

Töhötöm Á. Szabó

# Managers, Workers, and Day Labourers. Mobility Patterns, Migration and Renegotiated Social Positions in a Roma Community

## **Introduction: Questions and Theoretical Background**

Inspired by social anthropology, a few basic statements related to the internal divisions of the Roma communities, their identities and social positions changing in time, and the processes of bargaining modelling these situations are formulated almost unambiguously in the Eastern European Roma specialist literature of the past few years. The distribution or redistribution of economic resources, the political movements, the re-organisation of the religious field, social mobility within the communities, and spatial mobility are all part of these bargaining processes, during which certain Roma groups, families, or even individuals reformulate their places in society, both within their own communities and in relation to the non-Roma community (cf. Fosztó 2009, Kiss–Szabó 2017, Peti 2018, Toma–Tesăr–Fosztó 2018).

The present study assesses the mobility and migration practices of certain, economically and socially successful families belonging to a Hungarian-speaking, Transylvanian Roma community, in a local and non-local context, and the renegotiated identities and social positions resulting from these practices. Although the study treats the issues of ethnicity seen as a process and interaction (Barth 1969, Jenkins 2008), and of (ethnic) identity as central topics, these viewpoints are not exclusive. Firstly because these notions, due to their frequent usage, often seem to have lost their meanings (Brubaker 2004, Brubaker–Cooper 2004), and on the other hand, also because – as I will argue later – they are not necessarily adequate to describe the processes seen in the field and the phenomena experienced there. They fail to be adequate because the accumulation of social capital within the Roma community of the given settlement is changing quite dynamically, while the Roma – exactly because of the changed dynamics of the accumulation of social capital – have lately been questioning ethnic boundaries to an increasing degree; and because we are not simply dealing here with ethnic groups and the boundaries

among them, but with a much more complex social reality, formed of many components, which can perhaps be better described using the notions of social position and social capital (notions that evidently also include ethnicity and ethnic identity, see e.g. Portes 1998).

In this sense, the connection between ethnicity and social class is also worth to be raised within the framework of the present treatise (Horowitz 1985: 21), as this case (just like numerous other Transylvanian cases, see e.g. Kiss–Szabó 2017) provides an example for the relationships between class situation and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> The coincidence of social class and ethnic background implicitly produces hierarchical relations, and within that, ethnic background has got a status-defining role (Horowitz 1985: 21–25). In other words, Roma ethnic background in this hierarchical situation appears as some kind of a social disadvantage, more than that, a pervasive relationship that permeates other social relations, too. It is worth mentioning though, that in spite of all these factors, an elite of the Roma society was born in the analysed case, and in that sense the resulting local system is still more flexible than the hierarchical systems described by Donald Horowitz.<sup>2</sup> Specialist literature most frequently analyses the issues of social mobility in the context of class situations and social stratification, as mobility within and between generations ensure exactly the passages between them, or flexibility in our reading (Giddens 2009: 463–466).

However, the system remains quite rigid regarding the delimitations of the ethnic boundaries by the non-Roma, as the non-Roma hardly alter their identification strategies, even when they more or less recognise the economic and social successes of the Roma. At the same time however, the Roma build up their own ethnic affiliations much more flexibly, and in that they, too, make references to the elements that influence social position and social capital (work, honour, reliability, wealth) (Portes 1998). Thus, we are dealing here with a peculiar intersection between hetero-identification and self-identification, in the context of which – as the interview excerpts will prove later on – belonging to an ethnic group, ethnic identity necessitates continuous negotiations and explanations (Jenkins 2008: 42). These intersections, and the explanations evolving in their context, are part of a struggle in which fighting goes on in terms of classification, cognition and recognition (Bourdieu 1991: 220–221).

The struggle eventually is not simply carried on to obtain the right to determine ethnic affiliation, but in order to influence and shape a larger social reality, something that in this context I wish to grasp with the notion of social position. In my view, the elite of the local Roma community, while also wanting to exert an influence on the processes of ethnic bargaining, is fighting for a more general social recognition, and in the battle to achieve that they also aim at the accumulation of their social (Bourdieu 1986, Portes 1998) and symbolic (Bourdieu 1977) capital as an

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1 However, by this definition I am not saying that the local Roma could be described with the notion of underclass, the culture of self-reproducing poverty (for that see Fosztó 2009: 16–27 and Stewart 2002).

2 “The clearest indicator of subordination, on the other hand, is the logical impossibility of an acknowledged upper class among the subordinate group.” (Horowitz 1985: 25)

outstanding tool. Social capital in a positive – and here, to a certain degree, simplifying – sense is the totality of the connections and the resources<sup>3</sup> available for the group members (Bourdieu 1986, Portes 1998). In a negative sense at the same time, it also means the exclusion of non-group members (Portes 1998: 15), expressly in societies that are divided from an ethnic perspective. Belonging to different ethnic groups in this sense is a disadvantage from the perspective of achieving social capital. Thus we can understand the efforts of the Roma to obtain social connections and social recognition at the same time also among the non-Roma. Symbolic capital, prestige and honour (Bourdieu 1977) are important components of this endeavour, as the disadvantages coming from the ethnic background can be ultimately counterbalanced by these, and a better social position can be achieved. Most of the Roma families examined here saw the changes in their positions – especially with regard to the 1970-80s – as an improvement, thus it is perhaps not unjustified to talk about successful social mobility.

In summary: ethnic boundaries are relatively rigid from the point of view of the non-Roma, yet they are far more flexible in the perception of the Roma. Ethnic background can be seen as a drawback, but the emerging Roma elite counterbalances this disadvantage when reformulating their position through the accumulation of social and symbolic capital. The possibility for that was given by social mobility, driven by socialist modernisation.

In what comes, following the above introduction and the short part reviewing the theoretic background, I will briefly present the field and the fieldwork, as well as the sources of the data. The following part will summarise the specific features of the local Roma community, and touch upon the categorisation strategies and the hierarchical positions used by the non-Roma against the Roma, or in other words the classification struggles will be presented. The subsequent part will also include the era of socialist modernisation into the analysis; and the mobility practices of the economically and socially successful Roma elites will be examined. Finally, in the next chapter I will formulate new statements about these classifications and the struggles for social positions by examining the new mobility patterns after the change of the political system and the migration of the work force.

## Settlement and Fieldwork

The fieldwork for the present study was carried out in a Transylvanian settlement of about one thousand inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> The village is populated roughly half-and-half by Hungarians (Székelys) and Hungarian-speaking Roma. The main occupation of the

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3 In this sense I also consider economic capital as part of social capital (although I am aware of course that this, too, is a simplification), which is made possible by the definition of Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu 1986).

4 For the detailed presentation of the research carried out in twelve locations see Kiss-Szabó 2017, or access [http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?project\\_id=88](http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?project_id=88). Project number: POSDRU/165/6.2/S/140487. I express my thanks here to Tamás Kiss for his assistance.

Hungarians had traditionally been agriculture, but concomitantly with the socialist modernisation more and more of them began to take up jobs at the industrial establishments of the cities nearby. Following the change of the political system, working migration aiming at first to Hungary and then to other Western European countries also became significant.

The Roma had traditionally found work with the local farmers or sustained themselves by providing services for local households (for instance by making tools of wicker). Socialist modernisation brought about the thriving of a specific secondary branch of production, the processing of wicker through local producers' cooperatives, resulting in radically reordered relations both within the Roma community and between the Roma and the non-Roma. The change of the political system had an effect on the Roma community, too, as on the one hand new opportunities arose in wicker processing within private enterprises, on the other hand migration offered Roma families new chances.<sup>5</sup>

The 24 interviews and the one focus group discussion used here were carried out in August and September 2014. I recorded interviews with the leaders of the Roma and the non-Roma communities, those working in the area of education, entrepreneurs, and employees, about the ways the local communities organise themselves, ethnic categorisation practices, political mobilisation, the situation of the labour market, migration practices and other subjects connected to this, or similar topics. A household survey was carried out in the same period, in which we strived to assess every Roma household, and the same questionnaire was filled out in some non-Roma households as a control sample. I had already made earlier interviews in this locality, and carried out anthropological observations. In the present study I make use of the results of the 2014 research, but also of the experience of the previous years, and while I touch upon the entire Roma community, the survey mainly focuses on the Roma that are successful in a financial and social sense, the managers as they are called using a term introduced later.

## **The Roma Community**

As it had been stated earlier, the village is populated half-and-half by Hungarians and Hungarian-speaking Roma. Interestingly however, this is not reflected by the official statistics, according to which the local Roma population is made up by only a few people (see *Table 1*). That is why it is reasonable to talk about identification and categorisation practices, instead of ethnic groups and ethnic identity (cf. Brubaker–Cooper 2004).

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5 For more about the settlement see Szabó 2015.

	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Hungarians</b>	<b>Romanians</b>	<b>Roma</b>
1850	807	807	–	–
1880	877	778	46	–
1890	902	826	27	–
1900	882	876	–	–
1910	915	915	–	–
1930	1004	993	7	–
1966	945	932	1	12
1977	1072	1059	13	6
1992	1071	1046	19	–
2002	1048	1033	15	–
2011	1092	1046	14	7

Table 1. The ethnic composition of the village between 1850 and 2011.

Source: Szabó 2015

Thus, we are talking about a Roma community formed by people, the majority of which do not declare themselves Roma, yet in local identification and categorisation practices they are referred to as Roma (more precisely as Gypsy) by the non-Roma, and sometimes even by themselves. In interview situations for instance, when asked about their ethnic identity, Roma interlocutors repeatedly answered that they were Hungarians (Székely Hungarians), yet in the interview conversations referred to themselves as *'we, the Gypsies'*. For that matter, a related self-definition practice denoting their occupation is also emerging, when they say *'we, the basket makers'*. Or they simply call themselves *our people* or *our clan*.

Local identification practices are manifold. Still, answers trying to explain the situation simultaneously counting on hetero-identification and self-identification and the tensions arising from the differences between the two are typical: "in vain we are saying that we are Hungarians, while the others would say that we are Roma. [Intervention of the wife] But if we are Roma, why do we not speak the Gypsy language? [The husband continues] We are speaking Hungarian, Hungarian is our mother tongue... just like all the other Hungarians here in the village. [...] But aside from that, we can also be Gypsies." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma) Or in the same context they operate with origin (which, as we will see later on, has great significance): "Well, I have always declared that I was a Hungarian. I am some sort of a half-Gypsy, my mother was Hungarian. She was a Hungarian woman. My grandfather was a pure Hungarian man." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

This is surely connected to the differentiations bearing a negative connotation by which the non-Roma separate themselves from the Roma. These practices embrace wide areas from the symbolic differentiation of everyday language usage (Gypsy = negative meaning) to the economic subordination concealed in

patron–client relationships, or even to more or less latent delimitations like the dichotomic arrangements of culture and nature (Ulin 1995: 522–523), or treatment as a sexual object: “They grew up in the forest... they were more playful, with such a different perception. They are much closer to nature, I would say. They need to be approached from a different direction than Hungarian children. And more simply.” (Female, 1970, primary school teacher, Hungarian) “For the lads are just like that, they do not care if she is a Gypsy or anything, if they can take her from a sexual point of view, they take her, and after that they leave her.” (Male, 1930, farmer, Hungarian)

The subordination of the Roma, their closeness to nature in non-Roma perceptions is also strengthened by the fact that the members of the Roma community have traditionally lived in segregated areas at the edges of the village (a significant part still does), gathered their firewood, and often also the wicker to process, from the forest, and offered gathered products (mushrooms, forest fruit, wild flowers) for sale to local non-Roma households. In addition to that, several Roma families earned their living as shepherds. Of the segregated areas, one colony running up a hill gained a symbolic meaning because its inhabitants are even differentiated within the Roma community: the designation of the hill-dwellers bears clear negative connotations in local knowledge.

These differentiation and categorisation practices are in fact part of a complex, at the same time hidden power exercise mechanism, which also builds on the opposition between nature and culture and on sexual inequalities considered locally self-evident and unquestioned by anybody (Ulin 1995: 522–523). Part of the unequivocal and unquestioned character is the stigmatising nature of ethnic identity (Eidheim 1969, Fosztó 2003): in this sense being a Roma or a Gypsy is not merely the result of a functioning external categorisation practice, but rather carries the existence of an interiorised knowledge, which includes the awareness of the disadvantage,<sup>6</sup> in many cases some kind of an inferiority complex, shame and suppression.<sup>7</sup>

“L. recounts that he was hoeing in [...] [ridge, field] and saw from afar that someone was approaching mooching about on the road. He recognised him as a Gypsy man from the village. He moved with difficulty and when he reached on the bridge, he fell and hit his head on the concrete bridge-pier. He remained there, motionless. L. did not know what to do – as he later recounted, he felt shame for his helplessness and hesitation –, but finally ran to the lying man and bending over him, he tried to help. It turned out that the situation was not so serious. But when the drunken man raised his head, he said: *Why do you care about me? I am just a filthy Gypsy.*” (Reconstruction based on my fieldnotes, August 2014)

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6 “So here in the village this [being a Gypsy] is a disadvantage.” (Male, 1983, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

7 In connection with the local, unsuccessful and short attempt of the Roma party we are talking about the fact that a board appeared on a building stating that it was the headquarters of the local organisation. My interlocutor says, in connection with that: “I said that I would be ready to remove that board. [...] The whole thing started off on the wrong foot. (Male, 1983, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

From the often unconscious functioning of the local categorisation practices and their stigmatising nature one can understand to a certain degree the endeavours by which the Roma attempt to reformulate their own social, and as part of that, their ethnic positions, and the new identification tool that they make use of. And albeit the Roma community had probably already been divided before the socialist modernisation, after that period the mobility channels, the increased mobility provided new opportunities for quite a number of Roma families to follow a steadily upward mobility trajectory, becoming by now a local Roma elite that had turned away from the Roma community, questioning its own Roma (Gypsy) nature in several different ways.

Ethnic group and ethnic identity therefore are not entirely adequate to describe these situations, as it would be rather unnatural to describe the Roma that had been successful in this mobility endeavour, and those that had been less successful and are not connected to the previous ones any more by marriage for instance, as one group. At the same time, ethnic identity is organised according to a far more complicated formula, as on the level of official statistics, almost all Roma reject Roma as a category. Meanwhile all non-Roma – even the Roma health care official, whose job ultimately depends on whether there are enough Roma in the community – can single out the Roma with quite a high certitude, and there are but a very few cases of uncertainty regarding ethnic classification.

### **Mobility Patterns – A Divided Roma Community**

According to the concurrent remembrance of the local Roma elite, upward mobility started in the 1940s in one Roma family, where the head of the family considered the schooling of his children and their work-oriented education important: “Well, they were self-confident and industrious... they were no drunkards at all. They worked from morning till night; that was their secret.” (Male, 1942, wicker manufacturer, Roma) “That we worked. Work. When we had one hundred lei, we did not spend it, rather earned more to put next to it.” (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma) The father of the family gains an almost mythical character in the stories. He had 11 children from two wives. Several of his children served at local Hungarian wealthy peasants, some even stayed at their farms. At the same time, the father sent all of his children to school, as far as it was possible. In most of the cases that meant finishing the seven or eight classes of the local school, but in an environment where most Roma children dropped out from school after the fourth grade, some even earlier, that meant a significant resource. Moreover, there were quite a few of them going to vocational schools in the towns nearby, even continued their training in Romanian cities. For that matter, an important tool of upward mobility in Bourdieu’s sense is participation in education (cf. Bourdieu 1986).

It is important to remark that almost all the families of today’s Roma elite trace back their lineage to this founding ancestor – either directly, or through marriage.

Local remembrance and genealogy are therefore important components of achieving and preserving legitimate social positions, part of which, in addition to schooling, is accepting local religious norms, too:

“There had been two generations here, two... families that carried the banner. The [...] [family name] clan and the [...] [family name] clan. The rest lagged behind... Not that they just lagged behind, but neither did they send their children to school, nor to church confirmation. In our time, when we had our confirmation, only the members of our family had confirmation. They [the others] were not religious or anything, either... they did not go to church at all.” (Male, 1945, wicker manufacturer, Roma).

Family endeavours, local occupation traditions, primarily wicker processing luckily concurred with certain phases of the socialist modernisation in the 1950s, later in the 1960s and 1970s. The fifties and the beginning of the sixties primarily meant the reorganisation of local agriculture and the organisation of collective farms. But in the same period, for the first time in the village within a local cooperative wicker products were manufactured on a larger scale, meeting not only and not primarily the needs of local farmers. Still, wicker processing and the upward mobility of the local Roma gained impetus when in the seventies, an artisans' cooperative in a small town nearby organised a local wicker processing section in the village, which was later complemented by a similar section of a local consumers' cooperative, and an affiliated department of a larger cooperative from the county capital.

In these cooperative divisions not only ornamental pieces (flower-stands) and storage items (baskets, boxes) were produced any more, but entire sets of furniture were created, tables, chairs, settees for balconies, terraces or weekend houses. At the same time, production was not only carried out in the cooperatives, but in some kind of a household industry system, family members could work at home; the raw materials being ensured and the final product also being bought by the cooperative.

The creation of the cooperatives and the socialist development of wicker processing, the organisation of raw material supply and of the market of final products were important for the local Roma from three perspectives:

1. It made possible for ethnicity based self-identification strategies to shift towards an employment-based identification strategy. An important role in the process was played by the fact that wicker processing did not only fulfil the needs of a local society, primarily rustic in nature (did not depend of that world any longer), it did not simply fit in the economic practices of poverty (often equal with the Gypsies);

2. The more educated Roma could fulfil responsible positions in the cooperatives, and they indeed did that. Although the top leadership of the cooperatives was still formed of non-Roma individuals, some of the middle managers were already Roma (heads of department, purchasing agents), some of them even having non-Roma employees in their subordination. This questioned the asymmetric relations that had been unquestioned before;



3. The cooperative system and the putting-out system completing it ensured an accumulation of wealth for successful Roma families unimaginable before. Heads of families working as managers of departments recount that at the end of the seventies and the early eighties, when average salaries in Romania were somewhere between two and three thousand lei, there were months when they earned as much as 16000 lei.

The learned members of the mentioned family, who could comply with the requirements of local work ethic, obviously enjoyed advantages in the newly forming cooperative sector. This also contributed to the evolution of a mobility spiral for them, both on a local level, and outside the village. Choosing a dwelling place outside the segregated Roma areas, clearly facilitated by the significant incomes, constituted an important part of local mobility. Some of the houses becoming vacant in the village that was changing in the context of socialist modernisation were bought by these already well-to-do Roma families, whose mobility was now helped by the newly established neighbourhood relations, too.

Based on the recollections, the relationships with the Hungarians has always had and has got today as well a practical and symbolic importance simultaneously. The specific way of organisation of ethnic identification is shown by the fact that in the case of the descendants of the founding ancestor, part of the formulation of the social positions – as it was shown earlier – frequently includes references to Hungarian forefathers. But even among the forebears of the founding ancestor – besides their hard working lives – this reference appears: “My father also came from a family with many children. [...] They were shepherds, his father was physically handicapped, and his mother was a pure born Hungarian woman.” (Male, 1945, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

In the case of those descending from the founding ancestor this kind of reference to a Hungarian mother frequently appears in the interviews. It shows the other side of the already mentioned subordination-bearing sexuality: while the perception as a sexual object by the Hungarian farmers is a boundary-defining practice, in the case of the Roma it is a tool of defining a legitimate social position that is also accepted by the Hungarians for concrete cases, like when they explain and interpret the successes of a Roma individual or family.

Another important indicator of success is the embeddedness into Hungarian networks, the respect gained in these circles: “Well, I am in good friendly terms with everybody. We are not in bad terms with anybody in the village, nor Hungarians, nor Gypsies. [...] On Sundays, when we play cards,<sup>8</sup> I have my own place. And even if I do not go, nobody sits there.” (Male, 1945, wicker manufacturer, Roma) Having Hungarian forebears is thus some kind of a cause, while a Hungarian circle of acquaintances, friends is some kind of a result; the two mutually help each other. And the same way, the ability to find one’s way in the worlds outside the village is

8 On Sunday afternoon wealthy farmers play cards in the local pub. A few members of the Roma elite are also accepted in this circle.

simultaneously the cause and the result of local success: “I had my good acquaintances also on the level of the county. Any kind of problem they had I knew who to approach and who to talk to.” (Male, 1945, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

Upward mobility at the same time also resulted in or enhanced the strong division of the Roma community. Socialist modernisation did not mean extensive social emancipation in the case of the Roma either, or at least the degree of it was different. The evolution of mobility paths had been influenced on the one hand by the different degrees of integration into wicker processing, and on the other hand by the involvement into wicker processing or staying out of it. In that sense there are three important categories of the Roma community that can be distinguished: the managers, the workers and the day labourers.

The managers are the members of the elite descending from the already mentioned founding ancestor, who in most cases also know everything about the craftsmanship of wicker processing,<sup>9</sup> but what is even more important, they had integrated into the wicker industry as decision makers already in the years of socialism, accumulated significant fortunes and good connection capital (and during the privatisation process they managed to privatise and take these connections with them, too).<sup>10</sup> The workers are the Roma, who had also worked as subordinates in the years of socialism, knowing every detail of wicker processing but lacking the resources necessary to start their own ventures. Most of them work for the managers today, albeit there are examples when they attempt to start their own enterprises. However, as they lack capital, they are at the mercy of the managers, who also control the raw material supply. Finally, the day labourers are the ones that had only occasionally partaken in wicker processing in the years of socialism, they rather worked in the local collective farms, in lower positions. They only know wicker processing on a basic level, being mostly able to perform raw physical tasks (the carrying of wicker, boiling, perhaps peeling).

An important part of local identification practices, the negotiation processes on the emerging social positions, is that the members of the elite, the managers, distinguish themselves from the day labourers very clearly, a practice that is mostly based on their relationship to work or their attitude towards the norms interiorised by the Roma elite: “You know [...] [family name], living here on the hill. They were all milkers. They do not produce baskets today, either. [...] They don’t know how to do that. They peel the wicker. Those who are unable to work with the baskets, go as day labourers.” (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma) “For not only the Hungarians see the Gypsies, Gypsies are also able to judge the Gypsies. For instance we go to a party place, [...], or a performance, and we don’t like, either, the way they behave.

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9 Their social capital is positively influenced by the fact that they organise presentations to local and non-local non-Roma. These presentations constitute a very important part of local recognition policies, and those achieving successes in this field in Hungary, too, also come from their circles (see later).

10 In this sense they remind us to the managers of the post-socialist transition – and that is exactly why I find the term adequate –, who began the accumulation of capital as managers of socialist enterprises as early as the 1980s, being able to successfully transfer these capitals to the transition period (cf. Verdery 1996, Humphrey 2002).

Not to mention the Hungarians, they dislike it even more... there are these disorganised ones..., these nobodies..., they stand there and you cannot enter in some of the pubs because of them.” (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

Besides the stratification of the Roma community it is also important to remark that social mobility was successful mostly in the case of the emerging elite, they were the only ones managing to redefine their social positions, more or less.<sup>11</sup> The benchmark of successfulness is often the positioning with regard to the entire local community: “I feel that my family lives in the best possible circumstances.” (Male, 1945, wicker manufacturer, Roma) To see the complete story, though, one must also admit that many do not feel that their mobility is completed, moreover – as I will demonstrate in the next chapter – the last years were described by many in the terms of regress.

Mobility paths, the resulting social positions and the continuously reshaped and renegotiated ethnic identities are well demonstrated by the example of a young man from the Roma elite, the circle of managers. His family is among the most prosperous ones, his father had fulfilled several important positions in the cooperatives. His mother, as she told us, is of Hungarian origin, a fact not to be neglected. He graduated in a computer science high school in a town nearby, but did not go to university because of his father’s illness. He is staying at home, doing wicker manufacturing, but also working as a middle manager in a close factory. At the factory his colleagues do not know that he is of a Roma origin, so in this context his ethnic background is strongly stigmatising. As he is living with his family in one of the segregated areas, he does not want to invite his colleagues to his place, because although his house is equipped with everything needed for the amenities of life, he is afraid that the neighbourhood would betray him: “It is very bad. Cause I try to dedicate all my time to improve the situation of the family and the estate [...], and then anybody arriving to our street can see what is there.” He considers his mobility and the redefinition of his social position carried out only half-way through in this context: “I am trying to do something about this, but there is not really very much I can do. Now I am trying really hard..., I will not be able to come away from there, but I am trying to get at least my sons out somehow.” (Male, 1983, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

## **New Mobility Patterns, Migration Practices**

The change of the political system resulted in significant reorganisation in the local Roma community. It is worth underlining a few aspects here in connection with the managers, respectively the day labourers. For the managers their private enterprises connecting to the market ensured an ever larger degree of economic success, or in other words, their upward social mobility became stronger and they could

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11 However, the members of almost all groups turn away from ethnic categorisation, as they find it stigmatising – as it is shown by the official statistics, but also the conversations.

also strengthen their social positions. It can probably be explained by the socialist period, but the beginning of the nineties also contributed for sure to the fact that this elite describes its situation in the terms of market production and integration.<sup>12</sup> As it is said, it was characteristic for the increased demand of the nineties, at the time already satisfied by private ventures, that the buyers stood in queues for the products, and there hadn't been anything that the merchants or the dealers would not be willing to buy.

On the other side however the day labourers lost the relative security of the collective farm, and have become even more vulnerable. Thus, while upward mobility was more or less continuous in the case of the managers, we can rather talk about a downward mobility in the case of the day labourers, which was in this way aggravated by the increase of the social distance between the two groups: "There is another group, [...] the weaker part... where there is a huge mess. I don't really know what could be done there. [...] There is no solidarity there. Altercations are permanent... about the children, about almost everything..." (Male, 1983, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

Following the change of the political system, besides the opening of the market – or intertwined with it – the other important development in the life of the Roma (and generally in the life of the entire locality) was the opening of the borders and the unfolding opportunities for working force migration. The explosion-like development of private entrepreneurship and the opening of the market, respectively the working opportunities in Hungary have indeed contributed to substantial financial growth, yet on the other side these caused more and more difficulties in the operation of local cooperative divisions: "Now the people have begun to immigrate to Hungary. There was no-one to work with. [...] No matter if they were employed or not, they had their passports made, and off they went. The border was open, and wages were much better there." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

Members of the Roma elite, the managers, took jobs in Hungary in the field of wicker processing, and many of the workers did the same. In the golden years of migration and working in Hungary tens of families worked within the same company. Although some of them had better positions, for the great majority of the managers spatial mobility represented a step back from a social perspective: "We called it a colony. Only my family had a separate workshop there and separate living quarters. The others were here and there, on the granges, and they collected the wares by car." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma) Still, two factors, the significant wages on the one hand and the new opportunity of ethnic identification on the other must have compensated them. Of the incomes in Hungary the following passage is indicative: "There in Hungary, basket-weaving was paid well in the beginning. [...] If someone worked hard right from the very beginning, two or three months later he could buy a car." (Male, 1942, wicker manufacturer, Roma) It is important to emphasise that prior to the change of the political system, apart from

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12 In contrast for instance with the Roma community of another locality that we analysed, where employment was the most important point of reference. (See Kiss–Szabó 2017.)

the institutions (the village council, the collective farm, the consumers' cooperative) only but a few privileged people (the physician, the veterinarian, the shop-keeper, the manager of the consumers' cooperative) had had cars in the village, therefore owning one in the early nineties was also seen as a status symbol. The new opportunities of identification are described by the following quote: "In fact national identity does not matter. When you go abroad you are considered a Romanian anyway." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

Spatial mobility is often connected to social mobility by the specialist literature (Giddens 2009: 463–466). In many cases this is true indeed (Anghel 2013), even regarding the Roma migrant groups (Toma–Tesăr–Fosztó 2018). But it is not always evident, as migration routes can be fragmented, they include many uncertainties, employees are exposed to the intermediators, and in the end they quite frequently reproduce the shortage of resources characteristic for their home communities (Szabó 2018). Roma guest workers have to face the changes of market conditions in the beginning: "then, as more and more went to work there, prices loosened there, too, he [the owner of the company] was not willing to pay that much anymore." (Male, 1942, wicker manufacturer, Roma) Hopes connected to spatial mobility often did not turn into reality in the general sense, many recollections talk about facing fraud, disappointment, withheld wages, tricks with the official papers: "I have got seven years and six months of official employment, after having worked for eleven years, only that I was ripped off, unfortunately." (Male, 1972, wicker manufacturer, Roma). In the end, the final breakthrough came about only for a very few, many returned to the village: "He got nothing of the house because everything had to be officially registered on the name of the woman. There was the car, and he came home with his personal belongings. He worked for nothing for six years." (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma) Still, some of those remaining abroad after having left the examined village achieved important successes, and now they are teaching wicker processing in people's academies and special courses.

The reaction of the local Roma elite to the narrowed working opportunities in Hungary was the close of the migration routes there, as early as the 2000s, but in any case after 2010. However, returning to the village occurred in a moment of great changes on the global market of wicker merchandise, when (machine weaved) Polish and Chinese wicker products, rattan products, the increased offer of interior decoration shops produced a serious competition for local production. The managers, mostly collaborating with the dealers in the area in selling, were unable to come up with flexible solutions to these challenges of the market; they could not enter for instance into circle of suppliers to the wholesale stores in the Capital. The reason for that was perhaps that lacking the cooperative background (reminder: the cooperatives split up in the early 1990s), relying solely on individual production their bargaining positions were too weak.

Only one person managed to break through, a young entrepreneur almost seen by the traditional Roma elite, the managers as a parvenu, whose social position is thus questioned by the members of the Roma elite themselves. The young

undertaker for that matter is only distantly related by his ascendants to the two large clans; his parents were workers and not managers, and although his origins would probably be forgiven, his quick way of growing rich (where a rich relative living abroad having left the village is suspected to be the silent partner) is seen illegitimate in a certain sense. This fight of recognition policy is carried on simultaneously at the edge of the Roma and the non-Roma communities, inside the layers of the Roma community, but even between the newly formed and the traditional elite.

The stagnation of the local and regional market of wicker products (“everything is going backwards. This set [of furniture] cost the same amount 10 years ago”), the narrowing possibilities implicitly cause frustrations to the managers, who had lately been forced to seek for new migration routes, too. Those recognising this regress, yet were not willing to give up (very much) of their living standards, started to go to work as seasonal agricultural workers in Germany, beginning with the second half of 2000s. And although in the beginning this was also promising good incomes, by the mid-2010s a decline was experienced here, too, by those involved. Whereas in the early period they could even make some savings from their income earned during the season, or had had enough to buy the raw materials during the winter, by the mid-2010s, their earnings – among other reasons because the other Eastern European workers appearing as a competition and the new regulations regarding overtime – decreased drastically, only being enough to ensure subsistence from one season to the other. This obviously influenced the struggle for social positions negatively, which was further aggravated by the fact that the former managers found themselves as subordinate employees in their new situations. Moreover, their working and living conditions were not in harmony with their expectations rooted in their positions at home, either: “Only this shitty brood, only they can stay there. Who got used to cleanliness and order, cannot... these jumbled folks. [...] Two hundred – two hundred and fifty people there, common kitchen, common toilets.” (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

The 1990s in a certain sense – and especially in the beginning or up until the 2000s – provided the framework for further capital accumulation, upward social mobility and the search for new social positions. Spatial mobility had a role to play in that, as the migration of workforce contributed to the strengthening of the positions of the Roma elite, for instance by the fact that they could return from Hungary as new car owners, the possessors of an important status symbol. However, as the opportunities in Hungary narrowed down, and with the almost simultaneous change of the local and regional wicker processing market, the roads to seek or strengthen new social positions were also closed down partially or completely. Finally, neither migration to Hungary, nor working in Germany later on ensured further opportunities of social mobility. The members of the elite produced in the 1970s and 1980s, the managers are old people by now, and often see the positions of their children as a regress, a step back compared to their own. That explains the following, somewhat resigned statement: “Well..., at a time we were better off than the Hungarians, I daresay. But now we are somewhere in the middle range. [...] We have

got everything we need, but we are more in the middle range moneywise.” (Male, 1950, wicker manufacturer, Roma)

## Conclusions

In the study I made an attempt to present the dynamics of the social processes and changes, and the bargaining processes that shaped them in a Roma community that is internally quite divided, and in which struggles of classification and recognition policy take place simultaneously against the non-Roma, but also among the different Roma groups. Perhaps I succeeded to argue that although the ethnic identity can be an important component of the present situation – and of similar situations –, when observing the prevailing dynamics it is probably worth focusing on the identification, categorisation practices. During the bargaining processes earlier ethnic identification practices are also implicitly questioned; but not simply the ethnic identifications, but rather the sum of identities are shifted. Therefore, I made the assumption that instead and/or in addition to ethnic identification, social position and its seeking, and the accumulation of social and symbolic capitals describe the complex situation more plausibly.

The local Roma and non-Roma communities are separated from each other in the perception of the non-Roma by relatively sharp ethnic boundaries. Ethnic boundaries in a traditional sense also carried a class division in themselves. The perception of the boundary and the class division are continuously questioned by the Roma (class division especially by the emancipated Roma), although paradoxically they live their Roma-ness (Gypsiness) as a stigma in certain situations. Disadvantages, stigmatisations rooted in ethnic background, are counterbalanced by social mobility, which got its impetus from socialist modernisation. Increased social mobility resulted by the time when the change of the political system came in an extremely divided Roma community, which produced its own underclass, against whom the new Roma elite maintains the same classification mechanisms that they themselves had to face from the non-Roma.

The social mobility of the socialist era clearly positively influenced the strengthening of the social positions in the case of the Roma elite. The processes subsequent to the change of the political system also acted in the same positive direction in the beginning, but later, as a consequence of the changes of global market relations, the conditions of capital accumulation were also altered, and thus the conditions of social mobility, too. Migration, spatial mobility only fulfilled the expectations in the beginning, while current spatial mobility practices are perceived more as a decline or downward mobility. Relating to the main title of the conference (*Departure and Arrival*) we may raise the question whether the families presented here, participating in the mobility described, have finally arrived or not?

*Translated by Emőd Farkas*

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### **Menedzserek, munkások, napszámosok.**

#### **Mobilitási minták, migráció és társadalmi pozíció egy roma közösségben**

Jelen tanulmány egy magyarul beszélő, gazdaságilag és társadalmilag sikeres roma csoport mobilitási és migrációs gyakorlatait vizsgálja. A csoport helyzetének a bemutatásában a tanulmány túllép az etnicitás egyszerűsítő elemzésén és arra tesz javaslatot, hogy a csoport harcait az ismerés és elismerés (identifikáció és kategorizáció), a társadalmi tőke és a társadalmi pozíció kombinált perspektíváin keresztül szemléljük. A cikk amellet érvel, hogy a társadalmi tőke felhalmozása nem csak az etnikai határok újratárgyalását eredményezte, hanem a roma közösség belső tagolódását is. Végül a cikk hangsúlyozza, hogy történeti perspektívából nézve ezek a folyamatok rendkívül dinamikusak és nem tekinthetjük őket lezártnak.

### **Manageri, muncitori și zilieri. Modele de mobilitate, migrație și poziții sociale renegociate într-o comunitate de romi**

Studiul de față investighează practicile de mobilitate și de migrație ale unui grup de romi, vorbitori de limba maghiară, cu succese economice și sociale. În prezentarea situației grupului studiul depășește analiza simplistă a etnicității și propune să vedem luptele acestui grup prin perspectiva combinată a cunoașterii și recunoașterii (identificare și categorizare), capital social și poziție socială. Articolul argumentează că acumularea capitalului social a avut ca rezultat nu numai renegocierea granițelor etnice, dar și divizarea internă a comunității de romi. Finalmente, articolul subliniază că aceste procese văzute în perspectivă istorică sunt foarte dinamice și nu le putem percepe ca și încheiate.

### **Managers, Workers and Day Labourers. Mobility Patterns, Migration and Renegotiated Social Positions in a Roma Community**

The present study investigates the mobility and migration practices of an economically and socially successful Hungarian-speaking Roma group. In presenting this group's situation the study steps beyond the simplistic analysis of the ethnic background and proposes to view the group's struggles from the combined perspectives of cognition and recognition (identification and categorization), social capital and social position. The article argues that the accumulation of social capital resulted not just in the renegotiation of ethnic borders, but also in an internally divided Roma community. Finally, the article emphasizes that these processes seen in a historical perspective are very dynamic and one cannot perceive them closed.