a problem to such institutions, while other families that present no problems will be under-represented.” From the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Cigánynak születni – To be Born a Gypsy* (Ed. by: Ágota Horváth, Edit Landau, Júlia Szalai) Aktiv Társadalom Alapítvány–Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó. Budapest, 2000.

above proposition of Szélenyi we may infer that wealthy Gypsy families are not qualified as Gypsies despite their racial characteristics because – to quote Szélenyi – they have integrated “normally” into society.

I do not know how one should integrate normally – and the study also fails to provide any clues. It is a fact, however, that a prejudiced society that merely tolerates but does not accept differences is able to identify members of another ethnic group with great precision. Szélenyi and his team believe that self-identification provides a more objective criterion than that of classification by the environment. The authors propose that the answer to the question “Who is a Gypsy?” should go along the same lines as the answer to the question “Who is Hungarian?”.

As regards ethnic self-definition and classification by the environment, the standpoint of Péter Szuhay is identical to that of Szélenyi: “For a long time, the most frequent method of ethnic definition in Hungary has been the identification of various groups by the majority or its power groups and institutions, based on their own judgement. That is, identification consists of all that is said by the non-Gypsy majority about the Gypsies, while self-definition consists of what the Gypsies say about themselves.”

Though I do agree with Szélenyi and his team in that the right of deciding whether they belong to any given ethnic group always goes to those concerned, I cannot support their proposition according to which the answer to the question “Who is Hungarian?” should be similar to the response when the question asked is “Who is Gypsy?”. This proposition fails to comply with realities from several aspects. On the one hand – as I have indicated above – because of the pejorative content of the “Gypsy” terminology, the truth of the answers given to this question is doubtful. It is in this respect that Ágnes Daróczi, a Roma politician remarked that the sense of the term Gypsy should change first for it to be acceptable as a self-definition. On the other hand, the question whether someone professes to belong to an ethnic or national minority is always related to the economic and social situation and the attitude towards aliens prevalent in the given environment or country. One should also bear in mind that Gypsy people are mortally afraid of being recorded as such: memories of the Holocaust, experiences of everyday atrocities and isolation creates an urge in these people to “camouflage” themselves.

Another factor that adds to the difficulty of answering the question “Who is Gypsy?” is the internal heterogeneity of the Gypsy population. There are many who doubt that linguistically assimilated Gypsies should be categorized as Gypsies at all. Yet, though 70% of Hungarian Gypsies have been linguistically assimilated, their Gypsy consciousness is at least as strong as that of the Vlach Gypsies who speak Romany.



The sociologist Péter Radó has also formulated an opinion in his work *A Pamphlet on the Gypsies*, in which he complains about the lack of open discourse about the issue.<sup>2</sup> The author believe free speech is limited by solidarity and the overemotional approach to the issue and attributes the conceptual chaos prevalent in Gypsy matters to this double limitation. This conceptual chaos delays and obstructs the resolution of the issue. Radó's main line of inquiry is to explore the operating principles of the various approaches to the Gypsy issue. He distinguishes four main types of these: the social, the human rights, the multi-cultural and the ethnic approach: "...the real question is whether a new approach, encompassing the virtues, but eliminating the limitations of these could be formulated".

My problem with Radó's "real" question is that I have no idea who will decide in today's Hungary who the Gypsies are, what their culture is like, are they a handicapped social group or an ethnic minority or even whether the solution of the Roma issue is assimilation or integration. While during the past few years we have witnessed a certain degree of "merging" between the meanings of assimilation and integration, in my interpretation integration does not mean the submission of one's identity, but rather the integration of a minority into society, while maintaining and developing their customs, traditions, language and culture. For me, integration is a kind of emancipation rather than assimilation.

It is my conviction that among those dealing with the issue the "approaches" mentioned by Péter Radó will not always be compatible and therefore the integrative mode of thinking he argues for is an illusion at present. Why? Because there will always be such "experts" of the Gypsy issue who esteem their own work more than Radó's approaches or, for that matter, the scientific work conducted by István Kemény. There will always be scientists, politicians and "Gypsy specialists" who will have the means and the opportunity to make decisions about the Gypsy issue without asking the Roma themselves.

Of the four types distinguished by Radó, the human rights and the multi-cultural approach became prominent following the transformation of the political system. The ethnic approach had already been mentioned as early as in 1957 when the Cultural Federation of the Hungarian Gypsies was launched, but the attempt was stifled at birth and, in my opinion, the same thing is happening today. The opponents of the recognition of the Gypsies as an ethnic group are all those politicians and experts who believe that the Gypsy issue is no more than a social problem. According to this view once the Gypsies cease to be poor, the category "Gypsy" itself will automatically

---

<sup>2</sup> *Beszélő*: February, 1998.

cease to exist as well. Certainly, the improvement of the social situation of the Gypsy population is one of the major issues within the Gypsy question, but this standpoint represents a one-sided approach and ignores Roma culture and language. In her study “The Politics of Recognition and the Gypsy Question” Júlia Szalai also points out the fact that “after the change of political system the transformation of an ethnic problem into one of socio-politics hit back as a boomerang”.

Having reviewed the main views we are still not clear about the correct approach when a historian adds a further twist to the Gordian knot of the Gypsy issue woven by sociologists and ethnographers. In his study entitled “Aspects of the Historical Study of the Hungarian Roma” Pál Nagy highlights the problems and deficiencies of “naive science” and historical study. In his study the author criticises the representatives of “naive science” – mainly, “historians” of Gypsy origin – who, due to their lack of degrees, cannot have credible knowledge about the Gypsies that a historian could accept. However, Nagy states that “the creation of history” and its related false ideas is an activity that comes equally naturally to a part of non-Gypsy researchers as well. Sharply critical of his historian colleagues – Sándor Dömötör, László Szabó, Miklós Tomka, Barna Mezey, István Tauber – he sides with the Gypsy policies of the enlightened absolutism of the 18th. Century, which forbade the use of the Gypsy language, took away Gypsy children from their parents and had them adopted by non-Gypsies or placed in institutions, did not allow the intermarriage of Gypsies, made Hungarian clothes compulsory, etc. According to Pál Nagy, all these measures were taken by enlightened monarchs in the spirit of Machiavelli, believing their task – in keeping with the principle of force used to a good end – was to better the fate of their subjects, even if changing their lives was against their wishes. These endeavours were motivated not only by a desire to increase taxation, but by philanthropy as well. Once again – at least as regards the resolution of the Gypsy problem in Hungary – history appears to be repeating itself since, according to an eviction act proposed by a government MP and accepted by Parliament, families who are squatters or who are unable to pay for rent or utilities can and should be evicted without a court ruling, and their children have to be taken in by state institutions. In Hungary this affects the poorest social stratum, i.e. the Gypsies.

Pál Nagy’s study has called my attention to yet another expectation that had been known to me previously: “The authors dealing with the Gypsies agree in that for some two decades an ideological process has been underway, the aim of which is to have the Gypsy intelligentsia create a unified identity for Hungarian Gypsies. On the other hand opinions widely diverge as to whether

this process may be looked upon as one of national evolution, whether we may speak about a single Gypsy 'nation', ethnicity and culture..."

On the basis of this excerpt I have to ask the following questions:

Have – or are – the Roma intelligentsia been made aware of the social expectation as regards the creation of a single identity (and, if so, by whom)? Just who represented the Roma intelligentsia during the last two decades? The answer: those non-Roma experts who have "created" the unifying Roma ideology and deliberately ignored the fact which they too were aware of, namely that the Hungarian Gypsy population consists of three distinct groups.

If there is to be a Roma intelligentsia which accepts its Gypsy identity, will it be able to meet the expectation of creating a single sense of identity for the Hungarian Vlach, Romungro and Boyash Gypsies?

I believe these are the major questions we should never lose sight of when discussing Gypsies, the Roma, the Gypsy question and the related scientific research.

# The Roma, Poverty and Culture

Péter Szuhay: *The Culture of the Roma in Hungary:*

*an Ethnic Culture or the Culture of Poverty*

Panoráma, Budapest, 1999, 205 pages.

JÚLIA KÁROLYI

We may regard this book of Péter Szuhay as one that fills a gap: it is a work of science, based on a profound knowledge of its subject matter and the relevant authorities, and yet it targets an audience that is much broader than the small group of social scientists studying the Roma people. In the preface to the book the author says that it is at once a textbook for the layperson, a bibliography of the authorities, a reader, a picture book and a “guide” whose “aim is to provide clues to unravelling and understanding” a reality that is “extremely complex”.

The book’s structure reflects both the manifold nature of its aims and the complexity of the reality. The “picture book” character is ensured by a rich collection of images depicting the everyday life of the Roma and the image of the Gypsy as it lives in the consciousness of the majority. The range of these is indeed broad from the depiction of “savages” characteristic of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the forced optimism of the snapshots of the fifties and the images of socio-photography, focusing on misery and the revelation of true facts, to the documentary photos of the nineties. The individual pictures are not presented in chronological order but are meant to illustrate the propositions of the text, quite independently from their original purpose and date. And it is not only the last 40 pages of the book, entitled “Reader”, containing excerpts of fiction and non-fiction from Roma and non-Roma authors, which make the book a reader, but also the countless quotations from the authorities in the previous chapters which attempt to present a wide range of texts dealing with the Roma. In addition, the book is also a textbook or educational work in the sense that its many real-life examples, its rich collection of images, its easy-to-read style avoiding unnecessary technical language, and its provocative recollections (and refutations) of widespread prejudices are together probably able to arouse and maintain the interest of a lay audience.

The title of the work shows the complexity of the questions and realities involved. The purpose of such a long and clumsy title is to identify the

position of the work within the framework of the scientific discourse about the applicability of the concept of “the culture of poverty”, which goes back to the sixties and seventies. The central question of this discourse is whether this concept is relevant or not with respect to the culture of the Roma population in Hungary. It is not by chance therefore, that this question crops up in the very first chapter of the book, “Clearing up Concepts”. The two central concepts of the work, “poor” and “Roma” cannot be defined without first examining whether the Roma are to be understood as an ethnic group or a social stratum. This chapter adds historical perspective to the question and reviews the various approaches from the past centuries to today. Here, however, we find ourselves already facing another important source of the complexity of the situation, namely that the term “Roma” is a collective term used by the social majority that denotes various very different groups which do not necessarily regard themselves as forming a single community.

The second chapter enlarges on the historical overview and discusses in some detail the last 120 years of the Roma population in Hungary, primarily searching for the factors determining the present situation. The author reviews the historical causes of the geographical spread of Roma groups and attempts to sketch the mobility-differentiating trends of the present as well. The following chapter discusses economic activities and the strategies of securing a livelihood by first enumerating the possible avenues of activity (e.g. collection of foodstuff, seasonal or wage labour, provision of services, production, social care) then goes on to show in the form of case studies how these were combined in ten actual communities (e.g. Tiszavasvár, Ároktő, Nagycserkesz and Sarkad).

The section entitled “The Ethnography of the Roma” reviews the classic ethnographical categories of the systems of family relations, dwelling, food, dress, values and holidays, adding that when dealing with a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous Roma population we always have to take into account the economic dimension. It is impossible to make valid generalisations which encompass the different revenue categories. In comparison to the previous chapter, this chapter is more strongly in favour of the validity of the concept of “a culture of poverty”, especially in the sub-sections dealing with dwelling and food. Even though the term “deprivation” does not appear anywhere, it is still the most adequate summary of the descriptions of these two sub-chapters. A similar approach is obvious in the chapter on health care, which states that, among other matters, the Roma are reluctant to consult physicians because when they are sick they succumb to “the self-destructive, fateful philosophy” of “why should one be healed when one’s life is miserable and full of deprivation anyway”.

The chapter “Case Studies – Curious Histories” offers a much more relativistic approach. Using titles reminiscent of the tabloid press, the author here depicts cases where the actions of the Roma people involved seem irrational or even shocking from the majority viewpoint. If, however, readers recall the previous chapters, they will find that these acts were, in fact, logical, and what’s more, often represented the only humane alternative. For example, this chapter tells us “Why József H. cut off his thumb”, “Why Mihály R. stole the cadaver of his wife” or “Why Matild R. had her grandchildren photographed naked”.

Szuhay devotes a separate brief chapter to the photos made of the Roma, reviewing the ideologies such pictures served throughout the various periods. He calls attention to the ethical dimensions of taking and publishing photos: after decades of pictures taken from various external standpoints distorted by preconceptions, the time has come for society to see and show the Roma for what they themselves are willing to appear to be – to show, that they too “can be industrious and worthy, happy folk”.

The “Reader” contains a total of fifteen excerpts from, among others, the works of Gyula Illyés, Géza Féja, Menyhért Lakatos, Béla Osztojkan, Ágnes Diósi, Károly Bari and Michael Stewart. The bibliography at the end of the book covers both the works cited and those recommended for further reading, and includes over 100 writings by more than 70 authors.

Irrespective of what the field may be, whoever wishes to write about the culture of the Roma is bound to come up against the complicated problem of concepts and definitions. Furthermore, the issue of Roma culture is one that not only regularly leads to heated disputes within academic circles but also gives rise to frightfully strong emotions in society as a whole. Anyone who intends to publish a summary work which reflects contradictory opinions (i.e. ethnic culture versus the culture of poverty) plus a multitude of intermediate ones is indeed attempting a tightrope act, especially if a significant part of his target audience is made up of average people burdened with everyday stereotypes and prejudices. The situation is further complicated by the previously mentioned cultural and economic heterogeneity of the Roma and the political consequences of such diversity. The reader must fully realise the existence of such diversity without looking on it as negative, while the author must abstain from taking sides with any of the many groups.

Hence this book represents a very difficult undertaking, one that quite possibly could not have avoided certain errors. The attempt itself is worthy of praise. In the entire work we may note the author’s effort to maintain a relativistic-holistic viewpoint, evident for example in the listing of internal ethnonyms, the scepticism about the revelatory power of public opinion

polls or the way the Csátka fair is described without any value judgements, just as in the explanations attached to the “curious histories” at the end of the book. At other points, however, the author and those cited by him are unable to transcend their own, middle-class viewpoints. Thus, for example, in the ethnographical chapter the author regrets the fact that many Roma communities do not have the possibility of offering separate rooms or even daily warm meals to children, even though the absolute importance of such factors is not beyond doubt. He quotes without comment Péter Ambrus’s characteristically middle-class nightmare of a world of objects that has gone berserk and turned against us, where objects do not possess cultural connotations any more and thereby deprive us from the basic human act of assigning a meaning to things. Here, unfortunately, even the age-old term “sensory deprivation” crops up, despite the fact that in the chapter on child rearing the author tries to disprove this widespread misapprehension, even though he does not bring up the term again.

If we recall the conceptual conflicts and difficulties of definition described above, we may perceive the contradictions of the books as themselves evidence of the fact that the debate is far from closed and scientific discourse is still extremely malleable in these matters. This, by the way, is one of the aims set by the author: the book is not trying to give answers and does not contain “irrefutable truths”, but merely intends to highlight the complexity of the question and provide a background for the interpretation of individual experiences. The author has, I believe, fully achieved this objective, and this extremely diverse book will be of great use to readers.

# A Book about the Roma<sup>1</sup>

István Kemény: *The Hungarian Roma*

Útmutató Kiadó, Budapest, 2000. 128 pages (Változó világ)

BALÁZS WIZNER

By conducting the first comprehensive research into the situation of Hungary's Roma population in 1970–72, and publishing the work that has been definitive in both quality and approach, István Kemény has created a school of thought – a school he has been developing ever since. His goal, as witnessed by the book he has edited and the research he has organised, has always been to develop a workshop of research. Members of the workshop conducting the first Roma research included Gábor Havas, Mária Neményi and Zsolt Csalog, who later became definitive figures of Roma studies. The now ongoing research led by Kemény involves a new generation, and once again it is he who is tending to raise a new generation of social scientists who will carry on with the scientific quality and humanitarian spirit he embodies. What makes him able to do this is that even though his stand is the same as it was at the time of the first study, he is open to different interpretations, as the new volume he has edited, *The Hungarian Roma*, clearly shows.

Kemény approached the Roma question through the study of poverty, yet now he has undertaken to edit a book that includes works by ethnographers, cultural anthropologists and civil rights activists. Without any attempt at definition, the depiction of the manifold nature of the Roma question in itself provides a new interpretation of what is meant by the terms “Gypsy” or “Roma”. The renewal of his thinking is also witnessed by the fact that – at least in the title – he now uses the term “Roma”. The reason for this is certainly more than just political correctness. It is obvious that the ongoing very intensive discourse about the Gypsy people – closely related to the changes in social and political circumstances – gives new meaning to the ethnic term “Gypsy” and thereby alters the conceptual framework and approach used by researchers.

*The Hungarian Roma* is the 31<sup>st</sup> volume of a series entitled “Változó Világ” (Changing World). The subject matter of this series is rather broad ranging, from studies of the ethnic groups in Hungary to the history of sport,

---

<sup>1</sup> The original of this article appeared in the Autumn 2000 issue of BUKSZ



technology, political science and economic history. Indeed, it is not the subject matter but the manner of conveying knowledge that connects the various volumes. The goal is to publish brief, non-specialist works which nevertheless represent scientific quality. With due respect though, when I took this slender, 128-page book in my hands, I found it rather difficult to imagine how this tiny volume could provide comprehensive yet profound information about everything that is listed in the table of contents. Why should a scientist with significant background spend his time with publishing a work of general knowledge, when this surely takes at least as much effort as would the creation of a larger and more valuable serious work of science? The primary significance of this work is that it conveys the latest results of Roma research to the larger public, especially to teachers and the members of minority local self-governments. Its user-friendly size and even friendlier price certainly serve this purpose. Brevity, of course, could easily have turned into a major drawback, since it often forces the authors to be overly general or overly specific. This work certainly does not go into all questions related to the subject, but it does discuss the most important areas and in doing so manages to maintain scientific precision and – for the most part – successfully avoids taking sides in political and professional debates. Even specialists of the subject cannot complain for, surprisingly, the information presented in the book goes well beyond the basics. I have to add that the volume's size is deceptive, since the small and very close print greatly increases the actual length of the work.

A similar, but broader and more detailed work would be very welcome, but such has not been written to date, even though the necessary scientific background is not lacking.

Limitations of space understandably force the author to accept a number of compromises. In part, Kemény sacrifices his usual humanely sensitive (but by no means sentimental) approach on the altar of strict scientific objectivity, making the tone of the book somewhat dry, as befits a manual. The scientific style gives way only to brief passages, case studies or descriptions of events that are more personal in tone. The exciting scientific disputes about the interpretation of the concept of Roma, such as the famous clash between Ladány–Szelényi and Kemény–Havas–Kertesi published in *Kritika*, have been omitted, as well as the polemics about coeducation or educational segregation. The increasingly heated disputes about Roma politics have also been left out. This editing principle is quite understandable, since several or longer case studies or the correct descriptions of the various sides of a dispute would take up considerable space, not to mention the fact that the authors had to be careful anyway to restrain themselves from openly taking sides,

especially in matters of politics. By and large they were successful in this, which does not, of course, mean that getting to know these disputes would be any less important for understanding the case of the Roma. Less understandable is why – upon the express request of the publisher – there is no detailed bibliography at the end of the chapters dealing with the various themes. Only a list of recommended reading – less than one page – is provided at the end of the book, and this does not even cover basic literature and the addresses of relevant Internet pages are missing as well. The articles themselves, though, contain references to the authorities.

Despite its size, the book fulfils the function of a summary work, that is, it manages to broaden and at the same time narrow down our view of the subject. It provides us with a general picture of the Roma, but also allows us to catch a glimpse of individual characteristics. It is able to demonstrate the fact that the term Roma denotes several distinct groups with different languages, cultures and identities. (And, in doing so, it successfully refutes the view, accepted even by many who are not Vlach Gypsies, that “true” Roma culture is exclusively represented by those Vlach Gypsies who speak the Romany language and that others with different languages and cultures can only live up to their Gypsy identity positively if they learn the “authentic” folklore of Vlach Gypsies.)

The articles are divided into six chapters: *I. Historical Overview, II. Linguistic Groups and Usage, III. Culture and the Press, IV. Value System and Habits, V. Education, Labour and Law, and VI. The Research of the Roma*. In addition, a seventh chapter entitled *Outstanding Personalities* contains a useful list of the past and present Roma cultural elite. This little “miscellany” (written by Ernő Kállai and Péter Szuhay) is partly meant to provide information that has hitherto been lacking and partly intended to change the stereotype of poor and uncultured Gypsies by listing 100 authentic Roma personalities who achieved significant results in their various fields. It would have been nice to know just how the authors decided to classify someone as a politician, a writer a musician or an artist. The guiding principle seems to have been that if someone did something else beside politics which was significant, was an artist for example, then the authors preferred to place him in this latter category. This is understandable, since in central Europe nobody is surprised if a work of art is at the same time a statement of national or ethnic identity and politics, or that many express their politics via art.

The lists of relevant institutions at the end of the individual articles is very useful. (Such lists include Roma media, foundations supporting Roma programmes, educational institutions, national and regional organisations and legal aid bureaus.)

The individual chapters are not restricted to the discussion of any given period or even a segment of Roma culture, lifestyle or socio-political situation. We cannot even say they are organised along the lines of social science. The first chapter approaches the Roma question from a socio-historical point of view. The second contains linguistic, socio-linguistic and anthropological analyses. The third is mostly concerned with presenting the artistic expression of identity in a broad sense. The chapter on *Value System and Habits* is a functionalistic description of the structure of Roma culture. The exact relationship between the articles collected under the title *Education, Labour and Law* is less clear, since these cover such varied topics as schooling, traditional Gypsy trades and crafts, the problem of Roma employment as well as non-government organisations and the shortcomings of anti-discrimination legal protection. However, we can understand these topics as covering the four major elements of the social integration of the Roma, namely education, participation in the division of labour, political and social emancipation, i.e. the struggle for political and cultural rights, and action against discrimination. The sixth chapter describes the most significant research about the Roma. (The inclusion of Péter Szuhay's article about the self-definition of Roma ethnic groups in this chapter seems to be a bit of a red herring.)

The question of schooling, especially the various experiments conducted in this field receives little attention in the book. The problem of discrimination would also have deserved greater emphasis, especially since the Roma question is, for the most part, treated as a problem of discrimination by European and international organisations. May I add here, that in my opinion the system of legal aid institutions has been one of the very few successful achievements related to the Roma since the time of political transformation. The most authentic report about this could of course have come from the author of the article *Law and Legal Aid*, Imre Furmann, the leader of the first and most important legal aid organisation (NEKI), however he preferred to concentrate on analysing the legal framework. Thus he does not really speak about the relation between the situation of the Roma and discrimination, and the other articles also discuss this question only tangentially. Yet, it would have been crucial to emphasise this problem because it is evident – and indirectly stated by the book, too – that the present social situation of the Roma cannot be explained exclusively by reference to discrimination, as many Hungarian and international organisations appear to believe. Furthermore, discrimination itself is closely related to the social conflicts arising from the situation of the Roma within society. That is, the usefulness of programmes striving to do away with prejudices without changing the social situation is rather questionable.

The groups of topics of the book are defined by the approaches of the researchers rather than the subject matter itself. The form is not that of a debate: the various interpretations of Roma existence stand side by side, complementing each other – something that greatly contributes to the sense of wholeness conveyed by the book despite its small size. The Roma may be the outcasts of society, or the term can be meant as a linguistic category or one used to denote a people with a peculiar fate, outlook on life and culture (the way amateur or professional artists proud of their Roma origin define themselves) or it can mean a group of cultural occupation living in symbiosis with Hungarian culture as part of the cultural elite (the way Hungarian Gypsy musicians interpret their identity). Last, but certainly not least, researchers themselves can make significant contributions to both the self-image of the Roma and the image nurtured about them by others. It is obvious, for example, that the basic idea behind Michael Stewart's book, *The Brothers of Song*, the model of the contrary yet symbiotic cultures of the Roma and the *gadje*, also serves as a point of reference for members of the Roma cultural elite when arguing in favour of the goals of the struggle to create Roma national culture and institutions. Or we could recall the role of the collectors of Gypsy folk songs and dances in establishing what we and the Roma themselves today regard as authentic Gypsy folklore.

When trying to understand the fate of the Roma it is essential that we get to know the image non-Roma have formed about them, the criteria for their regarding someone as a Gypsy and the appropriate strategy used to treat the Gypsy problem. The depiction of the definition criteria used during the more than one hundred years of Gypsy studies shows how the interpretation of the Gypsy problem has changed over the ages, often as a result of political circumstances.

It was certainly not a matter of chance that by the nineties the number of studies aimed at exploring Roma culture had increased significantly, clearly showing that the problem of the Gypsies that had previously been primarily treated as a social problem has now become a problem of minority rights. Péter Szuhay's article on the self-definition of the Roma reflects on this minority policy approach to culture. In exploring Roma culture and identity, Szuhay's approach is quite novel and provocative, opposing both the views of ethnographical Gypsy studies and those of the protagonists of a so-called authentic, national Gypsy culture. In Hungary, Szuhay is the only researcher to provide a cultural anthropological analysis of the process of the creation of national identity. According to his proposition the Roma do not constitute a single culture or single identity, but are the sum of various groups that are often antagonistic to each other. That is, Roma culture as the

culture of a nation is simply the result of the efforts of a group of politicians and intellectuals. Of course, this is in diametrical opposition to the formulation of the Act on Minorities, which defines a minority as a native group of people whose members "... are distinguished from the rest of the population by their own language, culture and traditions, and who demonstrate a sense of belonging which is directed at the preservation of these and the expression and protection of the interests of the historically evolved community". In the case of both Stewart and Szuhay it is evident that even though they strive to remain politically intact, the results of their studies can nevertheless further or hinder political interests.

Kemény has called upon authors from various fields and different approaches to write the articles in the volume. It is interesting in itself that he has not restricted himself to the field of science but had the courage to collaborate with activists of the Roma cause. The authors include Tibor Derdák and János Orsós who are among the senior workers of the Mánfa campus for Roma high-school children, as well as Gábor Bernáth from the Roma Press Centre and Imre Furmann from NEKI.

I do not know whether this is just a consequence of Kemény's natural openness or whether he has intentionally broken the laws of scientific protocol. What is certain is that he does not believe in the rigid distinction between everyday and scientific thought, but keeps searching for authentic, or rather honest and open voices that are able to maintain the criterion of objectivity. The best example of such is Kemény himself who was always able to both explore and support the Roma at the same time. Naturally, his socio-political attitude determines his approach to the subject. However, stressing the notion of "deprivation", the lack of means necessary to achieve social elevation is something that has once again become timely. Today there are too many who forget or overlook the fact that the problem of the Roma is, to a large extent, a problem of poverty and is essentially related to the structural transformation of Hungarian society.

Unusually, at least in the case of summary works, the volume offers the opportunity of publication to young researchers, which makes it even more colourful. The sociologist Gábor Fleck applies the classic cultural anthropological approach, rarely used in Hungary even though its merits are clear to all today. Together with Tünde Virág, he did field work in a small Baranya County village, Gilvánfa, publishing the results in the form of a diploma thesis. In addition to Gábor Fleck and Tibor Derdák, who is still working for the cause with great energy and extreme dedication, another article published in the linguistic chapter was written by the young János Orsós, who is of Roma origin himself. The road they have chosen to take is the one created by Zita

Réger. They explain bilingualism not with the low level of development of the Gypsy language – in fact they hasten to point out that the Boyash language is much more refined than Hungarian in many respects – but with the fact that linguistic usage is always determined by the given social media and the content of communication. What makes their article extremely lively is the insertion of pieces of Gypsy dialogue and the fact that they depict language in a cultural and social context. There is no mention of the research of Timor Derdák and Aranka Varga here, who compared the school performance of Roma children with different mother tongues and reached a conclusion identical to that of B. Bernstein, namely that linguistic knowledge necessary for school performance is actually familiarity with the culture demanded by the school. That is, the socio-cultural backwardness with which schools are unable or unwilling to cope is an objective impediment to the progress of Roma children. At the same time Kemény assigns much greater importance to the difficulties arising from the low level or lack of knowledge of Hungarian, though he does admit that, because of what has been said previously, Roma children whose mother tongue is Hungarian are also at handicap. The debate is not one that can be settled easily, no wonder the book does not go into this set of problems in detail.

The editor has yet again entrusted a young researcher, Ernő Kállai, with writing one of the most important studies of the book, an overview of the political and social situation of the Roma from 1945 to the present day, encompassing the results of the first nationwide survey of Roma led by Kemény himself. The studies of Kállai, as a fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Minority Research Institute, have, among others, included Roma entrepreneurs. Another author of Roma origin is Imre Vajda who contributed the article on Roma organisations. Even though the museum is only one of many Roma institutions whose fate is uncertain, as there is still no Roma theatre, cultural centre or radio [Radio C has since started broadcasting – Ed.], its case exemplifies the rather similar Roma (cultural) policies pursued by the different governments. It is almost inconceivable why the museum could not be established. Three successful exhibitions have demonstrated that the necessary collection is available and that public interest is significant. It is also improbable that the problem is a financial one, since the museum would be a relatively low-budget institution. Of course, transcending the dimension of politics we can always raise the question about the purpose of the museum: is it to be a place for the preservation and exhibition of what is defined as authentic Gypsy culture or is it to serve as a stage for the discourse on the interpretation of the Roma? (Péter Szuhay has taken this latter direction as was clearly shown by the latest Roma exhibition he organised.)

Perhaps by chance, perhaps not, the three Roma authors of the book represent the three major linguistic groups of Hungarian Gypsies. Orsós is Boyash, Vajda is Vlach and Kállai is Romungro (Hungarian Gypsy). Their presence carries an obvious message – a message to those who tend to look down on the intellectual capacity of the Roma elite, but equally to those who call in doubt the authenticity or good intentions of non-Roma researchers. A very trivial fact becomes obvious: the origin of the authors is wholly irrelevant to their authenticity or scientific quality.

Speaking of young contributors we have to mention Gábor Bernáth, the leader of the successful Roma Press Centre. Even though the Roma press is often criticized by Bernáth himself, it is indisputable that the Roma media that was created out of nothing, as it were, since the time of political transformation, and the fact that this media allows the representatives of all ideological and cultural trends to have their say is, in fact, a success story, even if the group of consumers of this Roma media is rather narrow. A greater problem is that there are no professional journalists “who, with their presence, could exert a significant influence [...] on the image of the Roma in the majority media”. It is also strange that the journals of the organisations that are more radical in the representation of the Roma cause, such as *Phralipe* or *Amaro Drom*, deal much less with the social problem of Gypsies than does *Lungo Drom*, the periodical of the organisation Lungo Drom, which is co-operating with the government. We may ask whether the reason for this is that they do not wish to dilute the Roma cause – as a case of minority rights – with the problems of severely backward Hungarian citizens (who happen to be Roma) or whether they do not assign definitive significance to the social problem.

The writings of István Kemény and Péter Szuhay form the backbone of the book. They contribute more than one third of the articles published. While Kemény’s writings define the sociological chapters, Szuhay’s studies are essential to the ethnographical chapters concentrating on culture. It appears that this is the result of a conscious division of labour between the authors. Besides István Kemény, Péter Szuhay has been the other most important personality in the field of Roma studies, partly due to his scientific activities, since beside his publications he has also been the initiator of great ethnographic Gypsy exhibitions, the latest of which began to extend the concepts of ethnographic exhibition and folk culture themselves.

*The Hungarian Roma* will, hopefully, soon be published in English. As an important scientific and political question, the Roma problem has become a European affair during recent decades, one that is closely related to the fears of EU countries with respect to migration. This book could be an

important milestone in the process of determining whether such fears are justified and, if so, what is there to be afraid of, what the problems are and how to solve them. It is already apparent that joining the European Union lends a new political context to the Roma case and that it may well become one of the conditions of Hungary's membership. It is important, of course, that both the European Union and the Hungarian government have a stake in finding a solution, but this will only be of use to the Roma if the solution of the Gypsy problem takes into account what *their* problems are rather than just what the problem *with* them is. Since interested parties participate in the debate on the interpretation of the Roma question in line with their political clout, scientists' duties definitely include making heard the voice of masses of uneducated and isolated people.



# How the Roma Make a Living

*Roma and the Invisible Economy*

(Edited by István Kemény)

OSIRIS – MTA Minority Research Workshop, Budapest, 2000. 198 pages.

BALÁZS WIZNER

Despite increased research about the Roma, there still remain several blind spots, since the majority of studies to date have addressed only the questions of poverty, social backwardness and segregation on the one hand, and that of culture and, more recently, Roma politics on the other. The obvious reason for this is that research into the Roma has been motivated by the exploration of social problems and the search for exotic cultural phenomena. This is closely related to the stereotypical manner of thought which has always attributed various extremities to the Roma ethnic group. Thus, the image of the Roma as a people with faraway origins, who are not European and possess an alien culture, live in great poverty or squander money irresponsibly, have no scruples, are extremely emotional, have many children, are uneducated and unable to hold a job suggests that extremity is an ethnic characteristic of the Roma. This is why we often (many times with the best of intentions) present the Roma as an unemployed and severely backward group of the population which relies on social benefits, forgetting to speak about the social stratification of this group or the strategies they have developed to survive the situation of unemployment.

One of the significant aspects of this book is that it shows that the vast majority of Roma, including those who are unemployed, do not just idly wait for social aid, but try to do everything in their power to get jobs and independently secure their livelihood. Another important message of the book is that it does not highlight segregation but, on the contrary, focuses on the social integration of the Roma, depicting the everyday interdependency of the social minority and majority. It is worth noting that there is nothing special about the survival strategy of the Roma; the course they take is actually very similar to that taken by members of the social majority. Their lives are not driven by isolation and inactivity, but rather by the struggle to adapt to fast changing and often confusing social opportunities.

From the four case studies in the book three present an insight into the lives of Roma entrepreneurs in Budapest, while the fourth examines the various

integration strategies adopted by the Roma population of a settlement in Baranya County. These case studies are accompanied by two theoretical works. István Kemény's preface summarises the historical evolution of the position of Roma within society as a whole and on the labour market, while Csaba Prónai's study provides an introduction to the debate on peripatetic communities.

The historical summary of the economic integration of the Roma set forth in Kemény's preface has the depth of a full-blown study. In dealing with unemployment, he highlights the effects of the so-called hard social factors: geographical and educational handicaps. The significance of discrimination and ethnic segregation can only be gauged if we also take into account the effects of other factors, and, as the study points out, Roma unemployment is indeed closely related to these. At the same time, Kemény emphasises that Roma unemployment cannot be accounted for solely by the variables affecting poverty; the theoretical proof of discrimination is therefore given. To this I would like to add that since poverty and ethnic discrimination mutually reinforce each other, it is very hard to gauge the exact extent of this interrelation. Discrimination segregates and conserves poverty – poor people are more likely to experience discrimination and cannot rid themselves of the stamps of poverty or racial prejudice. This also contributes to the explanation of why the social integration of the Roma is so slow a process, even though it has been on the state's agenda for almost 250 years.

Kemény's preface also shows that the process of modernisation in Hungary had a contradictory effect on the integration and labour market position of the Roma population. While they have been continuously losing the market for their traditional services, they entered (or were forced) into agricultural and industrial jobs which lastingly confined them to the poverty-stricken and segregated strata of society, thereby conserving their ethnic segregation as well. Only a very narrow stratum of Roma managed to find new functions within the framework of Hungarian modernisation. Such, for example, were the elite of Gypsy musicians, who secured themselves a position of social respect as early as the 19th century and had an important role in the architecture of national culture – a position, however, which they gradually lost amidst the social changes of the following century.

Roma entrepreneurs, or, more precisely, those whose enterprises went beyond the limits of simple self-employment and family employment, were always a very narrow group within the Roma population. The previously large artisan group was also, for the most part, made up of simple craftsmen without guild who undertook cheap repairs and tool manufacturing work in the villages. By today this group has virtually become extinct in Hungary.

On the other hand, the group of merchant Gypsies, who operate primarily in the trade of antiques and used cars, as well as in the low-end housing market, has survived. Their world is examined by the works of Ernő Kállai, László Endre Hajnal and Elza Lakatos, which we shall examine in more detail later.

Prónai's theoretical study (*A Cultural Anthropological Approach to the Economic Activities of Roma Communities*) is loosely related to the three closely interwoven case studies and provides an overview of the debate on peripatetic lifestyle. The subject is very appropriate, since the case studies do not investigate the question of the ethnic characteristic of the revenue-making strategies described. Do the various jobs performed by Roma have a common, general cultural characteristic? Prónai's study, however, does not show to what extent the concept of peripatetic community is applicable to the present Hungarian situation. According to the formulators of the concept, constant migration and change of trade always allow certain communities to find and fill a gap in the services market, while maintaining their isolation, organising work on a community basis and integrating into the majority society only to a very limited extent, both individually and on the group level. However, given that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of Hungarian Roma have given up their migrant lifestyle, they do not easily fit the category of a peripatetic group in the strict sense. The question remains, of course, just how strict a definition we should use. Prónai's study seems to imply that the issue under debate is just how applicable the new category – whose formulation has been motivated by studies of the Roma – is to describe the various lifestyles of the different Roma groups. It might have been valuable for Prónai to have related the arguments of the debate to the Hungarian situation, especially as depicted in the book's other studies.

The work of Gábor Fleck, János Orsós and Tünde Virág (*Life in Bodza Street*) depicting the relationship between the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of a Baranya County village is also somewhat set apart from the rest of the book. The reason for this is not only that the living conditions, social situation, life strategies and opportunities of the Roma people described here are very different from those of Roma entrepreneurs, even "forced entrepreneurs" in Budapest, but the basic question set by the study is also quite different: how a more individualistic lifestyle comes to replace the traditional lifestyle based on close communal bonds. On the one hand, the study argues for the widespread notion that the fundamental change of earlier, communal relationships is an inevitable consequence of social integration. This process, however, is not a linear one, and it often happens that individuals with a lesser degree of social assimilation achieve faster social careers. Minority representation and utilisation of the various forms of special support for

minorities offer the alternative of a faster mobilisation opportunity compared to the longer-term strategy of integration. Such new political instruments were in many cases first exploited by those who have hitherto had basically no access to the route of integration.

The three co-authors follow the road set by Michael Stewart (*Brothers of Song*) in their research methodology and also in that they emphasize the interdependency of the Roma and non-Roma communities. The researchers have performed extensive field work and, uniquely, even included one of their interviewees, János Orsós, among the authors. Thus, not only did the researchers participate in the life of the community, but one of the members of that community – the leader of the local Roma minority local authority, the spokesperson of the community – also became an active participant in the research work. By virtue of this definitely interesting experiment, the “object” of the research is allowed to reflect on the way he is perceived by the outsider researchers.

The other three case studies of the book form a close unit and depict the world of Roma entrepreneurs, a world little has been known about until now. There has been no previous research dedicated to the question of Roma entrepreneurs, so it is all the more welcome that now we have not one, but three such studies.

Ernő Kállai presents a very informative picture of the situation of Rome entrepreneurs in Budapest and the wide scope of their enterprises, ranging from being a so-called forced entrepreneur to the position of an affluent building contractor. The nature of his study (*Roma Entrepreneurs in 1998*) is basically descriptive. Kállai’s declared aim is to go beyond mere generalities and provide a differentiated picture of this not so well-known group. He does indeed succeed in depicting the entrepreneurs in a lively manner, enriching his study with many interview excerpts and, avoiding generalities, restricting himself to the description of phenomena he has observed.

Kállai describes three major groups of Roma entrepreneurs: those who started a venture requiring minimal capital to escape unemployment; those who utilised the intellectual, financial and personal capital accumulated under the socialist system to start a venture at the time of the political transformation; and those who came from traditional entrepreneurial (trading) families. Roma identity is obviously a basic determining factor in the enterprises of traditional Roma families. This, however, is dealt with in more detail by the other two studies. Kállai, on the other hand, explores the political attitudes of the entrepreneurs and their relationship to Roma politics, emphasising that the majority of the entrepreneurial stratum prefers to keep itself aloof of politics. In this respect it would have been interesting to learn

more about the relationship of the entrepreneurs and the Roma intelligentsia. If Roma entrepreneurs were to significantly participate in cultural financing, this would open up new avenues for the support of Roma culture.

Similarly to the work of Fleck, Orsós and Virág, László Endre Hajnal's study (*Big City Roma*) also uses the conceptual framework of cultural anthropology to describe Roma entrepreneurs in Budapest. As opposed to Kállai's work, Hajnal's study is markedly analytical. The extensive use of the authorities of the field in providing explanations for the phenomena observed is definitely a virtue; however, the text is open to criticism in that it gives no indication of the empirical basis its many general comments rest on. Thus, Hajnal's endeavour to achieve conclusions that transcend the boundaries of mere description is somewhat problematic. Furthermore, while he is striving to explore the deeper strata of the meaning of Roma entrepreneurial attitudes, he neglects to define the extent to which such attitudes may be called Roma in character. It appears as if he automatically attributes ethnic content to these. A precise definition of this ethnic content would be all the more useful, since he depicts a rather negative picture about the operation of Roma enterprises. Despite his intentions, Hajnal might easily reinforce readers' false prejudices about Roma enterprises being built on defrauding and cheating non-Roma, and that such enterprises are founded on false pretences and bluffing – that Roma entrepreneurs are forced to hide or at least compensate their origins to be able to trick *gadje* customers.

Quite contrary to this is the more differentiated tone of Elza Lakatos's study (*They'd Go to the End of the World for a Deal*), which presents us with an alternative picture. Lakatos examines a rather narrow group of Roma entrepreneurs, the Roma antique dealers most of whom are Vlach Gypsies. She describes a world that operates according to a set of extremely rigid rules, where Roma traders make moderate profit with great expertise and a lot of very hard work. Trickery plays no greater part here than in any other enterprise, especially in those areas where the value of goods can only be set individually and with great uncertainty. Irrespective of the ethnic origins of their representatives, such risky businesses were always built upon the art of bargaining, and bargaining naturally involves role playing and bluffing. This, therefore, is not an ethnic characteristic. At the same time Lakatos emphasizes that it very rarely happens that traders make off with a large profit on any single deal, and for the most part their revenue is based on small margins and a reliable business.

All in all we can agree with the proposition argued for in both studies according to which familiar ties play a great role in the operation of businesses. In business communications it is fundamental that the party provid-

ing information be able to trust the receiving party that he too will be allotted a share in the profit made on the basis of the information provided. Strong family ties and unwritten laws thus speed up the flow of information, and this is especially significant in such areas where deals are often concluded informally. It would appear that such characteristically Roma enterprises as the trade of real estate, second hand goods and antiques are built on the utilisation of such forms of relationship capital. Relatives in the countryside, for example, are a great asset in antique trading; moreover, the benefits are mutual. The poor relative in the country is able to make a significant amount of money by providing information and may, if necessary, rely on a fast and simple loan from the rich relative. Having fast access to credit is essential even for rich entrepreneurs, for – as is often the case in this line of business – they may have to quickly mobilise a large sum of money to close a large and unexpected deal. In the fermenting economic and legal circumstances of the 1990s, therefore, a well-oiled system of family relations was a huge asset to Roma entrepreneurs.

Hajnal is probably right in that a certain part of Roma enterprises targeted the gaps presented by the malfunctions of the evolving capitalist economy, the state institutions and the general lack of capital. We can also agree that, as these gaps narrow, the number of opportunities for such enterprises will decrease. However, there will always be some gaps, and in my opinion the question is much rather how long the community system forming the basis of these Roma enterprises will survive. The Vlach Gypsy community of Budapest will probably change long before the black, grey or, as the book calls it, invisible economy disappears in Hungary.

Finally it is important to note that the authors of the book – with the exception of the author of the preface, István Kemény – all belong to the new generation of young Roma researchers, which is yet another pioneering characteristic of the work in addition to the novelty of its subject matter. Each work may serve as the starting point of serious scientific debate, each has managed to maintain an apolitical tone and broaden our knowledge of the Roma. I was especially glad to read the study by Elza Lakatos. As far as I know this is her first scholarly publication and one that has managed to be simultaneously objective, interesting and intimate at the same time.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Károly Bari, *Tűzpiros kígyócska. Cigány népköltészet*. Budapest, Gondolat, 1985. (*Little Snake as Red as Flame. Gypsy Folk Poetry.*)
- Károly Bari, *Az erdő anyja. Cigány népmesék és néphagyományok* Budapest, Gondolat, 1990. (*The Mother of the Forest. Gypsy Folk Tales and Traditions.*)
- Károly Bari, *Cigány folklór I – IX*. CD: BK 001 – B010. Private publication, 1990. (*Gypsy Folklore*)
- Béla Bogdán, *A cigány kisebbség rendszerváltozás utáni helyzete*. Regio, 1993/4. (*The Situation of the Gypsy Minority after the Political Transformation*)
- Zsolt Csalog, *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1980 előtt*. In: Bibó Emlékkönyv. Budapest – Bern, Századvég – Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1991. (*The Gypsy Question in Hungary before 1980*)
- Zsolt Csalog, *Kilenc cigány*. Budapest, Móra, 1976. (*Nine Gypsies*)
- Ferenc Csefkó – Ilona Pálné Kovács (editors), *Kisebbségi Önkormányzatok Magyarországon, 1994–1998* Budapest, Osiris – MTA AKM, 1999. (*Minority Local Authorities in Hungary, 1994–1998*)
- Erdős Kamill *cigánytanulmányai*. (*The Gypsy Studies of Kamill Erdős*) Edited by József Vekerdi. Békéscsaba. Publications of the Ferenc Erkel Museum, Gyula, 78. 1989.
- Sir Angus Fraser, *A cigányok*. Budapest, Osiris, 1996. (*The Gypsies*)
- Gábor Havas, *A Baranya megyei teknővájó cigányok. Korábbi cigány foglalkozások. Foglalkozásváltási stratégiák különböző cigány közösségekben*. (*The Tub-Maker Gypsies of Baranya County. Old Gypsy Occupations. Strategies of Changing Occupation in Various Gypsy Communities.*) In: *Cigányvizsgálatok*. (Gypsy Studies) Budapest, Institute of Cultural Research, 1982.
- Gábor Havas, *A cigány közösségek történeti típusairól*. Kultúra és közösség, 1989. (*On the Historical Types of Gypsy Communities*)
- Jenő Böszörményi – Márta Józsa (editors), *A romakérdés az integráció csapdájában*. EÖKIP, Budapest, 2000. (*The Roma Issue Caught in the Trap of Integration*)
- Ernő Kállai – Erika Törzsök (editors.), *Cigánynak lenni Magyarországon — Jelentés 2000*. EÖKIP, Budapest. (*To Be a Gypsy in Hungary – Report 2000*)
- László Karsai, *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1919–1945. Út a cigány Holocauszthoz*. Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1992. (*The Gypsy Question in Hungary, 1919–1945. The Road to the Roma Holocaust.*)
- István Kemény, Kálmán Rupp, Zsolt Csalog and Gábor Havas, *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról*. Budapest, MTA Szociológiai Kutató Intézet, 1976. (*Report on the 1971 Research on the Situation of the Gypsies in Hungary*)
- István Kemény (editor), *A cigányok Magyarországon*. Budapest, MTA, 1999. (*The Gypsies in Hungary*)
- István Kemény (editor), *A magyarországi romák*. [Budapest], Press Publika, 2000. (*The Roma in Hungary*)
- István Kemény (editor), *A romák/cigányok és a láthatatlan gazdaság*. MTA AKM – Osiris, 2000. (*The Roma/Gypsies and the Invisible Economy*)

- Katalin Kovalcsik (editor), *Tanulmányok a cigányság társadalmi helyzete és kultúrája köréből*. BTF – IFA – MKM, 1998. (*Studies on the Social Situation and Culture of the Gypsies*)
- Barna Mezei, László Pomogyi and István Tauber (editors), *A Magyarországi cigánykérdés dokumentumokban 1422–1985*. Budapest, Kossuth, 1986. (*Documents of the Gypsy Question in Hungary, 1422–1985*)
- Mária Neményi, *Cigány anyák az egészségügyben*. Budapest, NEKH, 1998. (*Gypsy Mothers in Health-Care*)
- Zita Réger, *Utak a nyelvhez*. Budapest, Akadémiai, 1990. (*Roads to Language*)
- Bálint Sárosi, *Cigányzene...* Budapest, Gondolat, 1971. (*Gypsy Music...*)
- Bálint Sárosi, *A hangszeres magyar népzene*. Budapest, Püski, 1996. (*Instrumental Hungarian Folk Music*)
- Michael Sinclair Stewart, *Daltestvérek*. Budapest, T–Twins – MTA Szociológiai Intézet – Max Weber Alapítvány, 1994. (*Brothers of Song*)
- Péter Szuhay – Antónia Baráti, *Képek a magyarországi cigányság 20. Századi történetéből*. “A világ létra, melyen az egyik fel, a másik le megy.” Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 1993. (*Images from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century History of the Hungarian Gypsies*. “The world is a ladder on which one rises while the other goes downwards.”)
- Péter Szuhay, *A magyarországi cigányok kultúrája: etnikus kultúra vagy a szegénység kultúrája*. Budapest, Panoráma, 1999. (*The Culture of the Gypsies in Hungary: an Ethnic Culture or the Culture of Poverty*)
- Imre Vajda (editor), *Periférián. Roma szociológiai tanulmányok. Kérdések és válaszok*. Ariadne Alapítvány, 1997. (*On the Periphery. Roma Sociological Studies. Questions and Answers.*)
- József Vekerdi, *A cigány népmese*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974. (*The Gypsy Folk Tale*)
- József Vekerdi, *A magyarországi cigány kutatások története*. Debrecen, 1982. (*The History of Gypsy Research in Hungary*)



## NOTES ON AUTHORS

GÁBOR BERNÁT (1968) is a media researcher, director of the Roma Press Centre.

GÁBOR HAVAS (1944) Ph.D. in Sociology, senior member of the Institute for Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He has been involved in the research of the Roma for decades. Also participant of the 1972 national representative research. Latest publications: *A kistelepülések és a romák* (In: *A cigányság Magyarországon*); *A cigány gyerekek iskolai szegregációja*.

ERNŐ KÁLLAI (1969) is a researcher of the Institution for Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His field of research: the Roma in the informal economy, history of the Roma in Hungary, past and present of Roma musicians, Roma minority self-governments, romapolitical programs after the political transformation. Latest publications: *A cigányság története 1945-től napjainkig*; *Cigányság és cigányságkutatás*; *Roma vállalkozók 1998-ban*; *The Situation of the Roma in Hungary on the Threshold of the Third Millenium* published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hungary.

JÚLIA KÁROLYI (1976) graduated from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest in 2000 in English Language and Literature and 2001 in Russian Language and Literature. She is studying Cultural Anthropology at ELTE, where her main focus is on Roma/Gypsy culture. She has been involved in numerous anthropological and sociological research projects and has been publishing reviews in the field of Romology and Social Anthropology. Currently she is doing fieldwork in an urban Gypsy community in the North East of Hungary, studying socialisation, gender roles and adolescence. She teaches English in a secondary school and works as a translator and interpreter for an NGO. Publications: *Cigány anyák és iskola*; *Kultúra és közösség*.

ISTVÁN KEMÉNY (1925) Ph.D. in Sociology. His main fields of research: social stratification in Hungary (1963–1966); the poor population in Hungary (1969–1972); the Hungarian Gypsy population (1970–1972); the Hungarian Roma population (1993–1994); informal economy among the Roma (1997–); integration and segregation of Roma

children in the Hungarian public education (1999–). Author of significant books on the social stratification, the poor, the leaders of the economy, the workers and the Roma. From January 1978 to September 1990 researcher of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Social in Paris. Editor of *Bibó István összegyűjtött művei* and co-editor of *Magyar Füzetek* together with Péter Kende. He has published several studies in French, Anglo-Saxon and German periodicals and publications.

ANDRÁS KOVÁTS (1971) is a research fellow of the Centre for International Migration and Refugee Studies – Institute for Minority Research at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

He also works as a program co-ordinator at Menedék–Hungarian Association for Migrants. He is the editor and co-author of the book *Roma Migráció* published in 2002.

VERA MESSING (1969) is a sociologist, media researcher.

PÉTER SZUHAY (1954) is an ethnographer, a sociologist, a head of collection museologist at the Museum of Ethnography. His field of interest: history of peasant economy, holidays of the current village society, cultural history and ethnic processes of the Roma in Hungary. His main publications on the subject: *A magyarországi cigányság kultúrája: etnikus kultúra vagy a szegénység kultúrája; Képek a magyarországi cigányság 21. századi történetéből.*

IMRE VAJDA (1949) is a sociologist who works as a researcher at the Institute for Minority Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His field of interest: Roma political sphere, changes of language and culture. He has published several articles on the subject in Roma and non-Roma periodicals.

BALÁZS WIZNER (1972) is a sociologist, researcher of the Institution for Sociological Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He has several publications on the Roma question. He is the most proud of *Palacsinta Hangja* (collection of writings by Roma children).

Responsible editor: László Diószegi

Printed by PrinterArt Kkt.  
Hungary, 2002