

The fish, the net and the sea: Othering and the multiple marginalisation processes of Romani in the context of post-socialist rural transition

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Introduction

I would like to thank the organizers to invite me to give this presentation today. Although my past research has not been engaged with the issues of Romani integration in rural areas, receiving the invitation challenged me to formulate issues related to the marginalization of Romani with special focus on the context of post-socialist rural transition. My interest towards these questions intensified by the increased politicized tension around these issues in Europe at large and in several post-socialist countries. This tension obtains all the more racified forms in the discourse of right wing movements, promoting radical solutions. One of the reasons why these movements can gain ground in Hungarian, as well as other post-socialist country's political life has to do with the lacking overall success of integrative attempts, despite of large public spending, the beneficiary of which are to large degree without doubt Romani, and despite of multitudes of efforts, projects, initiatives, many of which can serve as positive examples.

I am aware of the complexity of theoretical developments in the field of poverty research at large and the breadth of research on Romani in Eastern Europe and in Hungary in particular, which tackled both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the field (research groups associated with the Regional research institute Kovács, 2008, Szuhay, 2005, Kemény, 1976, 1994, 2004, Ladányi and Szelényi, 2004). This engaged research provides valuable and important assets in understanding the processes of marginalization and reasons for failing integration. Political regimes were variably ready to integrate results and recommendations that were made from the base of this knowhow. Even if I do not claim to be a foremost expert on the multiple forms of marginalization of the Romani, I take the courage to tackle this issue due to the urgency that recent politicization of Romani marginalization poses for finding sustainable models for integration.

The urgency of the issue lies also in the unfolding demographic trends. Reaching around 12 million Romani are Europe's largest minority without an own country. The Romani form sizeable minorities, the largest being in Turkey (2,75 million) followed by Rumania (1,85 million), Russia (825 thousand), Bulgaria (750 thousand), Spain (725 thousand), Hungary (700 thousand) and Slovakia (500 thousand) (EU, 2011). However, in several country's they form also a large part of the country's total population, reaching between 7- 10% of the total population in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Macedonia, Serbia, Romania and Hungary. The urgency does not lie with the demographic development per se, but with the fact that the Romani form, what Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi (2005) termed a multiply underprivileged underclass in the majority societies they reside in.

“Underclass” an explanatory model?

The term underclass has its connotations both in the ideologies of the political right and the left. On the one hand behavioral explanations of poverty blame the poor for contributing to its situation by their “culture of poverty” (see Oscar Lewis, 1966). On the other hand, poverty is associated with structural conditions which, as Myrdal (1963) argued, locked in the poor into “long-term structural unemployment, because they did not have, and could not acquire, the education and skills demanded in a diversified economy” (Emigh, Fodor & Szelényi, 2001, p.3). Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi (2001) specify a three-part structural definition of the term underclass being characterized by: “1)extreme poverty 2)that is persistent and thus tends to be lifelong and intergenerationally

transmitted, and 3) by spatial segregation. They also argue that an underclass is formed “during economic transformations that adversely affect some segment of the population” (p3). The economic crises following post-socialist transition formed such adverse long-lasting process, causing the rapid desindustrialisation of post-socialist countries combined with rudimental shift in the forms of agricultural production. These processes changed drastically the demand for labour, making un and semi-skilled labour, which characterized the employment of most Romani during state socialism, unemployable. Furthermore, they argue that an underclass is formed when the stigmatization of the group falling outside development is blamed for its failure, is deemed as “undeserving poor”, and becomes untouchable. The “outcasts”, are seen as incapable of adaptation to society, and therefore having behavioral shortcomings (Myrdal, 1963, Emigh et. al, 2001, p.4). Castells argued, that the underclass is formed in combination with the shifts in welfare regimes towards liberal models, cutting down benefits for large sections of those who fall outside the labour market.

Ethnicity and race are not necessarily, yet commonly associated with poverty. Ethnic classification is seen as an outcome of classificatory struggles through ascription and identification by agents with social constructions and categories (Bourdieu, 1991).

It has been increasingly argued over the past years that the Romani constitute an ethnicized and increasing racialised underclass (Kovács, 2008), and referred to the segregated living area of the Romani as ghettos (Virág, 2010). Unlike other marginalized ethnic groups, the Romani reside primarily in rural areas, and are secluded in rural ghettos.

“The reintegration of the underclass, besides ensuring the circumstances for sustainable economic growth, is one of the most important tasks of the facilitator state” (Szelényi and Ladányi, 1997, Ladányi, 2001, p. 74). However, not even state policies are exempt of classificatory struggles. Terms of facilitating integration may form grounds for reproducing segregation. A norm-critical perspective turns attention to ways how policies are formed along ethnic and gender specific forms of citizenship and to ways how entitlements and policies are formed from the views and intentions of norms characterizing majority society, and in which ways those not fitting into it become “others”. Tackling issues of multiculturalism in the Scandinavian context, two alternative models were contrasted in modeling ways of relating to minority societies: one being based on assimilatory and one on integrative terms. Assimilation assumes the minority group’s identification with the norms of the majority society. In contrast, focus on integration is based on a normcritical perspective, that implies multicultural tolerance and intention to find common normative grounds for co-existence (Gerle, 1999, Lahdenperä, 2011, de los Reyes, 2004). With starting point in a norm critical perspective:

I intend to problematise in which ways efforts to tackle poverty of Romani in rural Hungary can be seen as being ethnicized? Whether this ethnicification implied terms of assimilation alternatively integration? And finally, what kind of implications can we connect to assimilating/integrating efforts in tackling issues of poverty?

I intend to sensitize these issues by utilizing the following aspects:

- Who are the major agents of current efforts dealing with poverty among Romani of rural communities in Hungary?
- What are the institutional frameworks for their efforts?

- Which processes of ascription and identification characterize these efforts?

Based on secondary analyses of the analytical and theoretical results of recent case-study material from Hungary and from a recent media controversy, I identify four different models, which allow me to problematise processes of ethnification bound to the formation of conditions of poverty among Romani: 1) different shades of assimilation; 2) integration through strengthened identity; 3) the denial of norms of the ghettos; 4) overt conflict.

Shades of assimilation

Péter Szuhay (2005) introduced the concept of post-peasantisation of Romani, based on his studies in Szendrölád. He found romani there being well on the way to assimilate to the local peasantry, a process that he judged as being rather a social assimilation, than an ethnic. He identified three steps in this process: 1)The Roma are to take up the cultivation of land around the lot belonging to the house or on the land that could be acquired from the local community, one ought to keep animals, which implies intensive cultivation allowing self-sufficiency and saving expenditures, and finally involves the decline of gathering activities (mushrooms, herbs...). 2)one ought to buy a house in the peasant part of the village (away from the Romani colony and amongst the peasants); 3)the final stage is starting winegrowing, which is the symbolic acknowledgement of belonging. Szuhay argued that individual mobility has been possible for Romanis in the village, which however did not result in the acceptance of Romani as a group, rather they were considered as the proper (“rendes”) Romanis, as exceptions strengthening the rule.

While the successful assimilators in Szendrölád aspired to move class-wise, we can identify also attempts of assimilating to the norms of the village which not necessarily imply a class-wise equalization.

Bordo: giving the net

The Romani in Judit Durst’s (2008) case study conducted in the village “Bordo” (North-Eastern Hungarian border region) the “peasants” (also “gadzso”, Hungarians) evolved a co-existence based on mutual trust that reaches back to several generations. The Romani view the reasons for this in their own desire to “follow” the Hungarians. “We live just like the peasants. We went after the peasants. Observed what they did and tried” (p.254). Meanwhile, the “peasant” (“gadzso”, Hungarian) leaders of the community remember, that they acted actively for extinguishing the Romanis colonies already in the 50s and helped them to move into the village. However, the Romani, who were helped to move, did not just receive a ready-built house. Instead, they recieved a lot. The house was built in “kaláka” co-operation based on reciprocal aid. The leaders continued this philosophy: “one should not just give a fish into people’s hands; rather one should give the net”.

“Here at us, one should not make a living from social security payments (state support), one has to participate in communal work (közhasznú)”.

The romani were commonly working for the peasants. A social contract, that Durst identifies as “patron” “klient” relations. As a sign of mutual trust, the institution of “koma” (a kind of artificial kin relationship based on reciprocity) emerged between romani and the peasants, where the peasants obtained a kind of mentor role: “the koma drew after themselves the Romani, that is how the Romani came into the mines”. (p256). They had also cultivated household lots as the peasants, and

decreased their fertility, just like the local peasants. As Judit Durst (p261) draws her conclusion, “The history of Romani can only be understood in the context of the surrounding none-romani society. The attitude of both the leadership and local peasants was based on trust and openness and have not been based on “othering”. However, the price of peasantisation of being accepted as one of the peasants has been, that the local Romani have disentangled their own identity from the “real Romani”, and identified themselves as “peasant Romani”. They themselves became active in resisting the immigration of new “real Romani” families. Thus, the “price” of moving up on the post-peasantisation ladder was the partial denial of romani identity.

Csépa: social land program

Anna Hamar (2010, p130) in her case study of Csépa, a community with 20% Romani, concludes, that in Csépa the security net that the combination of a social landprogram together with communal labour provides an assistance for survival for those Romani families, who live up to the values and expectations of the majority society.” The village joined the Ministry of Social Welfare initiated and funded Social Landprogram, with the motivation that: “The local self-government cannot provide labour to all.... But if there are no workplaces, it is important that they can be able to provide for the most necessary food, even without an employment, and should not only wait from others for help.” (p116). The program gave support to seeds, chemicals, machines, fertilizers, and the self-government provided the land. At first it happened that the participants sold the fodder produced to the local peasants for cash rather than utilizing it for raising animals. With time a compromise evolved, which ensured that only those who utilized the fodder for animal raising did get access to the support.

Thus, these three cases exemplify how different adjustments to the norms of majority society is seen as precondition for either entering on the ways of post-peasantification, or being judged as deserving poor by the majority society. Adjustment involves either copy-ing, or accepting subordinate roles as deserving clients. For the Romani it implies also finding themselves in the distinctions imposed by majority societies between “rendes” “proper-Romani” and “real Romani”, the deserving and underserving poor.

Finding alternative ways

Perkupa: the Romani ngo

In contrasting model can be identified in the case presented by Zsuzsanna Vidra (2010) in Perkupa, a village with 30% romani.

As a response to an opportunity to apply for project foundation by the EQUAL program, the local Romani formed an ngo: “Ngo for Bódvavölgyi Gypsies and disadvantaged” (Bódvavölgyi Cigányok és Hátrányos helyzetűek Érdekvédelmi Szervezete”. with methor and financial support of a national ngo Autonomia, The project provided a training leading to certificates as carpenters, ovenbuilders, masons and blacksmith for 50 people. Although the program lasting for two years was not aimed only at Romani, finally only romani participated. The program guaranteed employment during the last year for the participants. Efer the end of the program the participants had difficulties to find work in the local vicinity. Something that they explained partly by of the envy of the local majority inhabitants, as well as expressions of open distrust to the Romani as reliable workforce. Despite of resentments, the local leaders of the community as well as some key economic stakeholders

provided their support for the project. Many managed to find employment on a broader national labor market and even in EU countries. One participant formulated the motivation of the Romani by stating that:

“There is envy [in the village] and a little keeping the distance, since we are Romani. Despite of this we participate in the life of the village. We do not want to be supplied by this country. If we need we employ ourselves. We need to create the opportunity for our children.”

While, the ngo can be considered as a success story, the negative side of developments concern the worsened feeling of collectivity with the local peasants, which gain expression by the peasants actively taking their children out of the local school. This left the local school for Romani only. Thus, the opportunities that arose through the project allowed the Romani to find their place in the village on their own terms, without having to find themselves in terms of dependency. This rather than enhancing chances for integration, yet provoked envy. The Romani could not force the majority to overrule their attribution of the Romani as “others”.

Gyöngyöspata: Example of failed integration

Gyöngyöspata could be imagined as an idyllic rural community in Northern Hungary with a population of about 2000, where the proportion of Romani was 12% according to self-declaration. Last April right radical paramilitary groups, like the Supporting Power (Véderő) and Nice Future (Szebbjövő) occupied the village. They claimed to respond to the powerlessness of the local majority inhabitation in dealing with grievances they accused the local Romani for. Following the appearance of the right wing guards, national ngos and political parties as well as media practically occupied the village taking solidarity with Romani, while others supported the villagers.

In a documentary presented in Youtube, by Barrikád Media (2011), an older peasant woman explains, how teenaged Romani boys are following her from the church, threatening her with being crucified tonight in her home. Demanding the payment of ransoms in order to pass. She complains about repeated minor robberies at night in her home and trees, yields of her garden being taken. An experience the other interviewed village inhabitants share. The Hungarians argue that law-enforcement are not helping them in coping with issues of thefts and atrocities. There is no stationary local police patrol in the village. It is this gap that the appearance of the right wing guards acclaim to fill. The commitment of atrocities, as those described by the elderly above are obviously breaking basic universal norms of coexistence, and are sanctioned by law. Although, the interviewed themselves say that the petty crimes can be associated with a few troublemakers, nonetheless, resentments seem by many become generalised against Romani at large, since in the recent local elections, the right wing candidate received the majority of votes.

Even if there have been several projects in the village aiming to facilitate the economic situation of the Romani, such as land programs, many Romani lack employment. The villagers argue, according to an article in Index (Magyar, 2011) that there would be a lot of work in the household plots of the locals, but the Romani refuse to take these. Thereof, the image of the Romani as “not wanting to work”. The locals praised state socialism for forcing everybody to work. Meanwhile, the Romani claim, that not even the local Hungarians would take this kind of jobs, why should they, [the Romani] accept the bad conditions of informal work.

One of the first actions of the newly elected right wing Jobbik mayor was to declare that those who do not accept the public labour (közmunka) offered at currently existing low wage levels by the self-government are to be expelled from public labour programmes as well as from social welfare system. Participants of public labour claim in an interview that although both Hungarians and Romani were called to participate in public work, the Hungarians declined, while they, the Romani felt obliged to obey (Csillag, 2011).

Despite of being a sizeable community, the local Hungarians started to move their children out of the local school, due to the increasing proportion of Romani children, who are considered trouble-makers and violent (Magyari, 2011).

The Romanis refusal to accept informal job opportunities can be also interpreted as the Romani's refusal of finding themselves in the role of clients in a patron client relation, that formally often provided the social formula for mutually acceptable informal employment arrangement. Thus, a basically a class-like conflict, became ethnified, as the sign of the Romanis not wanting to work.

Instead, the Romani, like others, are dependent on welfare transfers. However, public work assignments, as condition for inclusion into welfare transfers seem to be applied in selective ways, as a form of group punishment. Thus issues that have their roots in class-like conflicts and issues of juvenile delinquency become ethnified and are made into intrinsic features of Romani in the representations of right wing press, which interprets the current implementations by the local self-government as welcomed group-wise punishment.

Social exclusion: The ghetto village

The slow moving out of the Hungarian children indicated in several studies above, is a process that signified the beginning of coming ethnic migration processes. A process which in several documented cases led to the Hungarians abandoning villages, which in turn became isolated ethnic enclaves of Romani. (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2005, Cseteny, Virág, 2010: Alsószentmárton, Durst, 2008, Lápos). The common characteristic of these ghettolike communities is the total lack of working opportunities on the "first market". Those working become dependent on the quasi-labour market generated by various short-term welfare jobs and on the black economy. Katalin Kovács, (2008, p22) identifies the key features of this process in the following: "Ghettolike society evolved there, where even those Roma families, which had future orientation, on the road to peasantifying and concerned with the educational chances of the next generation has moved out the communities. They [these peasantifying roma] can make new steps towards integration. While those left behind, are left without a middle generation being pattern setting, rich in initiatives and having organizational capabilities. They were destined for a life strategy with a kind of now-orientation focusing on purely survival. Breaking the norms is not unusual on these settlements."

In these left to themselves villages the unmediated power of the "baron" and "millionaires" subordinate those poor, without alternative sources of livelihood. These barons become often mediators of grey labour to surrounding farms or building projects, leaving those working for them without social security. As in case of Lápos, the barons not seldom become also the majors, representing the local authorities. The ghetto becomes negatively stamped by the surrounding, completing the circle of exclusion. This exclusion is strengthened by racialisation of poverty by the mainstream surrounding society. The "peasants" as well as the upwardly mobile Romani, identify

these normless micro-societies with being “real roma”. This in turn inflicting the conditions of roma at large.

What kind of theoretical thrust can we draw from these four cases?

Poverty, welfare state retrenchment and local stake holders

We witness general trends of retrenchment of the universalistic benefits of Soviet type welfare regimes towards means tested systems (Kay, 2010, Haney,2002). Forsberg’s and Stenbacka’s (Berglund, 2005) term of local welfare regimes highlight that while entitlements are formed by national laws, it is on the level of local welfare and gender regimes that praxis is formed (Asztalos Morell, 2008). The above case studies exemplify how recent decentralizations of welfare to community level gave power to local officials to negotiate entitlements to benefits. These negotiations lead with Thelen’s term (2008) to differentiation among deserving and undeserving poor on the basis of belonging to “moral communities” the workings of which are well documented in several of the above case studies. Neo-liberal arguments of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility mix with Soviet-style references to work morality in drawing the limits of these excluding moral communities (as longing for the good old state socialist period when everybody was not only granted a work but even obliged to work). Similar to what Shubin (2007) pointed out in reference to Russia, the above case studies indicate that poverty could be blamed on the victim’s undeserving behavior and entitlements withdrawn or restricted. Kay (2010) argues that “Ethnicity, gender and class play a role in the ways in which needs and vulnerabilities are mapped onto categories of entitlement.” Here, the most clear-cut example could be the one of Gyöngyöspata with enforcing responsibilities to take on public labour only for the Romani. But we can argue that constructions of “rendes” proper Romani and “real” romani, are also working as organizing principles of entitlements. Through these constructions, as the case of the social land program in Csépa could exemplify, even if the grounds of entitlements were not sanctioned by ethnicity per se, they were made available primarily for those Romani, who were ready to adapt to the majority society’s values. Facing conditions of competing entitlement claims, such as the claims of elderly and large families, local self-governments have to priorities. This implicates how means tested systems of social welfare distribution create conditions, where a normative “we” and “they” thinking may , contribute to the emergence of new lines of ethnic and social differentiation and lead to underprioritising the needs of those worse situated.

As Julia Szalai (2007) study indicated, the majority of those receiving aids come from higher income categories, Szalai (2005) and Virág (2010) showed how the number of children was in opposite relation to the size of the received aid. However, rather than relating differences to ethnicity by itself, it is rather those multiply disadvantaged groups, where Romani are overrepresented that fall on the bottom of welfare hierarchy.

Nonetheless, the prevailing empirical evidence of different forms of “othering” the Romani as welfare recipients is convincing and justifies the need for deconstructing the terms of entitlements which regulate how deserving and undeserving poor are categorized.

(more on the impact of changing regulations on welfare substitution in Hungary in the paper)

A critique of the post-socialist welfare reforms could be summarized in the following: It decentralized the resources for social aid as well as the task of securing employment to the smallest community level. Neither the available means, or the current form of decentralized self-governance seem to be able to create conditions which would be adequate to prepare the unemployed for an open labour market. Instead, initiatives commonly focus on local solutions combining welfare benefits with diverse public labour projects on the local level. The decentralization made the administering of projects bound to politicians, rather than expert know-how and made it vulnerable to transform welfare rights into patron-client relations formed along criteria of deserving vs undeserving poor. As Balázs Krémer (2011) problematised, this system is vulnerable for adapting methods which regulate the output with administrative, punitive measures rather than by stimulating the demand (Krémer, 2011). While the level of social benefits is high in Hungary, these measures, in adverse ways may be the sources of social tension and increased ethnification of inequalities.

Civil Society and participatory models

Liberal trends rearranged also the balance of responsibilities between the state and the family, market and the community (informal and formal civil society), expanding the importance of smaller communities, while post-socialist welfare states had to develop previously not existing forms of benefits (unemployment) and capture new responsibilities (Thelen, 2007). In post-socialist states, like in Russia, Kay (2010) argues that the boundaries between diverse state and non-state actors become all the more blurred. In deed some see social security as an outcome of a welfare pluralism, a multi-layered combination of the efforts of individuals, groups and organizations to challenge insecurities (Pavlovskaya, 2004). The success or failure of different initiatives evolves in the interconnected responsibilities of local self-government, Romani minority self-government, ngos, local stake-holder, as the Perkupa example of Romani ngo illustrates.

Shubin (2007) elevates also the black side of this “blur” showing the importance of social networks in mitigating and constructing the categorization of poverty. Shubin argues that ways how institutional and private boundaries of social networks meet in constructing “moral communities” of deserving poor, contribute to the production and reproduction of poverty.

Soviet type systems aggravated the condition for bottom up, empowering civil organizing (Rose 1996) the importance of which for local development has been lifted up in diverse contexts (Krishna 2000, Berglund 2005). The destruction of bottom of systems of public organization in sovjet type systems, left long-lasting effects not the least for agrarian development in the region as Svendsen’s (2004) comparative study of cooperation in Poland and Denmark indicated. Sätre (2011) found in her study in Nizni Novgorod in Russia that these legacies fill a function even in today’s society, since NGOs assisting the poor most often are formed top down rather than bottom up and rather than working for empowerment stand for helping with doles. In Hungary EU membership gave boost to the development of civil organizations, which has led to the phenomenon of the emergence of a “project class” (Kovách et.al. 2006). However, the most marginalized communities as the Roma lack typically elites on the local level (Vajda, 2008) or if there are such they might distinguish themselves from the poor and projects aiming to empower communities do not reach those in need (Molnár 2010). Nonetheless, Anna Csongor and György Róbert Lukács (2003) comprehensive study of labour market projects for Romani indicate that while the overwhelming majority of financing such projects originates from diverse state sources, such as Regional development funds, Ministry of Social

Welfare, Labour Relations Centre, National Development Fund, civil organizations, as well as the Romani Minority self-governments (Schafft and Molnár, 2003) played an active part in facilitating project applications allowing the utilization of these funds. The presence of nation-wide foundations, such as Soros or the Autonomy Foundation contributed in the dissemination of Western-type, local empowerment oriented views, which aims not only to tackle material poverty but also to develop capabilities, one of which is to train democratic participation principles (p49).

Concluding words

I would like to conclude the reflection on the cases discussed by returning to the title of my paper: the fish, the net and the sea. By drawing attention to conceptualizing methods of dealing with poverty along the underlying models and intentions. I hope that my paper can inspire to further collaborative research. I would press the importance of elaborating the efforts dealing with the problems of those multiply disadvantaged segments of the Romani community, which share in many aspects its problems with other groups in poverty. I tried to put forward the importance of both structural issues of governance and the formation of everyday praxis. Within this praxis, I find the most pressing issue to be to tackle the normative aspects, of differentiating terms of entitlements along categories of deserving and undeserving poor and how these categories intersect with gender and ethnic inequalities grant primary attention. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to raise these issues.

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