



Facing the Far-Right

Ethnographic Portrayals
of Local Civil Resistance

Edited by
Zsuzsanna Vidra

CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Nádor utca 9
H-1051 Budapest, Hungary
cps@ceu.hu, <http://cps.ceu.hu>

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Cecília Kovai is a PhD candidate at University of Pécs in Cultural Studies. She holds an MA in Cultural Anthropology and Hungarian Language and Literature from Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest. She conducted a three months long fieldwork among a Romungro group living in a small settlement in North-East Hungary. Since then she has conducted further field research within this community as well as in other Gypsy settlements. Her main areas of researches are changes of Hungarian-Gypsy differentiation, kinship system in the Gypsy community and gender relationship. She has published several articles on these issues.

Gergő Pulay is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology of the Central European University, and currently a fellow of the New Europe College in Bucharest. He holds an MA in Sociology and Social Anthropology from the Central European University, and in Communication and Media Studies and Sociology from the University of Pécs. His main areas of interests are urban marginality, poverty, public culture, boundary-making, economic anthropology, ethnicity and nationalism. He has published articles on labor migration and ethnicity, Roma performance and identity politics, and he is currently finalizing his doctoral dissertation focusing on street-life, value and exchange in a stigmatized poor neighborhood of Bucharest.

Zsuzsanna Vidra is a research fellow at the Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, Hungary. She holds a PhD in sociology from École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France, an MA in Sociology from Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest and an MA in Nationalism Studies from the Central European University. Her main areas of research are poverty, ethnicity, migration and media and minorities. She has published several articles on Roma and non-Roma interethnic relations, educational inequalities, labor market and social policy issues and minority media representations. She has edited a volume on Roma migration to Canada and she has co-authored a book on ethnic relations, migration, labor market conditions and informal economy in marginal rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

FACING THE FAR-RIGHT. ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAYALS OF LOCAL CIVIL RESISTANCE

Zsuzsanna Vidra

Far-right generated ethnic conflicts

Interethnic – Roma and non-Roma – relations in Hungary today have been shaped by the deep-rooted history of local (ethnic) conflicts that occurred following the change in regime. Although, as we would like to argue in our volume, they have changed in nature: the conflicts persist. Until the early 2000s, the primary agents of local conflicts were local governments, local institutions, and the Roma population (as represented by civil rights advocacy organizations). Most often these conflicts concerned housing discrimination and school segregation. The advocates for the discriminated Roma population were almost exclusively non-local, external organizations. Of course, the most marginalized groups typically have the least capacity to present and defend their own rights, which makes it completely understandable that external actors would have to take that role. Moreover, establishing political self-mobilization and grassroots initiatives within the Roma minority proved practically impossible, despite the existence of a Hungarian law guaranteeing minority political representation. (Kovats 2003, Horváth & Landau & Szalai 2000) Interference by advocacy groups was an indication of the weakness of local democracies and highlighted the existence of institutional and everyday racism. In fact, no confrontation would have taken place had not the advocacy groups interfered. In response to claims of discriminatory abuses, the ‘rights’ discourse was often countered

and delegitimized by claims that, in fact, the non-Roma population's interests and their rights were not taken into account. The usual accusation was that advocacy groups were defending the wrong side and their activities were labeled uninformed and illegitimate.

From the mid-2000s, a political crisis – attributed with the rise of the extreme right in Hungary – has further been accompanied by a 'racial turn' in mainstream discourses and in certain policy areas (social protection, welfare, labor and later education policies). (Vidra & Fox 2012) To some extent the phenomenon is reminiscent of similar processes taking place in Western societies in the last ten to fifteen years, often referred to as a backlash to multiculturalism. (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010) One can argue that Central Eastern Europe is facing a backlash against the 'liberal', 'human rights', and 'civil rights' discourses of the last half-decade, as the far-right fosters racist discourses which are then rebranded under the label of 'culturalist' by the mainstream media.

The far-right party, Jobbik, has seen a rapid rise in popularity since the early 2000s. It gained nearly 15% of the vote during the European Parliamentary elections and 16% in the national elections in 2010. Jobbik's political tactic is to take advantage of the population's prevailing anti-Roma attitudes (Bernát et al. 2013) and thematise the Roma issue. For instance, by reintroducing and re-legitimizing the racist term 'Gypsy crime', they are able to re-root the idea that Gypsies (or at least some of them) are innate criminals. In fact, the media and political elite overall reacted receptively to these overtures in that the far-right's openly racist claims were neither condemned nor marginalized. Rather they reinforced them by giving airtime to these themes as they gained ground in the public forum - especially the theme of 'Gypsy crime.' (Juhász 2010, Vidra & Fox 2012) The Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard), a pseudo-civil militia organization, is a close ally of Jobbik and is dedicated to pursuing its political aim of exploiting ethnic tensions in local communities. The Gárda have organized hate demonstrations in local communities with ethnically mixed populations – some with a history of considerable tensions, some even without – where openly racist hate speeches are delivered, capitalizing

on the weakness of local democracies and the non-Roma population's feelings of marginalization by civil rights advocates. The far-right has been posing as a counter right's advocacy group and, indeed, it does represent an opposite civil society; the uncivil society. (Kopecky & Mudde 2002)

The Gárda was banned by the Hungarian Supreme Court in 2009. However, it resurfaced again, one week later. Sporting somewhat different uniforms and a new name, the movement deliberately challenged the democratic institutions by showing them that it was still possible to continue their activities despite the official condemnation. In fact, they were right. The Gárda has continued to organize hate marches – under two governmental regimes – without the permission of the authorities and without the state being able to take effective action against the illegal activities of the radical groups.

This volume contains two case studies based on fieldwork carried out by Cecília Kovai and Gergő Pulay (also the authors of the papers) which look at communities where the Gárda had organized rallies and where local leaders (or counter-event organizers) were activists of the *We Belong Here Movement*; a new, nationwide Romani grassroots movement geared towards helping local Roma communities self-organize and defend their rights and interests. The purpose of these particular case studies is to address the issue of the role of civil society – in particular, the role and prospects of Romani grassroots movements – in the fight against far-right aggression against them. While addressing the question of how a democratic country could or should deal with undemocratic and subversive radical right social and political movements, the role of states, institutions (including the legal and justice system), political parties, and of the media, etc. are often discussed (Gimes et al. 2009); more so than democratic civil society is (Pedahzur 2003).

The studies we present here seek to offer additional insight into this issue through the analysis and portrayal of some 'best practices' of Roma self-mobilization and local civil resistance to the far-right. They also discuss how, in local communities where the Gárda and the Jobbik had organized demonstrations and hate marches, social ties between the members of the majority and minority groups have been torn and, in general, what social,

moral, and symbolic damages have been done following these events. In terms of contextualizing the two case studies, we provide a brief overview of some conceptual issues concerning the political opportunity structure (POS) of Roma political representation and the space and scope for Roma political self-mobilization and grassroots movements in Hungary.

The case of undemocratic Roma political representation

Political scientists dealing with the development of Roma politics after the regime change of 1989-90 claim that one of the most serious problems with contemporary politics and policies designed for Roma populations in the various strata of society is that they all lack grassroots mobilization. One author distinguished three types of political strategies:

“the first strategy, using advocacy mechanisms from the international system and trans-national political processes such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe could be classified as the most successful. The second strategy, despite support from some states, stagnates in the moment and its inclusiveness raises appetite of Romani agitator to campaign for trans-national representation alternatives, such as a Romani Rights Charter or trans-national policy advisory body. Third, political representation of the Roma within the political mainstream in each state is one of the least successful strategies.”
(Sobotka 2003:1)

These strategies all represent a top-down approach to political organization, which partly explains their weakness and legitimacy or ‘accountability’ problem. (Kovats 2001) The grassroots political organizations that might have counterbalanced the current unfavorable situations and could influence national and transnational developments are

“unfortunately (...) very weak and immature and, thus, are easily manipulated by established interests.” (Kovats 2003:3)

The top-down representation of the Roma is characterized by providing

“negotiating partners’ for the state and other institutions, whilst ensuring that these ‘Roma representatives’ have no intrinsic political weight that could compel authorities to take any particular course of action.” (Kovats 2003: 4) Furthermore, “while top-down support for Roma organizations makes political activity more accessible, deepening political consciousness amongst Roma people, it is at the price of fatally undermining the development of a democratic Roma politics.” (Kovats 2003:4) The argument then goes on to claim “the obvious conclusion is that Roma politics is ineffective in promoting the interests of Roma people. The growing number of national case studies demonstrates how and why Roma have not been successful in creating effective interest representation even in states where they form a significant part of the population.” (Kovats 2001:8)

The Hungarian National and Ethnic Minorities Act was introduced in 1993. It

“was a landmark for the assertion of political rights in Hungary and for the country’s Gypsies in particular. For the first time, they were recognized as constituting an ethnic minority and, thus, over and above the individual rights, were entitled to set up their own bodies to pursue their collective rights.” (Bureau for Comparative Minority Research 2000:18)

Beyond these positive legislative achievements, the actual implementation of the Act has proven to be a perfect illustration of how a state has created a circumstance in which Roma politics becomes undemocratic, ineffective, and Roma representatives have no political weight.

The *ineffectiveness* of this minority representation system is further illustrated by the fact that it does not take into account the peculiar characteristics of the Roma minority. The law provides all national and

ethnic minorities in the country the right to establish local and national minority self-governments, with the primary function to preserve their distinct minority culture and cultural identity. In the case of the Roma population, this is already problematic, as the Roma do not have a unified culture or language. Maintaining their culture is not as easily defined as it is for other minorities living in the country.

The Hungarian minority representation system provides a forum for preservation of one's symbolic/personal identity rather than creating an environment that allows for the development of a strategic ethnic identity. What we mean by strategic ethnic identity is a situation in which the actor consciously chooses their ethnic identity with the aim of claiming equal redistribution of resources from the state based on the ethnic identity of citizens. It is different from the more subjective type of ethnic identity which is not meant as a mobilizing, political identity but rather as a personal matter, a symbolic gesture that satisfies an individual's need to belong, remember, connect with their cultural heritage, etc. (Glazer and Moynihan 1963) Other minorities affected by this law essentially fall into the category of subjective ethnic identities, as the socio-economic status of their population as a whole and degree of integration into the Hungarian society does not present a dichotomy; whereas, in the case of many in the Roma populations, it does. Potentially, the use of a strategic ethnic identity would and could challenge the majority society's political positions, possibly leading to a more just political representation and a more equal redistribution of resources.

The *undemocratic* nature of the minority representation system derives from the fact that no real power is given to the Roma. Roma self-governments are financed in part directly from the state budget; however, the rest is collected as a result of local and national political negotiations. Thus, to assure adequate financing, Roma leaders are obliged to accept whatever deals the state or the local self-government offers them in various matters. In other words, *"they are becoming pawns of the local majority self-governments."* (Bureau for Comparative Minority Research 2000:18) Some authors have called this system *"the biggest lie of the Hungarian state towards its Roma population."* (Horváth & Landau & Szalai 2000:69) By appointing

‘reliable’ leaders whose role is to mediate between the community and the authorities, the state has designed a system that functions very much as a reincarnation of how the ‘Gypsy question’ has always been dealt with by states. These ‘token’ Gypsy leaders have a dual loyalty, which is not possible to maintain most of the time. They have to be loyal to their community and to the majority society at the same time, even if they have opposite interests. This conflicted role is further degenerated by the fact that Roma leaders have no real political weight (as it is certainly not the intention of the non-Roma to provide equal participation in the public sphere). As a consequence, the legitimacy of these leaders is often most harshly scrutinized by the very population they are meant to represent.

The NGOization of human rights advocacy

Another problem faced by Romani political and special interest representation pinpointed by some authors derives from the new economic model taken on by Central Eastern European countries after 1989-90; neoliberalism. The economic policy changes, albeit necessary, had detrimental effects on the social and welfare systems in these countries and were one of the main reasons the majority of Roma became the underclass in the new system. According to one critic, the neoliberal human rights approach became dominant in Hungary - a

“phenomenon wherein human rights concerns and campaigning operate synergistically within neoliberal capitalist democracies, becoming an arm of the contemporary global neoliberal economic and political order.” (Trehan & Sigona 2009:52)

In concrete terms, this process results in a system whereby human rights advocacy does not address socio-economic issues. Whether or not one believes it is the responsibility of Western, neoliberal-minded funders and donors who determine, to a large extent, how civil society and NGOs representing the Roma interests could or should function and what agendas they should have – as it is claimed by these critics – it is a fact that social issues were not the main concern of advocacy groups. From this

perspective, the process of NGOization of human rights – the neoliberal policy hegemony transforming human rights/emancipation movements (Lang 1997, Stubbs 2007) – took shape leaving no space for fighting social exclusion from a Romani political movement point of view: Roma rights were framed as human rights without a social rights aspect. This critic further implies that NGOs defending Romani human rights choose not to be critical of the new economic order, which was responsible for both social inequalities and injustice.

Since the undemocratic POS open for Romani representation offered nothing but an opportunity to play into party or state and government interests, many of the more independent and activist-minded Roma decided to join the NGO sector. (Trehan & Sigona 2009) However, as the NGOization theory explains, this sector had its own limitations regarding Roma representation. Thus, any grassroots self-mobilization – taking into account socio-economic status as well as identity and human rights – was simply implausible.

Opportunities for Romani self-mobilization and grassroots movements?

Given that neither the undemocratic and ineffective political opportunities available to Roma representation nor human rights advocacy made way for grassroots self-mobilization, we may ask, then, how it is even possible to still find such movements. Who are they? What do they do? How did they come about and how do they fit the general POS for Roma? As Vermeersch (2006) observed, there was already a split within Romani politics in the early 1990s along the lines of the more critical and more loyal (or more radical and more moderate) fractions. The moderates endorsed cooperation with official politics while the so-called radicals remained on the fringe and many of them entered the NGO sector.

The different routes that ethnic mobilization took in this case can be explained by the various factors that influenced this process. The ‘culturalist perspective’ contends that shared values and ethnic bonding were the most influential factor, while the ‘competition’ approach emphasizes that ethnic

leaders made rational decisions and used ethnicity in order to mobilize their constituency to achieve their goals. The ‘reactive ethnicity’ perspective stresses that mobilization is spurred by the socio-economic inequality of certain ethnic groups, and the ‘political process’ approach sees the institutional environment – or, the political opportunity structure – as the main factor for ethnic mobilization. (Vermeersch 2006)

Here, we argue that Romani mobilization in Hungary – or, more precisely, the lack of Romani political mobilization – can be best grasped implementing the ‘political process’ explanation (as we have seen above) while accounting for the ‘undemocratic Roma political representation’. The institutional environment providing minority representation has proven unsatisfactory in terms of embracing all Roma needs (cultural as well as socio-economic). Moreover, it also prevents Roma leaders from formulating real claims for their communities; the only way they can function in this political structure is to adjust their claims to the majority’s political will. However, we also have some counter examples of Roma mobilization that can be interpreted as ‘reactive ethnicity’ mobilization. For example, Aladár Horváth, the first Liberal Party representative, established his own organization, the Roma Civil Rights Foundation in 1995. It was a movement that could be defined as a grassroots organization that fought against discrimination and exclusion of Roma by taking action in communities where local governments or other institutions introduced measures that segregated or discriminated Roma. For example, in cases when Roma were to be resettled into segregated housing estates or kids were sent to segregated classes, the RCRF tried to intervene – either by starting negotiations with the authorities (if they were willing to do so) or organizing public events and demonstrations to call attention to what was happening in the given community.

Later on, in 2011, a young colleague of the RCRF, Jenő Setét, founded the *We Belong Here Movement* (WBH). The WBH was formed in the year of the national census with the aim of persuading Romani people to declare themselves Roma. Once the census was completed, the movement remained active as a Roma Community Network:

“We think that it’s an important social question what self-esteem Roma have. (...) We tried to inform local Roma communities and we created the We Belong Here Facebook group. This is still alive, it’s a virtual community that organizes civil rights actions.” (Setét 2013)

The WBH can be considered a good example of reactive ethnic mobilization in a new, changing political environment. Of significant note, the WBH explicitly engages the theme of social exclusion as the primary cause of the destitute situation that Hungarian Roma are in:

“After the regime change we were expecting that Roma emancipation would start and there would be a highly-qualified Roma mass and that the education level, the living conditions, and the labor market indicators of Roma would approach the national average. And we also hoped that we could have a dignified identity just like anybody else in this country. (...) The Roma movement’s primary aim is to regain a position on the labor market. If it doesn’t happen, Roma will remain excluded and vegetate on social benefits.” (Setét 2013)

As Jenő Setét formulates it, the ‘new era’ meant new challenges for ethnic mobilization, as racism went mainstream – taking a racial turn – with the far-right growing stronger and the solidarity amongst the moderate majority getting weaker:

“For over a decade, Roma suffered the most discrimination and disadvantage from the state or municipalities. Now, we have a new situation, a qualitative change with the strengthening of the far-right. Before, the far-right was on the periphery. The difference is not only that they have a bigger constituency but also that their rhetoric influences the whole society. It’s horrific that the far-right rhetoric has been seeping into the mainstream. (...) It was stupefying that not even the racist serial killing of Roma generated any social movement. Neither amongst Roma

or non-Roma. (...) It's a scaring experience for many of us how little solidarity we get from the non-Roma communities.”
(Setét 2013)

Now, with an empowered far-right, the intensified racially motivated public discourse, and the increasingly hostile environment, taking pride in one's Roma identity is seen as a crucial self-defense mechanism:

“I believe that hiding our identity will hurt – not others but ourselves. Also, hiding it is independent of whether our environment thinks we are Gypsy or not. My social environment will point to me even if I hide it. The far-right doesn't care about the census data when they go marching somewhere. If you have your racial features, hiding will not protect you from any atrocities.” (Setét 2013)

Besides all these 'new aspects' that the WBH movement represents, its grassroots dimension is best illustrated by the crucial role it played in mobilizing local Romani communities against the far-right. They published a guidebook entitled *Do you know what you should do as a Roma community activist when the Nazis march in your settlement?*¹ to help Roma activists mobilize and organize their community members. Throughout the course of the years, as the far-right continued its hate marches and the state did nothing to stop them, the anti-Nazi movement managed to stage a few successful events. All of these events shared one common element; namely that they were all peaceful. It is one of the main principles of the movement that any mobilization should be done in self-defense and in a non-violent way:

“Why are there no violent uprising in the whole country? We, Roma activists, we are pacifists. The Hungarian Roma movement learnt only non-violent methods, we are inspired by the non-violent movements of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.” (Setét 2013)

1 <http://www.commmunity.eu/2012/08/13/tudod-e-mit-tegyel-roma-kozossegi-aktivistakent-ha-a-nacik-lakohelyeden-felvonulnak/>

Case studies: anthropological portrayals of the local Roma civil resistance

As was mentioned, the case studies provided here cover two communities that the far-right had targeted as locations for their hate demonstrations and marches and in which the *We Belong Here Movement* activists had – to varying degrees – some role in organizing (or trying to organize) counter-events. We wish to illustrate with these in-depth studies how and why ethnic self-mobilization works or doesn't work and what the potential future development of such grassroots activities might be.

One of the communities, the village of K., has a population that is about 40% Roma. Here, a Jobbik and Gárda demonstration was held with the police safeguarding the event by isolating the Roma neighborhood and not letting anyone to cross. The Roma community reacted by holding an ecumenical church service. The other community, the small town of Gy., has only about a 3.5% Roma population. The march was to be held right in the center of the Roma community, however, due to the intervention of the mayor – supported by a local Jobbik representative who nurtures some strange kind of friendship with local Roma residents – the demonstration was relocated to the town centre.

In order to understand the level of damage – besides the obvious negative impacts of hate speech on those whom it targets – these case studies explore the nature of interethnic ties in the two target communities by looking at the recent history of Roma and non-Roma cohabitation and the ways in which the members of the related groups interact with each other in local social and geographical spaces. Local political representation of the Roma population constitutes the next important aspect of the investigations. Considering this aspect is crucial to understanding the main issue at hand in this volume: how can civil and grassroots resistance to extremist threats and provocation come about? Therefore, political self-mobilization is the third dimension that is explored here. Finally, the case studies also attempt to account for the impact that the far-right events have had on local interethnic relations within the two settlements. In our conclusion below, we will also provide our readers with some highlights of

the main points presented by our authors in the following chapters as well as providing you with our own (at least tentative) conclusions to the query of how Roma civil resistance can or cannot come about.

Local ethnic relationships

The two settlements display two different modalities of interethnic relations. Although we do not have much data on each and every aspect of these relationships (rather some general, informal information gathered from local inhabitants), we can still grasp the main features of how Roma and non-Roma live together and what type of cohabitation we are discussing. In the village of K., we labeled the interethnic relations ‘controversial’ while in the town of Gy., we labeled it ‘confrontational’. K. was controversial because Roma go to segregated schools and are employed (if at all) in jobs with ethnically homogeneous staff even though, as we will see, Roma representatives are elected to the municipality government. All these contribute to an atmosphere where the general feeling (especially expressed by the non-Roma) is that K. is a disintegrated village where inhabitants are constantly under threat from Roma youth’s violation of the rules (thefts, robberies, etc.) as a result of their cohabitation.

Gy. is something different in that it is a significant place for the far-right; one of its leading politicians comes from there and one of its two segregated Roma neighborhoods is featured in the extremist media as a symbol of the horrific conditions in Gypsy settlements. In fact, the Roma communities in these two neighborhoods are indeed poor and destitute and the inhabitants there feel excluded by the majority society. There is a high level of drug use among the youth which has not been tackled by neither the social institutions nor the police: the police turn their back on the problem even when Roma (parents) report cases in order to curb the spread of drugs. The Roma in Gy. are both straightforward scapegoats in the hands of the far-right and are victims of a system where their needs are ignored and abandoned by those who are in a position to change the game. This is just one explanation of why Roma in Gy.’s two segregated neighborhoods might express such violent contempt towards the majority population there.

Local political representation

Here, we provide two opposite examples: K. is a case of strong political representation of Roma and Gy. is a case of weak and controversial representation. What features define our definitions? Are the differences between the two the mere consequence of self-mobilization or are they simply based on the community's level of political awareness?

The primary institution defining Roma political representation is the minority self-government, which has elected representatives. However, these representatives generally have very limited leeway for political maneuvering and little to no political power to influence actual decisions in the settlement. The only way to have one's voice heard is to have a representative in the municipal government. However, it is not very common to see a Roma running for a municipal position. When it does happen, it seems to be more of a compromise that is made by the majority when there are a significant number of Roma in the settlement – a way to 'involve' them in local politics. From this perspective, K. is a rather atypical case study in that there are four Roma municipal representatives (out of a total of seven). Along with the seeming emancipation of allowing Roma onto the local self-government, as can be observed, the non-Roma elite continue to behave in a rather paternalistic manner towards the Roma population (it is an openly and widely shared opinion in the village that Roma have to be 'domesticated', 'civilized', etc.).

In Gy., a dominantly Vlach Gypsy community, there are additional internal divisions along social lines. One group is clearly better off than the other. One player is a Roma leader who is not only a non-Vlach Roma (i.e. a Hungarian speaking Roma) but also happens to be a woman. In addition, she has remained outside the sphere of the political games played by other Roma politicians, choosing not to ally herself with any of the political parties (despite the 'advantages' they offer her) and she does not belong to any of the kinship networks that seem to form political platforms within that Roma community. Another peculiarity of political representation in this town is that a Jobbik representative is visibly active in one of its Roma settlements and, quite surprisingly, he even aims to recruit political

supporters from there. In fact, he has actually succeeded in building a base of support in this community for the mere reason that he goes there, talks to people, and promises things that simply no other politician would do. This tactic, of seeking ground level support around election time, is far from being unique to Jobbik. It can be said that all Hungarian political parties neglect Roma communities except for when they are paying a visit in order to win votes. Nonetheless, an overtly racist party representative trying to gain the political support of Roma is something quite exceptional and baffling. (As we will see, the local population's low level of political awareness might account, in part, for how this could happen.)

The role of local churches in integration

There are several churches (and congregations) that Roma in K. attend. The role of these churches seems incredibly important not so much in integrating the community – people attend different congregations – but much more in constituting a base for emancipation and, thus, self-empowerment. Yet, the Catholic organization Caritas Hungarica has a more controversial role than the neo-protestant charismatic churches, which are equally active within the Roma neighborhoods in K. Caritas' patronizing attitude towards the Roma, essentially purporting that one must 'civilize' them in order for them to have the right to be full members of the church (and society), intends, in fact, to reintegrate Roma into the very hierarchical order in which they have always been marginalized. On the other hand, Caritas has some unquestionably good intentions in terms of bringing members of the Roma and the non-Roma communities closer to one another. However, these efforts have not been notably successful. According to this study, neo-Protestant churches, on the other hand, seem to offer a more genuine model for routes to emancipation, as they present practical alternatives and innovative approaches to the real life problems of their Roma congregation (addressing head on social issues such as unemployment, racial violence, marginalization, etc.).

Strangely enough, no church was found to play an important role in the communities' life or in the integration and mobilization of community members in Gy. Whereas there had been initiatives that set out to establish

congregations, for various reasons, all efforts failed. Mainly, it seems, people there simply do not trust even a church and the generally shared view was that everybody, including a church, can only act out of self-interest.

Examples of civil resistance against extremist threats and instigations

As these case studies show, there were probably even more differences than there were similarities in the way resistance was organized in K. and Gy. In both locations, members of the Roma communities felt outraged, frustrated, and angry over the marches that the far-right planned to organize close to – or right in the middle of – their habitat. In both places, they wanted to defend themselves even if it would have meant turning to physical violence; they wanted to fight against those who depreciated and provoked them. In the end, despite strong emotions, no violence took place in either settlement. Roma both in K. and Gy. chose different strategies of resistance and, to a large extent, their approaches depended on the way their political representation and self-mobilization had been structured.

K., as has already been stated, has a strong community embedded with a network of neo-Protestant churches, which enabled the local Roma to mobilize driven by the self-empowering and emancipating nature of their churches' activities. The Roma leader finally managed to appease his constituents – people who originally thought they wanted open confrontation – by organizing an ecumenical mass. This was a solution brought about in the eleventh hour, after an attempt at organizing a counter-march was banned by the police. This leader also happened to be a member of the *We Belong Here Movement*, an example of how the WBH's grassroots movement and the neo-Protestant church's were able cooperate and mobilize a very effective resistance.

In contrast, one of the local Roma leaders in Gy., who also happened to be an active member of the WBH movement, initiated a forum to discuss the far-right's march with the Roma population. However, most people seemed disinterested in the forum and instead called for an open, physical confrontation. The locals in this community indicated that all kinds of social, religious, and political initiatives attempted in Gy. failed

because of the tendency to be motivated by self-interests; a view extremely predominant amongst the Roma here. Kin networks dominate both social and political relationships and are the only networks with any mobilizing power, which is most probably one of the main reasons why the WBH mobilization failed to work in Gy.

Impacts of far-right events on local interethnic relations

One of the most important aspects of this pair of case studies is how they present the aftermath of the far-right events in the communities in question. In the case of K., we can see a clear example of how social relations between Roma and non-Roma in the village were severely damaged as a result of the far-right's demonstration of hate. A village that used to be rather intact, despite some public ethnic conflicts and a degree of tension, turned into a hotspot of suspicion and distrust and a place of enhanced ethnic division. The demonstratively different narratives given by Roma and the non-Roma here testify to this new cleavage. The majority population – and the elite – had very controversial interpretations of the event. They made a range of excuses as to why the demonstration might have taken place (there had not been especially strong support of the far-right before), while asserting that security in the village had improved after the event (implying that the confrontation created by the rally was an effective means of tackling their 'security' problems). Moreover, they didn't appreciate the peaceful religious ceremony held by the Roma, saying that "*they should learn the ten commandments*", a denigrating comment suggesting that the Roma could not possibly have authentic faith, as they are incapable of upholding the basic tenements of the Christian religion. For the Roma, one important indication of how non-Roma were touched by the event was that not one of non-Roma in the village stood up for them. Yet, the Roma, shocked by the event and the outcome, still tried to make excuses for their co-villagers behavior throughout. Perhaps they simply wished to reconcile with them for the future good of the village. Nonetheless, even everyday encounters became difficult, regardless. People who once greeted each other on the street now just pass by without saying hello.

In Gy., where the demonstration was held far from the Roma settlement and people felt less affected by it (although, the Roma community in general is more isolated and ‘abandoned’ by the majority here), the direct consequences of the event were less tangible. However, throughout their fieldwork, the researchers observed that support for Jobbik was visible everywhere in the town: affiliated symbols, leaflets, etc. were scattered around and displayed in various public places. Concerning Roma mobilization, activists said that the event might have strengthened self-awareness and community solidarity but that this did not happen, mainly for the previously mentioned reasons – the lack of trust, the belief that self-interest is the sole motivation people have for mobilizing fellow community members, and the dominance of kin networks.

Conclusions

This volume was produced in an attempt to provide greater insight into Roma self-mobilization against the threats from the far-right in Hungary by examining examples of Roma grassroots mobilization and analyzing the difficulties faced. We argue that grassroots ethnic mobilization, formulated on genuine claims, was practically impossible. This is due to the shortcomings of the minority representation system (a political mechanism that is both undemocratic and ineffective for Roma) as well as to the NGOization of Roma representation, with interest groups too dependent on funder and donor interests. There had been some exceptions and, in this case, we focused on one particular movement – *We Belong Here* – which has been recently active in trying to achieve a greater level of political awareness and self-organization amongst the Roma.

The two case studies presented here in this volume explore ways in which Roma communities reacted to the threats of the far-right. By presenting the main issues raised in the studies, our intention is to address the questions of how local resistance and self-organization comes about and what factors either assist or thwart grassroots community actions because, while it is a strange and new concept to local communities, Roma political participation in Hungary requires more effective grassroots initiatives. As

we see it, the WBH phenomenon is a promising one in this respect. Despite the clear objectives stated above, the focus of these studies was not to come up with one definitive answer or conclusion, but rather to observe and consider each factor one by one, providing that each may warrant further exploration.

Nonetheless, we will share briefly here some of our own preliminary and tentative conclusions: The damage caused by far-right, public hate speech to a local community – embodied by far-right rallies in Hungarian villages – is greater where interethnic relations are somewhat or relatively better and Roma are more integrated than it is in a place where Roma are more excluded and less integrated. In other words, when what is more intact is broken, the damage is greater. At the same time, what we can also see is that being better-integrated does not protect a community from the threat of disintegration. Once the far-right enters and deliberately aims at breaking a community's foundations, the weakest beams give way. However, the more integrated the place the better the chance it will be open to accepting new strategies for political self-mobilization (such as those promoted by the WBH). Self-empowerment can only come to those who have previous experience with emancipation. In places where the main source of solidarity is kinship ties and familial relations, it is extremely hard to mobilize people outside of this paradigm.

In the forthcoming pages the two authors of the case studies will lead you through a ground level look at two Hungarian settlements – a village and a small town – following a far-right rally. You will hear local people's narrative accounts of their own lives, their beliefs, their politicians, their neighbors and their communities. We hope these narratives and their analysis will provide you with better insight into how interethnic and other social relationships work and how people interpret and understand the events that are happening to – and around – them as well as a better basis for exploring the complex interaction between the far-right's activity in Hungary, Roma and non-Roma in Hungarian rural settlements, and the Roma civil rights movement.

"WITHOUT JESUS, IT DOESN'T WORK":

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-ORGANIZATION
AND INTEREST-BUILDING ADVOCACY
IN A HUNGARIAN VILLAGE²

Cecilia Kovai

"Because only through belief can this country become one community again. Only through belief can I make a Hungarian or a Schwab accept that a filthy Gypsy kid is God's creature, too. They may lynch me for this, but I think that no integration program has ever reached its goal, while this miserable Catholic Church has been persistently telling the Schwabs 'and forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.' Our community has to carry such a burden! I can sense the force in the Catholic Church – if it became more open, we could work within it, because the love of God is there, because everyone is God's creature." (Katika S., family social worker and leader of Caritas in K., Hungary)

"The simple Gypsy man, who does not know God, asks 'what will you give me, will you give me something?' Those who know God no longer ask what they would get; they ask how they could help. And if we organize something, this would be typical. Let me give you an example: the entire [village of] Nagyecsed has been converted. We messaged the people of Nagyecsed with

2 K. is a village located in the North East of Hungary.

details about when the Holocaust commemoration would take place. See what happened; by the time I got there, 1,500 people had gathered together – young people and the pastors, too – and I only had to go there and make a speech. This is the difference between one congregation and another: these are reliable, respectable people; you can build a movement with them.” (Lajos S., deputy chair of the Roma Minority Local Government in H. County, member of the Faith Church, and activist with We Belong Here)

“I was a confused man without a self-image, without self-awareness. Belief has given me focus, self-esteem, and the same goes for being Roma. There is so much grief and rejection we have to face in this country. It can be harmful, and yet we can recover again and again. This rejection is so depressing – that we are not Hungarians, we are Roma people, we are not part of this country. Where shall I go? Shall I kill myself or go away from here? If I weren’t a believer, I would have left the country already, but I am a Christian, a believer, I know who I am, I know my rights, I know who I am through my belief, that God wants to see me here, and there is a reason why I have been born here.” (József B., Pastor at the Faith Church in K., furniture factory worker)

The missing foundation: the village as a community

The differentiations made between Gypsies and Hungarians in K.

K. is a Hungarian settlement with 2,300 inhabitants and four different church organizations. Although it seems as if the Catholic Church has been present here for centuries and it has retained its dominant position amongst the village elite, it does not gain its power from the support of the majority of the population. According to the interviews and public

discussion I gathered during my time here, K.'s major and most disruptive village conflicts stem from the shifting use of and contradictions in the term 'majority population.'

"I must tell you that young people don't remain in the village,"

says László S., the mayor of the settlement.

"In particular, young people with a marketable profession go to the cities and oftentimes, recently, an increasing number go abroad. Those who stay in the village are mostly unskilled workers, mostly replaceable in the production process. The 'urban' drain of the village has been going on for decades, maybe centuries. The cities have been dragging away the sensible, viable, most influential residents. During the era of cooperatives, everybody had a job according to their abilities and everybody found their place and that was real integration,"

says Katika S., the local family social worker and leader of the Catholic organization Caritas Hungarica.

The widespread unemployment, in combination with high rates of poverty, for some, and the threat of poverty, for others, together with the demographic changes has resulted in a major crisis regarding the societal integrity of the village. The definition of 'integrity', according to our interviews, is specifically associated to a distinction made between the Roma and the Hungarian identity of the village, and was expressed rather differently by our Hungarian and Roma subjects.

Based on local estimates, about 40% of the population in K. is of Roma origin. In the village's traditional layout, the Roma population was mostly located along the settlement's marginal streets. However, these days, there are many families who now also inhabit houses that have been abandoned by local 'peasants'. Alongside the still rather significant spatial divisions of the two communities, differentiation between the Roma and Hungarian populations is present on the labor market, too. K. is located only 15 km from E., H. County's capital. Due to the significant amount of transit traffic,

transport between the two locations is excellent – available to the villagers until 11 p.m. daily. Highly skilled workers have job opportunities available to them in E. or even locally, at more prestigious workplaces. Some of them are self-employed in the agricultural industry and may even employ others. These examples, however, are characteristic of the ‘Hungarian’ population, while ‘Gypsies’ fill in the remaining labor market positions.

Compared to an average village in the region, K. offers more opportunities to its inhabitants. There is a furniture factory and a mushroom production plant nearby, both of which employ mostly local Roma people, while agricultural production accounts for the rest of local employment. Most social scenes are divided along the lines of Gypsy vs. Hungarian: here, the local school is almost predominantly Gypsy children, while most non-Gypsies take their children to school in E., to more prestigious institutions.

Nevertheless, this distinction seems to factor in less, or at least differently, in the case of other major institutional settings within the village. Four out of the seven members of the municipality are of Roma origin, one of the leaders of the local civil guard³ is also Roma, and Gypsies and Hungarians work together in most local organizations. When we asked about life in the village, both Gypsies and Hungarians alike listed unemployment and poverty as the major and primary problems. The mayor believes the key to the solution would be to turn the unskilled Gypsy labor force into a productive, viable work force. The village continues to apply for trainings that fit the local profile, and there is a study hall dedicated to talented, socially disadvantaged, (mostly Roma) pupils.

All in all, it can be stated that the village leadership does not advocate a division of the village into Gypsy-Hungarian factions; rather it genuinely seeks to provide better opportunities to all its citizens and this is why it came as a surprise that the far-right Jobbik and the racist and xenophobic civil militia group, the Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard) was ‘invited’ into the village to hold an anti-Roma demonstration.

3 Civil guard is a nation-wide civil organization with self-organized local branches. The aims of the civil guards are to help authorities to maintain public security.

According to interviews with ‘Hungarians,’ K. is a place that does not fulfill the physical and spiritual needs of its inhabitants, as it does not provide a livelihood and a supportive community. The “*capable*” population leaves since the village does not offer them an optimistic outlook for the future; further, there is an

“overpopulation of a certain group, which is incapable of coexistence.”

This definition – implicitly or explicitly – is the crux of the Hungarian-Roma differentiation. Of course, the “*overpopulation*” which is “*incapable of coexistence*” is a reference to the Roma, while the reference to “*capability*” is meant to describe the Hungarian population. This interpretation is valid even if most interviewees have explicitly stated

“it is not the majority of the Roma that cause a problem” or “some Roma families are more distinguished than many Hungarian ones.”

The smaller thefts, burglaries, the constant threat to peace in the private sphere, that my interviewees expounded on, were not simply daily annoyances to them but rather virtual manifestations of the integrity they felt was lacking, a proof that the village is no longer able to protect its residents; neither through common norms nor through the sanctioning of their violators. This harsh criticism is also directed at the Roma community, since it is ‘common knowledge’ in the village that these crimes are committed by Gypsies and, frequently, by Gypsy children. At the same time, there is a contradiction to every conversation – be it with locals sitting in a local bar, with people actively engaged in village social issues, or with the mayor: a contradiction between identifying the village’s major problems with its Roma community and the declaration that the Magyar Gárda’s march through town was the result of the problems made only by “*a few problematic families*”.

The intellectual burden of maintaining the village’s integrity falls most heavily on the shoulders of the local elite; individuals with more prestigious

positions in the village who, as a consequence, are existentially connected to K. Caritas, a Catholic organization, is the largest organization in K. It provides the villagers with a variety of programs designed to improve their standard of living and income. Caritas' leadership consists mostly of members of the village elite and the municipal educational director, the local family social worker, and some members of the municipality also support their work. Caritas' primary mission is the "*domestication*" of the settlement's Roma population, which they purport – as was cited in the quotations provided above – can be achieved through the integrative power of the Catholic Church.

As opposed to Jobbik's rigid perspective which centers around the differentiation between a Gypsies and Hungarians, Caritas' distinction is much more inclusive. Based on our observations, the village elite are trying to create a common basis for coexistence and are much less preoccupied with emphasizing the differences between K.'s Gypsies and Hungarians. The leading example of this is the fact that four out of the seven municipality members are Roma. This rather exceptional phenomenon and other examples of inclusiveness that characterizes the village prompt a few serious questions: First of all, how is it possible that a municipal council with a Roma majority gives Jobbik and the Magyar Gárda permission to march in the village? Moreover, how can the village that has elected a predominantly Roma representation (despite of the majority of villagers being Hungarian) tolerate the public exhibition of an openly racist party and the radical militia movement, such as Jobbik and Magyar Gárda? As a follow-up, exactly what were the mechanisms that might have operated in this particular case to bring forth this scenario?

Based on my brief research, as I will outline in more detail here later on, the answer lies in the power of a larger, hierarchical organization which overrides even the local Gypsy-Hungarian distinctions – namely Fidesz (Hungary's ruling right-wing political party with strong nationalist rhetoric). Fidesz met with an overwhelming victory in K. in both 2006 and 2010 (the second victory was in accordance with the national trends) and the four Roma representatives are also members of Fidesz. Thus, it can be supposed that their party affiliations were more important to them than their ethnic origins.

Integrative forces

In any case, as stated above, there is a strong need for more integration of the village's various groups. The village elite are dedicated to developing a stronger integrated community, one that can go beyond its various communities' cultural differences and would, at the same time, accommodate the villagers' identities. However, as we will see, the well-intended integration efforts led to more disintegration as it was envisioned to be achieved through patronizing rather than emancipating means.

The village's elite concluded that Catholicism would be the solution to arrive at integration, identifying distinctions made between Gypsy and Hungarian citizens as the main obstacle against the village's integrity. Caritas Hungarica works mainly with the local Roma community. With the mayor's support, they launched a corn seed campaign, the main goal of which was (beyond providing a basic food supply) to

“motivate the local Roma people to be self-supporting and to promote the joy of manual work.”

The campaign reached 220 people and the relative success of the program is reflected in the vegetable gardens of the Roma families in the village.

The attitude the village elite have towards, and the way they talk about, Gypsies is characterized by an intensely paternalistic vocabulary, which sees the solution to local “problems” as “taming” the “constantly proliferating”, “savage” Roma population. We can argue, that within this framework, the corn seed distribution (in support of poor Roma families) and the Magyar Gárda's march may both fall within the same agenda. While the former one teaches its subjects the way towards a ‘civilized life,’ the latter disciplines the disobedient ‘pupils’, as they deserve a slap from time to time when they trespass the ‘most elementary norms’ with their barbarianism.

“I cannot stop a lot of Gypsies with kind words”,

says one Caritas member.

"And if I cannot stop them, they will confront a stronger authority, just because they did not listen to me."

(In this case, the term "stronger authority" means Jobbik.)

Regardless of its original intentions, Caritas now undertakes this noble task of 'domestication', basing its activities on serious ideological and in strong institutional foundations. It believes it can provide more than a 'simple' civilian organization, both in terms of material and mental resources.

"I have seen several cultures from the inside," says Katika S. "because my mother comes from a Roman Catholic family and my father was a Socialist. Both are cultures, as both of them have given me values and a firm foundation. I have seen all kinds of things I wouldn't call 'culture', whatever came after the regime change was nothing. Culture gives you a future that you can plan and goals and I haven't seen any of those since the regime change. I have chosen my mother's path, because I think that Catholicism is a more solid religion. I believe that Socialism is a religion, too, but lacks the power of the centuries."

For Caritas, Roma Mission of the Church goes hand in hand with their charity work. One of the keys to fulfilling their mission is to integrate local Roma people into the Catholic Church. Every month, Father Tihamér officiates a mass specifically for Roma people.

Clearly a Catholic Mass is by definition hierarchical; everyone, great and small, Hungarian and Roma, all become the tame lambs of God within this structure. During our visit to the Roma mass, we could see the children had adapted their own approach, based on past social experiences, to the disciplining attitude here; they howl each other down while giggling. Meanwhile, the priest takes this opportunity to reach the flock:

"It is easy to say," says the priest during his sermon, "that I am a Gypsy, I am being discriminated, and wait for the miracles. No. You have got to do something for the miracle to happen!"

A Gypsy band plays religious music with lyrics in the local Romani language. After the mass, the congregation has a lunch and sits around talking and singing together.

“The most miserable people come here, the ones that are not wanted anywhere else,”

says Caritas leader, Ildi. Indeed, the participants in the Saturday mass are mostly Roma children in poor clothing, from the infamous Dankó Street neighborhood, who are open to any space that welcomes them in the spirit of inclusiveness.

“Unfortunately the village’s Hungarian community does not really accept these children. We are far from being able to have such an event on a Sunday mass,”

explains Ildi regarding the remoteness of such a ‘miracle.’

“For the people of K., even I am a rebel simply because I have five children. K. is typically an only-child village, but now we have to face the consequences – there are no young people, and the power of the family does not hold us together, so, old people have remained here, unsheltered.”

Caritas also seeks to reunite K. as a community again, yet this seems to be a distant desire. The exclusive mechanisms which drive the distinction between Roma and Hungarian are too powerful to put the established Hungarian churchgoers and the Roma children on common ground.

“Tell me,” Kati asks me “where do Gypsies and Hungarians meet? I am angry with the Faith Church [neo-Protestant] because they don’t go to the Hungarians to show them that there are good Gypsies. They have no contact with them, although they could – through religion. Hungarians have built the school, with their blood, and then had to run away from it. The Faith people take the good Gypsies away, so, the worst ones stay here in the church and the Hungarians meet only them.”

Tell me, where would they meet? Everything is so chaotic; there are so many kinds of religions. I have seen the child who has been baptized as a kid, I have seen their wedding, I have seen their daughter's wedding; we have seen each other. Yet we don't know the Faith Church people, they are apart and this is a problem; we have no common ground. In this community, you can at least meet the Dankó people. And, if it happens, they will know it was not aliens that invaded their garden and ate the fruit from the trees but it was Danika Lakatos, with whom they are in touch."

In this statement, it can be yet again seen that the main characters in this Catholic community, just as in the entire village, are the elderly Hungarians and Gypsy children.

The Hungarian elderly and the Gypsy child also represent societal positions, the absolute polar opposite of each other, and therefore their encounter creates the greatest tension. The social processes threatening the village's integrity culminate in this relationship. Our interviews with the Hungarian elderly indicate that, as a whole, they are lonely – abandoned by their children who have left in search of work and a future elsewhere. The community of their past is constantly disappearing, while they grow weaker and more vulnerable. Whereas the looting Gypsy children are protected by "their own kind" whatever they do, the Hungarian elderly have no one to turn to, as their most important connections are no longer available. Of course, nothing can replace missing family ties, but the need for a protectorate is still a central theme whether they seek it in the caring Catholic community or the Magyar Gárda.

"Look, my children have left and, if all goes well, they come home to visit once in a month," Katika summarizes. "Now it is the two of us, me with my husband, but as we know from statistics, Hungarian men don't live very long, so, I might remain here, old and alone. Who will shelter me? The Gypsies have their own people, but what can I do if they attack my garden? Whom can I turn to? They may beat me to death. But

the Catholic Church, as a community, is different. No matter if you are toothless old man or a dirty little Gypsy, we are brothers and we take care of each other.”

Local Gypsies, however, seem to be only partially susceptible to Caritas’ (slightly) hierarchical integrative intentions, even though, as the leader of the Caritas explains, religion might be a basis of common understanding. A significant number of the Roma people in K. prefer another stream of Christianity, the so-called ‘neo-Protestant’ churches.

The Faith Church and the Christian Life Centre are both popular organizations, each with around 120 members, 90% of which are Gypsy – a serious ratio in terms of the Roma community (approx. 900 people). It seems that many of the local Roma people do indeed seek spiritual answers to their problems, however, are looking for them in completely different places than the Hungarian population does.

Incidentally, the particular questions and problems that the local Roma community seeks answers to are, naturally, also quite different from the dilemmas that the Hungarians seek to solve at the Catholic Church. And, indeed, according to our interviews and interaction with the villagers, the theme of ‘integrity’ refers to something different for Roma people in K.; it is far from being the main issue on their mind, as they are occupied by many other dilemmas.

Both spatially and socially, local Gypsies have always lived on the periphery of the village. Belonging to the village has, therefore, always been a problematic issue, due to their minority position. If they move to the centre of the village, their Hungarian neighbors react with ambivalent emotions.

“If a Gypsy family with seven children moves next door to you, you won’t even be able to go shopping, they will be observing you all the time,”

say the men sitting in the bar. With the influx of Roma inhabitants, the Hungarian population faces their fear of ‘losing the village.’ Meanwhile the Roma are threatened by other dangers; living without basics rights and opportunities.

"Where might young Gypsy people go?" asks a woman from Dankó Street. "They have no money to go to E., they loiter around here and they get bored and even start using drugs."

"I would take my kids to the school in E. because they would get better opportunities there, but how could I do it?" pipes in another woman.

Unemployment and poverty are problems the entire village faces, but it affects the Roma population much more drastically as it is even more vulnerable and much more helpless to combat them. The social environment in the village is generally hostile towards them, and after Jobbik's rally and its impacts on the social relations in the village, the looming threat of conflict has turned into a daily reality. Charismatic churches are able to reposition their followers to a certain extent, placing their Roma congregation into a new context, even promising the possibility that they will be able to break out of the overriding depressing social status through a personal change, through their religious rebirth.

"As I see it, there is the Catholic Church," says the head of the Faith Church in K., József, "and there is the Caritas Association, supported even from E. They take advantage of the social weakness of the majority of the Roma population and try to attract people this way; they supply them with corn seed and organize all kinds of gatherings, which is nice. However, instead, we aim to connect with people's personalities and teach them about the real sources of life. If you realize what your main problem is and you approach it differently, you can grow out of those dead parts of your life that have caused poverty and social disadvantages; you can become stronger, more powerful. We have come here from a similar background as this community; from poverty, unemployment, broken families, and ruined lives. If you receive this and that, you won't be able to change your life. You can only do it yourself, otherwise you will always

be dependent on someone else in order to fulfill your basic needs, unless you realize for yourself what the biggest problems in your life are.”

Although the intention of this study is not to compare the Catholic conversion policy and mission with that of the neo-Protestant churches, it is important to stress a few differences that are central to the subject at hand.

Socially speaking, these neo-Protestant churches (like the Faith Church) promote a sense of autonomy to its members, advocating self-empowerment as the path out of their depressing social circumstances and something beyond the hierarchic Roma-Hungarian distinctions that they have been subjected to for centuries. Also, having attended both the Catholic Mass and the service at the Faith Church, we could observe that integration of Roma culture is handled differently at both. At the Catholic service, Roma culture is included quite naturally, almost without any transformation: the music band from Szatmárnémedi, with their traditional instruments, sing religious songs in the Romani language and the children who stay for lunch after the mass play Vlach folk songs on the guitar. The leaders have institutionally provided a space for ‘Roma culture.’ The actual mass takes place in the church and the church garden, a place that has only recently been opened up as a spiritual space for Roma people – in contrast to centuries-old practice. Those who may have had access, they were still on the margins of religious life there. In this sense, this space needs to address the same issues as the village itself, and the organizers similarly challenged: how to accommodate the ‘new’ (Roma) followers as well as the slowly (but surely) decreasing number of aging ones (Hungarians). The temporary solution has been to organizing separate events and religious ceremonies, as the Hungarians do not appear to be open to the presence of ‘Roma culture’ at Sunday Mass.

As it is a younger church with less emphasize on established historical legitimacy, the Faith Church services take place in the conference hall of a hotel in K.: a modern, neutral space, free of markings that intimate the dominance of one particular ethnic group or century-old social meanings and practices. The space is not provided by any institutional power; rent

is collected from the donations of the followers. In the neo-Protestant churches, relatively new churches where, by default, everyone is essentially 'new', its Roma members are far less likely to stick out. Joining is also far less political, as it does not imply a loss on either side, in regards to the rivalry between the traditional churches, nor does it threaten to complicate existing social relations with neighbors from any of the traditional churches. In this sense, the neo-Protestant churches do indeed provide new alternatives to and repositioning for Roma people.

It is important to note that Roma cultural inclusion is an element of both a Catholic Mass and the Faith Church service. However, the two Churches represent two different ways of approaching the 'Roma issue' – one with little or no empathy to the problems that Roma face on a daily basis (Catholic), and the other with real answers to them (neo-Protestant). As witnessed above, the priest of the Catholic Church points back to the difficulties Roma face as excuses that are used if someone is too lazy to solve their problems. In other words, he blames the Roma for their own hardships and accuses them of using their poverty and destitute as a pretext for non-action. At the Faith Church service, the Roma theme comes up less explicitly throughout the service; the Roma preacher and the followers jointly ask the Lord to protect them from unemployment, to stop the spreading of Neo-Nazi ideologies, and to "*heal the wounds of this ill society*". The leadership at the Faith Church, thus, somehow reacts to the social problems affecting its folk and their environment. This is, in fact, where József S., member of the Caritas Association in K., went to get protection from "his folks" when Jobbik, with its heavy-handed crew, was about to pay a visit to his house.

Hog-tied village or, how did the Magyar Gárda get there?

The events of Autumn 2012, when Jobbik and the Magyar Gárda arrived in the village are intimately connected to the scenario that K. has found itself in, as described in the previous sections. K. has become a village where local problems are simply unsolvable; where increasing poverty, unemployment, the lack of established common norms and conflict management tools,

as well as the exclusiveness of the distinctions between the Roma and Hungarian communities, have all lead to a point where the village could be taken over, even if only for one afternoon, by an organization that understands the situation exclusively on a racist basis.

In the autumn of 2012, Jobbik and the (at that point) banned Magyar Gárda that is associated with it, held a legally-permitted gathering on the main square of the village. They planned to march to the house of József S. on the Dankó Street within the Gypsy part of village to hand over a petition. The petition called József S., as the local Roma leader, to control the local crimes committed by Gypsies.

“I was warned on the phone,” recounts József S., *“that the Magyar Gárda would come on Saturday, and that they would hand over a petition to discipline the Roma people so that they would not steal and rob and that children would not loiter in the streets. But honestly, who is able to do that? Shall I hold each and every Roma child by the hand?”*

Villagers and the organizers have several versions of the antecedents that took place that day, however, there seems to be a consensus over the fact that a certain field guard from K. had requested Jobbik come to the village, as he had had several conflicts with local Roma people. The narratives of the events from that day, however, vary in the Roma and the Hungarian versions.

My ‘Hungarian’ informants see the Jobbik march as a result, an end-point of an on-going process.

In the past few years, the number of incidents has increased: garden thefts, robberies,” explained the mayor. *“The perpetrators, juvenile delinquents, committed them with a grin on their face because they felt they could do whatever they wanted, nothing ever happened to them, and this infuriated the villagers. Not to mention the outdoor thefts; they took everything that was not paved into the concrete. Last time, there was this elderly lady that they visited regularly and they*

almost beat her to death. The police were helpless, the lady was helpless, and everything happened out of helplessness. Many people in the settlement thought that only Jobbik could provide support, so they asked them to help."

Another local woman had this to say:

"there was a period when the elderly were constantly afraid, Gypsy kids were going in and out, and all kinds of people who had moved here from other villages. And when they beat up the old lady, many people had just had enough."

According to the Hungarians in K., the situation in the village had got to a state that they could not solve things on a local level, as there was no institutional power or a local conflict management tool that could intercede in this impossible situation. Yet, the "impossible situation" they describe is connected to all the factors described above, that for years, and even decades, the integrity of the village, the village's faith-base, and somehow its identity as a united community has seriously weakened. Whether such united community ever existed is rather questionable but villagers do believe so. Nevertheless, both the Roma and Hungarians interviewed indicated traces of faith in their testimonies. Many emphasized that the perpetrators were not local Gypsies; in other words, the threat of danger comes from outside. Despite all this, the Jobbik rally directly threatened the local Roma community, including the minority leader who had been working as an elected official in the village and was widely respected by the Hungarian community.

As mentioned above, the interviews with Hungarians exhibit notable contradictions. On one hand, they say

"there is no problem with the majority of the Roma people in K."

and, on the other, they collectively blame the Roma population for individual crimes committed by Roma people. The Roma children, who trespass and wreck havoc in neighboring gardens become "them" – the "Gypsies" who need to be disciplined one way or another. Just to underline

the strength of the above-mentioned contradiction: with one exception only, not one person I met entirely condemned the Jobbik rally. However, on the other hand, I didn't meet anyone fully supporting it either.

The differentiation between Gypsy and Hungarian can also be identified in how that day's events are described, judged, and justified. Roma informants talk less about the reasons; they are more concerned about the actual events themselves and the shocking experience of being accused of a collective crime. When asked about the reasons it happened, local Roma people most often referred to K. recent events, saying that recent crimes had provoked the Hungarian population but the elderly woman's attackers were not locals, they don't even know them, thus, the collective criminalization does not hold water.

“There were these little Gypsy kids here, immigrants, not locals; we don't even know them. They caused the trouble, they almost killed that lady, this is why we all were confronted.”

one local woman declared. Others went deeper into the possible 'reasons,' forming complex explanations for the overall situation.

“There are quite a few Roma people – not locals – who have given Jobbik reason to come, so a Roma person who is a member of the Faith Church tells me. They have this mentality, they are just susceptible to committing crime. They take anything that can be easily acquired and smaller robberies happened, etc. But it all stems from the unemployment. If an entrepreneur comes here and offers jobs, about 80-90% of the Roma people would accept it. When we had the cooperatives, Roma and Hungarian people worked together; there was nothing like this.”

The “*times when the cooperative still functioned*” is an important reference, even for those who did not live in that 'golden era'. Hungarian and Roma alike name unemployment as the main reason for the conflicts. However, while for Hungarians this reason comes up in the course of a longer discussion (or argumentation) and only in the context of an ethnic

interpretation of the events. Roma testimonies refer to unemployment and widespread poverty as the factors behind the threatening and vexing crimes taking place much more frequently. In their narratives, my Roma informants somehow seemed fairly intent to soften the shock of the Jobbik 'invitation' to the village as well as the quite controversial attitude of the village's Hungarian community. Many of them blamed the whole thing on the one field guard who allegedly called in the Magyar Gárda:

"it is one person who started the whole thing; I don't want to mention names."

There were others, however, who saw the event as proof of Hungarians' innate racism.

In general, it can be stated that the post-Jobbik rally evaluations show a strengthened discriminative and excluding differentiation between Gypsies and Hungarians – highlighted by two strikingly different narratives – and there are, in fact, subtle markers visible in each that are entirely missing from the other. In the 'Hungarian narrative,' for instance, the fears of Roma from the racist rally are hardly present. Meanwhile, the 'Gypsy narrative' does not mention any of the grievances the mayor brought up. It is worth considering the role of the mayor, who did not support the presence of Jobbik, but nevertheless showed greater sensitivity towards the grievances of the Hungarian villagers and was much less concerned about the attack on Roma villagers. All in all, it seems that an 'invitation' to the village to the extreme right brought to the surface existing divisions between Roma and Hungarian, and even reshaped them a bit.

The Jobbik March – the event

K. mayor László S. and municipal representative József S. are colleagues. They are representatives elected by the citizens, both Roma and Hungarians, to lead the village. On the Friday evening, when József S. got the phone call, somebody called the mayor, too.

“It happened too suddenly,” László S. says, “we didn’t have time to think. The police called to tell me that Jobbik was having a gathering.”

Both József S. and László S. started immediate action. The mayor got in touch with the notary and the police, while the frightened József S. called Lajos Sz., vice president of the Roma minority self-government for H. county. The two of them, however, did not speak to each other once that day.

“We got scared,” explains József S., “the Magyar Gárda people were about to come over, there were a lot of children here. What could happen? I told Lajos Sz. that Jobbik people were about to march to our house. Then, we asked for permission by the police to organize our own march, which was approved, but later on we got a phone call from the police – they withdrew the approval. We had to stay here in Dankó Street, closed up all the time.”

At that point, László S. and József S. took different paths, only meeting again after the events had calmed down.

“After such a march, the settlement will never be the same again. People remain hurt on both sides, the mayor tells me,”

recalls József S. All the same, he also thinks that after the march, despite of their shared workplace and party affiliation, they found themselves on different sides and both of them feel hurt, at least József S. does.

“He [the mayor] heard and did things differently,” József S. says. “They shouldn’t have got permission. If the mayor doesn’t allow them to march, there would have been no problems. That should have been his task and the notary’s task, to disallow the march. He can’t say he didn’t know, he should have done so, he should have been clear about his duties, he has been a mayor for six years after all!”

The role and position of the mayor are less clear to us. However, it is certain that he did not stand firmly against the Jobbik event even though he alleges he wasn't even sure what he could do about it.

"It all happened too quickly, so, we forgot to consider if we would even have the possibility to prevent it. We wanted the police protection to be appropriate, so that the Roma residents and the people in the march could not access each other."

As the researcher I, as well as the residents, have some doubts about László S.'s account of the events. Many Roma people were sure he allowed the event to appease the Hungarian population and their public morale.

"The mayor is not a racist, but he is under a lot of pressure, he does not want to lose the support of those Hungarians, he wants to satisfy them. But he should also be aware that he has been elected by Roma people, too!"

one Roma man explains. The mayor, however, had (consciously or not) given way to the angst stirring in some of the residents that then escalated to anger and racism, letting it all culminate in an extreme right, anti-Roma march.

A majority of my informants thought the march had been an overreaction and were not very happy about the presence of the openly racist, rancorous militiamen (The Magyar Gárda) most of whom were not from K. Their judgment, however, was more about the numbers of the participants; as they thought the anger was still, to some extent, understandable. Most of them questioned the appropriateness of pouring all this anger out on the entire Roma population, and still, they interpreted the problems predominantly within an ethnic framework. This doesn't mean there weren't those who supported the mission and presence of Jobbik or believed in the collective guilt of the Roma people. According to the mayor, the villagers had quite diverse attitudes in this respect.

“There were mixed reactions from the Hungarians, I was surprised that certain people supported Jobbik, but there were others of whom I knew. Some thought this was too much, while for others it was too mild: They wanted to burn down the entire Gypsy settlement. It depends on their temperament,”

László S. said. As it can be seen, the mayor indeed thinks in ‘quantitative’ terms when it comes to differing opinions. For him, the voices that called for complete destruction of the Roma community were only insignificant emotional outbursts and he does not attach great significance to them.

One of the leaders of Caritas, Ildi, thought the march was “*terrible and impermissible.*” She claims if she had been in K. at the time of the march, she would have stood by her fellow Roma and protested alongside them. There was, however, no non-Roma person to stand by the Roma; they were left on their own. József S. did not turn to the local community for shelter, either, but reached out to his minority contacts outside the community. This is how Lajos Sz., vice-president of the H. County Roma minority self-government, a member of the Faith Church, and activist of the *We Belong Here* movement came into the picture. Lajos Sz. is not a local resident and he barely has any affiliations with the place. He does know the village and the village affairs to some extent; nevertheless, his perspective is that of the county- and/or nation-wide Roma movement. He is involved in several, overlapping social scenes that explicitly or implicitly represent and advocate for Roma citizens in Hungary.

As mentioned above, Lajos Sz. is vice-president of the H. County Roma self-government as well as an ex-member of the Roma political party Lungo Drom, which has remained in contact with József S. this whole time. Lajos Sz. is in his fifties. Nevertheless, he feels like part of the Roma movement’s ‘new generation’. He distinguishes between the nationally active Roma politicians of the ‘90s and the Roma activists of the early 2010s. According to Lajos Sz., the main difference is their attitudes towards politics.

"The generational difference is that older leaders are still stuck playing party politics, but the new generation, and specifically their leader, Jenő Setét, sees the situation of the Roma differently. The old ones still believe that if they support MSZP and MSZP gets into office, they will protect the interests of Roma people. Jenő Setét is part of the new generation; he has experience with the older one but thinks completely differently. He does not think we should get close with the MSZP or Fidesz, he believes there should be a movement to mobilize and help Roma people and advocate their interests," states Lajos Sz.

Lajos Sz. has also been involved in the *We Belong Here* movement that was formed for the census⁴ taken in 2011.

"We Belong Here is different from other movements," Lajos Sz. says, *"because it does not get involved in politics, does not belong to a party, and is not motivated by politics, but wants to help without any ulterior motives. If we see a conflict forming, we use our networks and mobilize our contacts depending who lives nearby."*

The status and the definition of *We Belong Here* is rather unclear. It is a network organized on Facebook by active residents in certain settlements. In K., people haven't heard about the movement but they like its goals: primarily that Roma people should declare themselves as Roma in the census. Several people complained that Roma people hadn't been asked this question in the census at all and they suspected it was politically motivated (if they seem fewer than in reality, their representation and opportunities as a significant minority population would also diminish).

4 The aim of the movement was to convince Roma to self-declare themselves Roma in the census. Usually, due to negative experiences of discrimination deterred the majority of Roma to identify themselves as Roma. Thus, the number of Roma population in the census is much lower than the actual number. In fact, from the year 2001 (the previous census) to 2011, the number of self-declared Roma has increased by 150%. The increase is due to a complex set of phenomena.

Lajos Sz. points out what the movement (a self-financed organization) has to offer played an important role in the protest of the K. Roma against Jobbik. The basic lack of resources determines when and where they can be represented and, to some extent, how visible they are as well. As Jenő Setét expressed it, the lack of money and no ability to cover travel expenses drives the activists to get as organized as possible on the local levels first, which anyway corresponds to the principals of *We Belong Here*.

According to my research, the Faith Church is the third, but most important – as well as most complicated – social scene that Lajos Sz. is active in. Neo-Protestant churches are not political organizations. Their gatherings do not explicitly target Roma people. Their initial charm must have been that they offered a new meeting venue for Roma and Hungarians. Today, however, most village congregations seem to have a Roma majority. Yet these are not ‘gypsified’ social spaces; the Gypsy majority here seems evident but is not connected with concepts of a loss or devaluation. At the same time, the social status of Roma is not stigmatized and it is possible to step out from these small congregations to the universal, ethnically-unmarked Christian space through belief (i.e. A Roma person from K. may go to the Sunday services at a church in E. or Budapest, where Roma and Hungarian people celebrate together in the fraternity of faith). The congregations of neo-Protestant churches in K., thus, can become Roma spaces because Roma see this affiliation as less risky than other social moves, which may lead to stigmatization. In this sense, these congregations seem to be social scenes outside the normal sphere, and this is exactly why they can be that much more powerful.

The role of these neo-Protestant churches has come up in quite a few interviews, even though they don’t have a direct connection with Roma movements. Informants have explained how much their faith and their congregation gives them a sense of self-empowerment, a sense of belonging, and a space where they do not have to hide or deny being Roma. As Lajos Sz. has said, those who convert start to “*take care of their own lives.*” This is the intention of Roma movements, too. Of course, congregations, as Religious entities, are not supposed to openly discuss politics – especially

not in this social environment, where politics means party politics and not an active engagement in public affairs. What is interesting is that the Faith Church is somewhat different, as the leadership has openly taken a stand on certain issues. For example, last autumn several Roma people from K., as members of the Faith Church, went to the Parliament to protest against a statement made by Hungarian Member of Parliament Gyöngyösi.⁵

Congregations seem to have greater capacity to mobilize people.

"If the congregation calls, I would go to other villages, too, to defend Roma people,"

says one woman. The congregation is, thus, a resource that is otherwise not available. József B., for instance, was advised by the non-Roma leaders of the congregation to prepare banners for the Sunday service with the subtitle

"I am Roma, I am not a criminal."

József B., who grew up in the Roma settlement in the village, would have probably never thought about using this mode of expression.

Lajos Sz.'s last minute idea to organize a public church service at the time of the Jobbik March is a perfect example of the duality of being a universal church member and being Roma. Lajos Sz. said,

"Roma people have always drawn their strength from belief. If there is nothing left but God, than that's where our power comes from. On such occasions, many others, those who are not members of the congregation, join us because they, too, have belief."

Lajos Sz., thus, sees belief in God as an integrative force, which can gather Roma people who have been fragmented by societal positions, kinship networks, and the scrutiny of the majority, into one protective community. His expectations were more or less met, as Roma people

5 Gyöngyösi is an MP of the far-right Jobbik and after his openly anti-Semitic statement in the Parliament, an anti-racist demonstration was organized in Budapest in December 2012.

from both neo-Protestant congregations, as well as the Catholic Church, took part in the service. Moreover, people from other villages participated including Christians, ministers, priests, as well as those from other faiths and atheists. The event included a sermon but also speeches and music.

József S. and Lajos Sz. both stress another important function of the service. It also served as a distraction for the Roma residents, so that they could not hear the shouting of the Magyar Gárda during that time, due to the loud music, thus reducing the chances that a fight would break out. Several active participants emphasized that, through faith, these Roma people received greater and stronger protection.

“This also meant that, of course, these people wouldn’t attack a religious service, all Christianity would have been outraged, including the Pope and everybody else. They wouldn’t have dared to.”

“If they ruin a service, all Christianity would have protested, not only Roma Christians.”

The outdoor service could, thus, accommodate many important needs: it gathered the local Roma community together, it prevented violence, and it placed the threatened Roma into a universal community setting and protected them. All these three essential needs were met.

Gypsies from K. live in three different parts of the village: the aforementioned Dankó Street, the most infamous neighborhood in the village, Petőfi Street, and Pataki Street. There are also a few families living in the inner parts of the village, amongst the non-Roma. Roma people living in the Gypsy settlements go out of their way to differentiate themselves from the others. In particular, the other two groups wish to distinguish themselves from those living on Dankó Street. Making a differentiation based on kinship or neighborhood is a common way some try to free themselves from disadvantageous stereotypes associated with Gypsies. This is how this strategy in practice can be summarized:

“We are not those dirty, backward, thieving Gypsies that people talk about, that is them, not us.”

This strategy, the fragmentation of the Roma, can be advantageous in everyday life, but when it comes to common interests, it can become the greatest obstacle. This happened on the day of the Jobbik rally, too.

"The Magyar Gárda did not come here, they came to Dankó Street." says a woman from Pataki Street, "because those small cannibal kids beat up a Hungarian woman. We stayed in E. with my mother, we didn't even come home."

Interestingly, this woman downplayed the possible danger to herself, but at the same time – also sensing the insufficiency of this move, namely that the Magyar Gárda doesn't care at all if she is "that kind of a Gypsy" like those on Dankó Street – she decided to not even take chances by not being at home.

Kinship ties, the shared religious faith, and the commitment of being Roma, however, seemed to be enough for the other groups to go to Dankó Street on that particular day.

"Of course, I went there," says a man from Pataki Street, "we don't give in! We would have been up for a fight, too, but I didn't want a fight. Some of us would just look for trouble and I don't like that. We were there and showed ourselves."

As this man emphasized, everybody thought it was feasible that violence would breakout. Both the mayor and the organizers of the service were worried about that possibility, having witnessed the rising temper of some young Gypsies. The Roma organizers, as mentioned above, tried their best to pacify the violent reactions of the angry, frightened crowd by providing a reassuring, calming religious service and then some loud, uplifting songs of praise. However, the outbreak of violence was not only up to them; Jobbik and the Magyar Gárda ascending down Dankó Street were not opposed to a fight either.

In the end, both Mayor S. and Lajos Sz. turned to the police for help. Eventually they blocked off the entire length of Dankó Street and, during the march, it was impossible to get in or out of the Gypsy settlement.

“It was a very claustrophobic feeling, like animals closed up in a reserve,”

expressed a young man. Nevertheless, people were generally satisfied with the police department’s role.

“I felt that if the police hadn’t been here, someone could have died. The hatred and the anger was so palpable.”

Generally, the presence of the police provided everybody a sense of safety, however, the police had played a very different role in the story, too. When Lajos Sz. discovered Jobbik’s intentions, he planned to organize a counter-march along the main road of the village; however, the police would not permit it.

“In other places, Gypsies blocked their way,” says a local man, an active member of the Faith Church, *“it is a shame they let them come in here [K.]. They needed permission to come, and the mayor allowed them! Nobody asked us, and the other shameful thing is that they didn’t let us have our march; we were blocked and not allowed to come out. It was humiliating.”*

Throughout my time in the village, I heard a lot of people complaining about the humiliating feeling of being barricaded into the neighborhood during that day. Local leaders and the police alike agreed the best thing to do was to separate the “two sides” from each other, which is understandable. However, local residents felt it was unfair that Jobbik was entitled to invade their village spaces, while they – the residents of K. – were not even allowed to move freely. Many approved of the police presence around the Roma neighborhood, but they also resented that they were held within it, temporarily – but greatly symbolically – ghettoizing them.

“There was one thing we found offensive,” says József S., *“that they insulted us, they called us stinky, dirty Gypsies. They were threatening to hang us and that field guard was yelling we should get away from here because they will burn our houses*

down, and so on. It was insulting, and we couldn't protect ourselves. We couldn't go there and explain that we are not the stinky Gypsies, and the murderers, and we are not cannibals, because they were saying things like we had already eaten two Hungarian children and stuff. But we were closed up here and couldn't tell our truth!"

In this way, the police officers and the leaders of the village prevented the Roma residents from acting as their own advocates, as residents representing their own interests in the village. Most of my non-Roma informants, including the mayor, expected the Roma to be completely passive because, as they saw it, being active would only provoke more violence. While the outdoor religious service played an important role that day, additionally serving to say

"that the Gypsies answer the violence peacefully, with a service,"

many Hungarians did not particularly appreciate the gesture.

"They should rather learn the Ten Commandments,"

was a common reply.

In fact, this "witty response" was Jobbik's exact message to Lajos Sz. and the Roma of K. The mayor says he didn't like the idea either, to

"respond with a mass event to a mass event."

The mainstream media reacted similarly and most of the reports, in fact, did not even include the Roma response. In the end, the Roma community did not get the appreciation for their gesture that they had somehow expected; the much-coveted integrative force of Christianity remained unrealized.

Repercussions of the march

The Jobbik rally lasted for a couple of hours. After speeches on K.'s main square, the protesters started walking towards Dankó Street. However, the police stopped them and from that point on, Dankó Street was a ghetto

for a day. Meanwhile, outside the parameters became a dangerous place for Gypsies. There were about 100 meters between the Gypsy settlement and the bridge leading to it (where Jobbik was gathering) marking a 'no man's land' between the Roma and the Hungarians. Only the police could enter the area in between. That day, Gypsies and Hungarians existed in two separate spaces, like two disconnected entities, attempting to steer clear of each other. The great symbolism of this spatial situation and the experiences had because of it has left its mark on the life of the village. As Mayor S. put it,

“the village will never be the same again.”

“Such a march is soberly enlightening, it shows us where we stand,” says József B., *“these are people we meet every day, maybe even talk to or watch football with. And then it turns out they stand with the majority and shout together with the others: Gypsies out! This cannot be seen otherwise, we walk in the street, we greet each other, we pass each other by, but now it has been shown what many people think. And this makes one sad.”*

“It has disappointed a lot of Gypsies,” says József S., *“there was a lady, who works in the kindergarten, and she shouldn't have been there. Afterwards, many people didn't want to let their child go to the kindergarten. I told the mayor that those who work with mostly Roma children should not have been there. If you are a racist, how can you work with Roma children? The issue was brought up at the plenary meeting. I said, this was wrong. The mayor and the leader of the kindergarten talked to them, but we haven't talked to her ever since, she hates all Roma.”*

“I think,” says Mayor S., *“that the normal, moderate people thought it was alright, they came and left. But if the problems remain and the two cultures don't come closer to each other, there*

will always be conflicts. But the Roma know who participated and they won't forget it. The kindergarten instructor was among them, so we had a talk with her, we had to measure what was right – if someone fulfils a public duty, if it would be possible for them to cooperate with Roma children and the parents further on [in the future]. The lady even started crying. She had had no clue; she had gone there out of curiosity."

I was never able to interview the kindergarten instructor, so, we will never know what her actual reactions were. However, a few things are certain: on one hand, even if it happened a little late and only marginally, the 'Roma voice', the 'Roma perspective', was present at the municipality's plenary meeting and the mayor listened to József S. and took the necessary steps. At the same time, he took steps following the same strategy he had been employing all the time throughout events – to keep the two sides away from each other. While he urges a dialogue, at the same time, he enforces his power and does not even allow József S. talk to the kindergarten instructor. The remains of the day's events display what a large rupture in the community the march was. Although the temporary barriers may have come down after the march, there remains very little trespassing between the Roma and the Hungarian experiences and interpretations of what happened.

The mayor and a leader from Caritas published a statement saying that, since the presence of the Jobbik, public safety has increased. Although the mayor added that the increased police presence might have contributed to that. So, all in all, even the village elite believe that threatening can be efficient, after all. At the same time, an even stronger silent statement has been made; such an event is not such a big deal and it shouldn't be blown out of proportion.

Most the Roma people I interviewed shared with me a sense of estrangement and spoke of palpable tensions between Roma and Hungarians that lasted for a couple of days after the day's events. This was something they simply hadn't ever sensed before. On the other hand, rather than the overdramatic reaction I think the mayor and others may have been

expecting from the local Roma community, I really felt that most my Roma informants intentionally understated the whole issue, trying to pardon the 'Hungarian' residents and village leadership and blame the whole thing on the one field guard. Ironically, the only joint Roma-Hungarian agenda to truly come out of this whole mutual experience is that now both sides are making every effort to forget about it all and pretend that nothing really happened. Yet, as clearly documented in this piece, for better or for worse, even this slightly backward, mostly well-meaning, mutually (but separately) determined goal cannot, and will not, be achieved.

“HE’S GOT A BIT OF A JOBBIK GENE”:⁶

CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES AND THE CHALLENGES OF RECONCILIATION IN A HUNGARIAN TOWN

Cecilia Kovai & Gergő Pulay

In the autumn of 2012, the extreme right-wing political party Jobbik held a rally in the town of Gy. dedicated to the issue of public safety. When an elderly non-Roma man was killed – presumably by Roma youngsters – in D., a local settlement, the local deputy of Jobbik announced their intention to organize a torchlight procession there. In the end, the procession was cancelled and a demonstration was held in the city center instead. Still, the negotiations behind the events highlighted the complicated relationship between the Roma residents of D. and the local representatives of Jobbik. In this piece, we would like to, first of all, introduce the town of Gy. and the Roma settlements located there. Secondly, we would like to provide an overview of the most extreme predicaments that these communities presently endure and the ways in which these are connected to both local conflicts with the extreme right as well as to issues of civil and political participation. The protagonist in our study is a local Roma leader who served as our main informant during our visits to Gy. We believe her case to be an insightful cautionary tale: a vignette on the prospects and pitfalls of Roma mobilization at a grassroots level.

6 To quote the original statement made in Hungarian by one of our informants: “Benne van az a kis Jobbikos vér”.

The Roma of Gy.: settlements and communities

Approximately 90% of Gy.'s Roma population is Romani-speaking Vlach Gypsy. As is also the stereotype, Vlach Gypsies form a rather 'traditional' community, maintaining a particular set of ethnic customs despite the pressure to abandon them in favor of assimilation to the majority culture. For the Roma, these features of their community life are often also seen as their means of resistance 'from below', specifically in regards to state policies and bureaucratic institutions.⁷ Nevertheless, as we discovered during our research, some of the perspectives coveted by local residents within these Roma settlements can even be quite hard for the Roma activists themselves, individuals otherwise deeply engaged in strengthening their own ethnic community's mobilization, to reconcile with.

There are two zones in Gy. that are largely inhabited by Roma, one is the aforementioned D. settlement with 7-800 inhabitants, the other is the neighborhood known as the Th., populated by 200-300 people. The majority population in both settlements is Vlach Gypsy. Romungros form about 10% of the town's overall Roma population and are scattered throughout. The boundary between Vlach Gypsies and Romungro is a serious division between the Roma of Gy., followed by many secondary types of distinction – such as the one between the D. and the Th. settlements, the Masari and Lovari subgroups amongst the Vlach Gypsies, and, above all, the distinction between Gypsies who are 'strangers' and those who are kin. As Krisztina Cz., a local minority representative and member of the 'We Belong Here' Roma network told us in reference to the D. and the Th., the latter is the

“more ordered one...there is at least some cohesion amongst the people. It's completely different from D., you will see, there are also nice tidy houses, which are bigger.”

D. is recognized as the place where the poorest Roma in town are concentrated. As Krisztina put it,

7 Stewart, M. (1993). *Daltestvérek, a cigány identitása és közösség továbbélése a szocialista Magyarországon* (Brothers in Song: the persistence of Gypsy identity and community in socialist Hungary, translated by T. Sajo et al. Budapest T-Twins Kiadó.

"many of them are coming from families where they already represent the third jobless generation. Under such conditions, they just lose all their skills for making their own initiatives".

Th.'s composition has remained about the same for decades, while D. has seen a constant flux of people in the last ten years. As it's a more affluent area, Th. carries higher prestige and this is reflected in the high self-esteem of its residents. As one man living in the Th. put it,

"real Gypsies are living here, those ones are just hybrids. We speak the purest Gypsy language, the Masari. Here, everyone are relatives, pure Gypsies, they have pure Gypsy blood."

Cz. also made a similar comparison between the Th. and the D. settlement:

"You'll see, the Th. is really different. There are nice, tidy houses and there is still some sense of community. A Jobbik deputy would not even be able to enter there!"

Though we will return to this topic a little later on, for now it's enough to say that D. bears many of the features typically attributed to 'Gypsy settlements' in the Hungarian media, especially according to right-wing extremist publications. This particular settlement, in fact, is given lavish coverage in the right-wing extremist press, depicted as one of the most dangerous and threatening Roma settlements in present-day Hungary. That said D. is not a fully segregated residential area. The local Roma majority lives together with some non-Roma families, too, mainly elderly people. In anti-Gypsy discourse, this population composition – an aging Hungarian population and a Roma majority – is used as a symbol of the impending threat that the Roma population represents to the 'Hungarian nation'; one day they will wake up a minority in their own land. According to many local sources, one of the reasons Gy. is a hot spot for the Hungarian extreme right is that one of the most important leaders of the Jobbik party was born here. In the 2010 elections, Gy. nominated him for Member of the Parliament, another reason why he might very well consider this town his home roost.

The role of a local Roma leader

Krisztina Cz. is an energetic person, fully dedicated to the work she does for the Gy. Roma communities. We first made her acquaintance downtown, in the Roma Minority Self-government's local office where we arrived right in the middle of business hours. During our interview, a stream of mostly Roma women were coming in and out of the office, asking for her help with daily matters: for instance, how they could move their kid to a better prison; how to get housing subsidies; how to manage their high debts from electricity bills; how to combat rapidly spreading drug-abuse amongst local youngsters. All the while, in the waiting room, her 'clients' sit and chat amongst themselves in the Masari dialect of Romani language, a language that neither we, nor Krisztina (who is Romungro), can understand.

As is apparent from their rapport, Krisztina has cultivated intimate, well-established relationships with many of the members of the local Roma communities. Our tour of the D. settlement included frequent stops so that residents could discuss with her their current problems or simply discuss the general state of affairs in the settlement. Krisztina is a trusted member of the community, something she attributes to her constant, visible presence and regular visits to constituents, which she deems an essential part of her work as a local Roma representative. Interestingly, her cultivation of these familiar relations and general approach stuck us as in complete contrast to that of her superior, Mr. V., president of the local Roma Self-government. During our time in their office, we saw the president on many occasions, coming in and out of the room, giving tasks to Krisztina and making the impression that their relationship was clearly that of a boss and a secretary. When we interviewed him, he was quick to blame the current government of Hungary for failing to fulfill the promises that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán personally made to the people of Gy. on stage during his 2010 election campaign. As we came to discover, V. has been immersed in local politics for quite a while and at this point he has aligned himself with both the left- and right-wing parties, depending on which one was in power. Switching allegiance from the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) to the currently governing Fidesz, his declared disillusionment suggests he might

be interested in switching back again (although MSZP might be a closed door for him following his previous switch). As V. departs from the office, Krisztina tells us he represents the kind of 'dilettantes' that made her give up all consideration of a career in local politics. She decided it is better to minimize the social settings where she is to obliged interact with such actors. While she is involved in politics and decision-making at a countywide level, in this office, she is still in an officially subordinate position to V. During our interview, after giving her several tasks to complete in the office, V. again calls Krisztina over, right in the middle of a response she was giving to us. As if she hadn't heard a word he said, Krisztina continues on with her answer to us, ignoring his call and indicating that he was due a lesson in manners.

After meeting Krisztina, we could easily imagine her work in the community as a prime example of good practices of an exemplary Roma leader. When it comes to the issue of Roma representation, the settlement's residents often spoke about the particular interests at stake, the interrelated agendas in which "*everyone is looking after his/her own*" (that is, following personal interests, the needs of close family members and kin are always considered). On the basis of the accounts we heard, it seems that any initiative can be doomed to failure in this environment if there is any break in the web of trust. Krisztina appears to be an exception in this respect. When we asked residents about her, they all responded similarly: "*She's all right, she always helps*". However, we also heard another common statement, which complicates this confident image: "*Kriszti Cz. is Hungarian!*" This awkward declaration has several explanations. When pressed for a clarification, one Roma woman corrected what she just said, explaining that Krisztina is in fact Romungro, but not a Vlach Gypsy. Apparently, the woman does not make a clear distinction between the categories of 'Hungarian' and 'Romungro', as the heart of the matter is that a 'clean-cut Gypsy' is someone who is Vlach Gypsy. Another woman said that Krisztina has spent so much time amongst the Gypsies and she got to like them so much that she has now been accepted – even adopted – by them. However, she is still, originally, Hungarian. On a related note, one of Krisztina's closest colleagues in the local minority self-government office is a Vlach Gypsy woman, who was

introduced to us (by another Roma) as ‘unique’ because she “*looks like a Hungarian,*” due to her light skin color and general appearance. Due to this, Gypsies who don’t know her personally sometimes ask her for help with the kind of official affairs that Krisztina also offers to them. Still, behind the ‘mask’ this woman is also ‘truly Gypsy’ and also speaks Romani. The special interrelations between the minority self-government office and the settlements and between the local Roma representatives and the people they serve represent a fluid boundary that all the actors are aware of and wary of, even if it can sometimes be transgressed in certain regulated ways.

In terms of her own identity, Krisztina is confident: she identifies herself as a Gypsy. During the last national census, she worked ardently for the ‘We Belong Here’ movement, which focused on getting Hungarian Roma to declare their identity on the national census as well as building pride in their ethnic identity and culture. Any distinction between the Romungro and Vlach Gypsies made in our conversations with her only occurs when we directly ask her to make one and it is only when she is pressed on this topic does she then tell us her own family’s origins. Krisztina has been living in Gy. since she was nine, but she never lived in one of the town’s Gypsy settlements. Despite the internal divisions between the various Roma communities in Gy., Krisztina sees her role as a minority representative and Roma activist who works “*for [all] the Gypsies,*” paying no heed to the complex plane where the aforementioned distinctions are made. In fact, it is those distinctions that make her appear ‘Hungarian’ in the eyes of the local Vlach Roma and the way that some in her community deprive her of a core element of her activist identity. Regardless, local Roma do seem to genuinely recognize her aptitude and interact with her under the framework of a kind of trust that is notably lacking from their relations with other officials. In a wider context, it seems as if it is often the case that someone who aims to represent ‘the Gypsies’ is obliged to be in a position wherein his/her own Roma identity or ‘Gypsiness’ will ultimately be put under scrutiny and often disputed.

Community Welfare: Poverty, unemployment, and drug-abuse

Just as in many other Roma communities in Hungary, Roma settlements in Gy. also face debilitating levels of unemployment: all our respondents mentioned this – as well as the resulting poverty – as their biggest challenge. Before the changeover from Communism, local Roma had been employed by factories in Gy. – mostly in the parquet industry – or by the slaughterhouse. Most of the Vlach Gypsies in Gy. also pursued private commercial activities outside their official workplace. After the transition, many people became entrepreneurs, however, most of these enterprises went bankrupt due to administrative complications. The most reliable business throughout most of the post-socialist period has been the construction industry. At the beginning of the 2000s, what was called ‘social policy housing subventions’ (*szocpol támogatás*) boosted many local business ventures. The poorer residents in these settlements contracted their housing development needs over to wealthier and more resourceful Roma, who built them cheap houses out of low-quality raw materials and kept the difference in the subsidy for themselves, as profit. “

I have to add,” points out Cz., “that the nice houses in Th. were also built from of these same funds. This is how they got rich. But, thank God, nobody was ever handed over an uninhabitable house, at least not here in Gy.”

The unregulated practices that evolved out of the ‘social policy housing business’ (*szocpol biznisz*) resulted in messy property relations, which, in turn, created further complications for many families when making legitimate demands for social benefits later on. Ultimately, this social policy housing system was doomed to fail and, in some cases, things went so sour that legal proceedings were even initiated against some of these entrepreneurial constructors. Nevertheless, the Roma in Th. – considered ‘more cunning’ and resourceful than most – are now living in visibly better conditions than those in D., even if poverty is common in both communities. For instance, some of the newly built ‘fancy’ houses in the Th. settlement have also had their electrical supply shut off for months on end.

Apart from poverty, the other main problem these settlements face can be attributed to high levels of local substance abuse: these include juvenile delinquency, theft, and violence. Locally, the type of substance abuse that has taken hold in these communities is foremost involving ‘designer drugs’, which are traded without any of the legal obstacles that used to characterize the trade of ‘classic’ drugs. These products have become available in shops in town and can be ordered over the internet, leading to a dramatic epidemic mainly amongst the local youth as well as, in some cases, even respected men in the community becoming drug users. In fact, casual substance abuse seems to be widespread. One father of two in Th. said,

“OK, I won’t deny that I’ve also tried it...when there was some party going on. But what the youngsters are doing is already like a degeneration.”

We later discovered that his 18-year-old son is one of the youngsters he was referring to:

“He is not going to school; he is not interested in girls, only drugs. He is skinny, like my finger, and we don’t know what to do with him. I’ve beaten him several times, alas, because he is also stealing from us. I’ve slapped him many times, but with no results. We’ve been to the doctor. Now he is assigned to a hospital in Budapest, but the doctor said it doesn’t make sense if he doesn’t want to stop. He’ll just run away from there.”

The boy’s mother continued:

“I don’t know how to prevent this. The police are not doing anything, although everyone knows who sells these things. They just go to the herb shop or wherever and they buy that bio-grass and the police are only glancing over without doing anything. We have been everywhere, but couldn’t do anything about it.”

An elderly lady then added:

"Of course these herb shops, where this stuff is sold are all the property of the vice-police commissioner, so, he just takes his cut from this; do you think he'll be the one who prohibits it?"

From here, the mother continued again:

"Although they should also know what acts these dazed youngsters have committed. My son also has a case like the thefts that they do while they are on drugs."

The recent spread of designer drugs amongst the local youth is one of the most pressing issues the community faces and almost all the other problems can be linked to it. During our visits to her office, Krisztina was constantly visited by women asking for help with drug-addicted children. Krisztina, just like most of the residents, feels helpless in this respect:

"We can visit the families, but the parents are helpless with their own children. These drugs can be ordered even over the Internet. The postman brings it to their door, in a box. It's his obligation, so he must deliver it, whatever is in the package. If not from the Internet, they can just buy it from the herb shops, like that one at the end of this street. The parents might not dare to report the case because they are afraid of the outcome. Their child might encounter collateral damage if the person they report decides to take revenge. My feeling is that the police know precisely the people who are into this activity, but, still, they are not taking action. I can't suspect anyone's ulterior motives, but there must be something going on if it's so obvious whom these people are and yet nothing is happening to them. There must be something. The youngsters are skinny like skeletons; they are destroying themselves and their environment. There are more and more thefts, and more serious crimes might also happen."

One man explained drug-abuse in the following way:

“It’s about boredom, that their lives have no meaning and there is no future for them. There are no clubs here in Gy. where they can go to have some fun or, if there are places, Roma are not allowed to enter – it’s just for the elite...maybe not even for those. They are not going to school. They are not working, as there are no jobs. There is no future. This is what makes them doing such things.”

During this discussion, everyone seemed to agree that drugs, and other substances that are used like drugs, have clearly entered the local economy – providing sources of livelihood at various levels. Krisztina continued:

“Women sell tranquilizers that they get with doctors’ prescriptions. Pills can be bought for a few hundred forints and then they are just taking it like candy. And this is only on the small scale, not the one where you get rich. There are people who take over the stolen goods [from the users] and sell it on. It’s one thing that they make a young man a drug-consumer, but it’s not enough and then they also take the things he had stolen for the drugs. The Roma destroy themselves – this is the sad thing about it.”

As these distraught comments suggest, drug-abuse has had devastating consequences on this community and its outcomes also seem to be totally out of the control of the community. It is not the only phenomena in recent years with such repercussions. The spread of drug use amongst the Roma bears many characteristics similar to the features of other problematic phenomena. In spite of their different targets and mechanisms, the briefly aforementioned ‘szocpol business’, or money lending at high interest rates (*kamatos pénz*) – usury –, can also be described as a way in which “*Roma destroy themselves*”. Once these phenomena become widespread, they become active, almost live autonomous forces within the community, setting up their own rules and rearranging the social relationships into which they are embedded. As an outcome, the lives of these Roma communities are distorted in such a way as if they existed in totally abandoned, isolated

environments without any alternative means or resources. Under these conditions, the surplus that one person possesses invariably seems to be equal to the amount that someone else is lacking. Drug-dependent Roma youth carry on as if no one is able to either defend or stop them anymore. They are left alone with a problem that destroys their communities, their environment, and their own mental and physical health. According to our research, drug use amongst juvenile Roma has not been successfully curbed following intervention by any caring authority, doctors, the school, or even their own parents. When desperate parents turn to the police and ask them to do something to combat access to drugs, they rarely get any official response: the police will pay attention to their children only once they are criminal offenders. Not surprisingly, drugs re-enforce criminal activity: thefts, burglaries, and violent crimes go up, engaging individuals it may not have otherwise. With the additional factor of substance abuse related behavior, these illicit activities spiral even more out of control. One grandmother in D. told us that her grandson had stolen from her to get the money for another dose. Her only recourse was to indignantly drive away the postman who delivered the postal packages of drugs to the young man.

Although drug consumption is present in both the Gy. Roma settlements we visited, they present slightly different challenges to the residents of each. In Th., drug abuse is considered a family issue and it is handled within this social unit. Conversely, the impact of drug use in D. seems to go far beyond the limits of the family structure and concerns the entire local community as a whole. For example, when drug-affected youth begin to commit more crimes, they are more easily pinned as the 'potential perpetrators' of local crimes, causing the social tensions that provide fodder for Jobbik when it looks to capitalize politically by expounding on 'Gypsy crime'.

The challenges of intervention by the extreme right

In Autumn 2012, an elderly Hungarian man was murdered in D. One Roma woman had the following to say about the homicide that provoked the Jobbik Party rally, which followed shortly after:

“He was a nice old man; he was always giving candy to the children. I’m sorry for [what happened to] him, it weren’t us [who committed the homicide], but those from Jobbik are blaming us all together. Shall I say, than, to any Hungarian, that you are a killer and so on just because one Hungarian killed someone? What does he have to do with it?”

To put it another way, the events that took place in the D. settlement became a ‘public affair’ involving the Roma residents there, as the message transmitted by the Jobbik demonstration translated into their collective stigmatization. In response to being addressed this way, the Roma then replied in collective terms.

Although we don’t have exact data on this, our impression has been that the extreme right continues to maintain a solid basis of support in town. In certain bars, right-wing extremist journals were put out on the counter, just like any other public reading material. Moreover, some of the popular, widespread symbols of Hungarian nationalism could be found in Gy., such as stickers on the doors of many shops downtown featuring the Hungarian coat-of-arms and the caption *“Hungarian-owned business”*. As the popularity of such signs intimate, the current economic uncertainty had made the public susceptible to these extreme right-wing or nationalist articulations, just as it has in many other European states.

As was mentioned earlier, Jobbik initially intended to organize a march in the D. settlement; however, they later gave up this plan following pressure from the city’s municipal government. Jobbik’s local deputy did not support the idea either, which may have been part of his own ‘special policies’ regarding the area and its residents, but we will return to that later. After being informed of the planned march, Krisztina Cz. and Jenő Setét (founder of the ‘We Belong Here’ Roma Community Network) organized a public forum to discuss modes of peaceful resistance on behalf of the Roma. Only a few people came to this meeting. According to the Roma residents we met, most people had envisaged an open confrontation, should there be a Jobbik march. When we asked Roma from the Th. settlement about what they would do in such a situation, they all expressed the same reaction.

A middle-aged man put it this way:

"If they would come here and we would stand up to them; would they dare come against us? Hey, we would just cut them up here! When there was that Jobbik rally, there was a small and thin man, like this, explaining something to the others. Poor thing, he would be finished once he gets punched. Is this Jobbik? Such people? What do they want? But they are not daring to come here, just to D."

The question of "*what do they want?*" also arises in D. The settlement is a popular fixation of the extreme right-wing media and they use it as an example of the general decay, misery, illness, and dirtiness that is stereotypically attributed to Gypsy settlements in extreme right-wing discourses. D. became a symbolic location for them; several short videos about the area circulate the Internet, attempting to exhibit the "*animal-like nature of the Gypsies*". Indeed, from a certain point of view, the level of development and the current prospects in this settlement makes it fit the image they are looking for. There was even one occasion when European MP and Jobbik Party member Krisztina Morvai, along with the mayor of Érpatak village, Mihály Zoltán Orosz, – (in)famous for his sympathy for the extreme right and his personally-developed 'model' for Roma integration, which included the criminalization of Roma and their severe punishment –, visited the settlement together. Their trip was also presented in a 40-minute documentary film. The film describes how the previous inhabitants of D. were non-Roma Hungarians and it was, at that time, considered to be one of the most nicely located areas in town. However, throughout recent decades, the local government began to resettle an increasing number of Gypsy families from other settlements, which were far worse off in comparison. They then mention the low-quality housing built using social housing benefits (*szociálpolitikai támogatás*) saying that, although the respective families got new houses through this program, their social environment hardly changed, compared to the one they left behind in their previous residences. Today, it explains, the remaining non-

Roma Hungarian residents live a few streets closer to the city center, while the rest of the area is taken over by the Roma, who now represent a strong majority in the settlement.

This film claims to belong to the genre of investigative journalism. The extreme right media presents it as a daring exposé in defiant opposition to the ‘liberal crap’ produced by the mainstream media. The introduction of the settlement and summary of its most serious problems are followed by recommendations for intervention according to a far right approach. These include methods of discipline, sanctions, and selected forms of punishment. Core images are of run-down houses owned by the local government and garbage dumps located along the bank of the irrigation canal. A considerable part of the documentary is dedicated to the suffering of non-Roma Hungarian residents who still live in the settlement. Morvai and Orosz (the latter dressed up in a traditional national costume) are walking through the Roma settlement undisturbed, while they introduce to the viewing audience the “*animal-like living conditions*” of the Roma that crippled the lives of the local non-Roma. Probably the most disturbing and cynical aspect of the film is that all these claims are then reiterated by the interviews with local Roma residents. Morvai and Orosz walk casually into the homes of local residents, shake hands with them, listen to what they have to say and then present this in the film as all illustrations of why Jobbik has the most appropriate ‘solution’ to the ‘Gypsy question’. In summary, relying on the partial assistance of local Roma residents – as procession men for this display – D. soon became an iconic location for the extreme right media; a symbol of the righteousness of their cause.

Alongside these media representations and occasional visits by extreme right-wing leadership, the local Jobbik deputy, Ké., has also been striving to develop his own personal link to the D. settlement. According to Krisztina Cz.:

“The Hungarians are, in fact, like him, while to the Gypsies he simply says that his party will straighten up everything here. The problem is that the Gypsies are receptive to him. He is coming with all his promises, that he will arrange housing and so on, and the Gypsies believe this because he visits them personally. He uses the phrase ‘my Gypsy friends’, so, I asked

him 'what kind of friend is that who represents a party which is claiming that Gypsy men must be put into containers and Gypsy women must be made infertile?' I ask him sometimes, what kind of a friendly relationship is that...is this what you say to the families that you are visiting? And he says, 'no, not at all.' I can believe that it's not necessarily his personal opinion, but he is still a member and a deputy of a party that propagates these ideas. From then on, he cannot be exempt from all this. Still, he is not saying these things himself to the Roma. The only thing they see is that he visits them and that he is concerned with them. Unfortunately, misery and hopelessness go together with a terrible ignorance. Many of them don't even know what Jobbik is, or that the Magyar Gárda [Hungarian Guard] is related to this party. It's all in vain if we try to inform them. Disinterest and the lack of motivation are overwhelming in the D. settlement and it's truly disappointing. This is what the local deputy of Jobbik utilizes for himself; he visits the families, drinks coffee with them, gives them promises, and, unfortunately, many of them believe what he says."

Upon our arrival to D., we met up with a woman of around 25 years of age. She gave us a rather direct illustration of Krisztina's previous statements:

"Ké. visits us. He is a nice man; he is normal with us. If someone is nice with me, I should be also nice, isn't it like this? Ok, he's got a bit of a Jobbik gene, it's there in him, but he acts normally with us."

People's categorization according to their 'blood'(or genes) popped up in our other conversations, too. For example, as one of our Roma interlocutors put it, the crimes that have shaken the life of the settlement might be explained by 'blood mixing', in other words, the merge of Roma and non-Roma Hungarians. One man says the community has lost the true Roma heritage, which he attributes himself and his Vlach Gypsy peers and relatives with. He explained it to us like this:

“the main problem is that the blood got mixed here; there is no clear Roma blood here. People moved here from all over and it’s degeneration that is going on here; the drugs, the killing, Roma committing crimes...because you don’t have the original Roma blood here anymore.”

Regarding Ké., the personal relationship he has cultivated with some local Roma seems to overwrite national level political distinctions. Yet, his ‘blood’ – as an essential human property – still cannot be changed and he remains a member of Jobbik anyhow.

Those Roma who are more engaged in politics – and who condemn the activities of Jobbik – would also surely welcome the efforts of local politicians to maintain personal contact, beyond the usual rituals of electoral campaigns. Yet, this is something that no other political actors have done, apart from local Jobbik deputy Ké. As one Roma man put it, *“at least he is dealing with us.”* Although this man, like others, also condemned Jobbik’s rhetoric and activities, he considers it important to also make other Roma think the same. On one occasion, a large group of Roma residents gathered around us to discuss politics on one of the streets in D. This group included men, women, and children. The heightened sense of awareness residents had concerning the spotlight put on their neighborhood could be exemplified by the way they appeared to perceive us in the beginning: First of all, they thought we might be proselytizers from a church and their second thought was we might be activists from a political party, aiming to win their allegiance. As this street discussion unfolded, it was clear they shared a common position regarding Jobbik as a Nazi organization that is threatening the Roma. They seemed to concur that, if Jobbik should get into power, the Roma would not have any other choice but to defend themselves – even by armed force, if necessary.

However, at the time the march of the Magyar Gárda was still very likely to take place, rather than preparing weapons, Roma residents in the settlement resorted rather to their arsenal of debate skills and interpersonal network resources. As they explained us, at that point, they contacted Ké. himself, who then came to visit them in the settlement. They had a discussion

with him and they told him that it's not a good idea to march around D. because "*there might be blood*". As they saw it, a counter-demonstration was the only viable form of resistance, however, in their opinion, this would have inevitably led to a violent clash. Since they wanted to avoid violence, they had to give up the idea of resistance. In the end, the march of the Magyar Gárda was turned into a rally held in the city center, which did not hold the same level of concern for the Roma of Gy., even if they were still prepared for a potential attack. Regarding further events during that occasion, no one in the group felt it necessary to express any further discontent.

The politics of interest groups and the limitations of local mobilization

For most the Roma in Gy., the prospects of advocacy are identified either as negotiations at a personal level or as the collective demonstration of physical power. Many of them expect that, most of all, it is political parties that will mediate their common interests. As this case study suggests, this latter expectation appears to be rather unsatisfied. Those who we spoke with could not name a single political party that they would rely on to truly improve their situation. Their all-pervasive disillusionment in politics and difficulty in choosing amongst the existing political parties has further contributed to their constant state of uncertainty. In another discussion with a large group of Roma residents on a street in D., many people said they expected us to give them advice regarding the dilemma as to whom to vote for. At one point, one man said, "*there is no other choice but to return to MSZP*⁸!" The others echoed his statement claiming that they'll all 'return' to the former governing party. However, similarly supportive affirmations were made shortly after, when another member of the crowd started praising the merits of the current government and the party in power, Fidesz.

In general, both these people's widely-shared attitudes about party politics and their political engagement are ultimately motivated by personal interests – be it in regards to a political organization or their family. Kopi, a man around 30 years old, put it in the following way:

8 The Hungarian Socialist Party, which was in power between 2002 and 2010.

“I’ve helped B. [the vice-mayor of Gy.]. I brought him a lot of votes, since he was promising us everything. He said he’ll do this and that for the Roma and for D., but he needed me only for this, to bring him the votes. He hasn’t even come to D. ever since!”

Kopi seems to be someone who tried in his own way to represent the interests of the local Roma and the D. settlement at the local political level. His bitter experience is hardly any different from the ones shared by those who had been active at the national level. As Krisztina Cz. noted, the last few decades have demonstrated that Roma advocacy, as mediated through party politics, is a failure – even though possible alternatives remain unclear:

“I think that in Hungary today, Jenő Setét is the most trustworthy person possible to represent the Gypsies and who is also by in large accepted by them. But he wants to stay away from politics, even though many had approached him. But he doesn’t want to get into this because he learnt from others how big the failure can be. For example, Aladár Horváth has been a Member of Parliament, is from the liberal party, was an advisor to the prime minister, but he couldn’t achieve anything real. One person is not enough for all that is there to be done. Real advocacy might be to have parliamentary representation for the Gypsies, if their voice could be articulated at that level. But the way I see it, Jenő rather thinks about a sort of an umbrella-organization. Party-politics can take advantage of the kind of leaders who move according to their own interests, not caring about their community, just about what they can get for themselves. Jenő keeps on repeating this point, he says that these kind of people are needed in party politics. The minority self-governments are ineffective; they have neither resources nor decision-making power. We are good for filling in documents. Politics will always find those who can be controlled by personal interests.”

Being motivated by one's own interests seems to be the primary motivation for a wide range of actors and not just in the narrow field of party politics. As it was explained to us, most community initiatives in D. failed for this precise reason. Like a lot of other Roma settlements throughout the country, neo-protestant churches have begun to appear here, too. On one occasion, French Roma Pentecostals arrived in the settlement. They managed to mobilize many of the local residents. However, people grew suspicious when they started taking a lot of photos and accusations were made that these people had come from France only to document their achievements for a project that pays them well. Although it was never revealed whether these suspicions were true or false, the French Pentecostals gradually disappeared from the settlement. On another occasion, a Sri Lankan priest managed to establish a congregation in D. and started to hold worship services in a house that he rented. In the beginning, the local Roma seemed to be receptive to this initiative as well. Still, in a few months time, the owner of the house submitted an electricity bill that was unrealistically high and the priest could not (probably also did not want to) pay it. This is how this initiative also came to an end.

According to Krisztina Cz., a major obstacle for initiatives espousing Roma self-organization is this ongoing suspicion that can easily arise during any initiative, simply based on a claim that the organizational effort serves only someone's selfish personal interests. As Krisztina asserts:

"Whatever event we organize, very few of them come. For example, last February, we lit some candles here in front of the office to commemorate the victims of the Tatárszentgyörgy murders⁹ but the people were only saying 'what for? What kind of use can I make out of it?' And if someone still tries to do something, than they start saying: 'look, they just want to take advantage of you!'"

9 In 2009 a Roma father and his son were murdered in Tatárszentgyörgy by a number of Hungarian men who were later discovered to have neo-Nazi leanings.

A real or claimed motivation of self-interest can potentially discredit any initiative designed to facilitate local Roma mobilization. This mechanism has had a devastating effect in D. This is another great difference between Gy.'s two Roma settlements: in the Th. settlement, where nearly all the residents belong to the same extended network of kinship, there is an organizational unit that is able to cover almost all the local circles, individual and group interests.

As was mentioned before, the concept of 'blood' refers both to being part of the Vlach Gypsy heritage and to the possession of kinship ties. According to those from Th., the shortcomings of local Roma advocacy are related to the fact that the members of the local minority self-government are Romungro, who they do not consider to be real Gypsies as "*they don't have the real Gypsy blood*", thus, they cannot represent the Roma. For the men in Th., an authentic Gypsy leader is embodied in an influential Vlach Gypsy male head-of-the-house with extended kinship ties, what some might call a 'Voivod' (vajda). This 'Voivod' represents the Gypsies in a way that automatically translates into kinship networks. As one man pointed out to us, he is planning to run for the presidential position at the minority self-government as he thinks that the current leaders take into consideration only their own interests; they are in favor of their 'own kind', their own kin. However noble this sentiment sounds, following the aforementioned abounding prevalence of self-interests above all else, his election might prove to be much more to the benefit of his family interests, instead of others. This rational suggests, on the one hand, that each and every Roma leader acts only according to his self-interests. On the other hand, it allows individuals to act as 'real leaders' in the face of all those who count as members of their extended kinship networks.

The residents of Th. seemed to have only vague memories about the Jobbik march. Mostly, they could recall that members of the Magyar Gárda wanted to go to the D. settlement, since they almost all have relatives or acquaintances there. However, the demonstration that finally took place in the city center was hardly of interest to any of them. At the same time, some of the men went to the village of Gyöngyöspata when incidents took place

there,¹⁰ as they considered it their duty to defend their relatives. This trip was made in the name of a shared 'Gypsiness', much like the mission of the activists from the 'We Belong Here' group, who made visits – at their own expense – to many other settlements under the threat of the Magyar Gárda, too. However, otherwise, the two groups and their trips, their purposes, and principles were quite different. After all, it is not so surprising that Krisztina Cz. managed to mobilize only a few for the 'We Belong Here' network or for the local Roma self-organization of the Gy. settlements. Those who have joined have mainly been women, many of them divorced or widowed; hence, they are not under the control of male partners. Since the national census, the initial target of the 'We Belong Here' movement has passed. In fact, it is difficult even for the core members to account for their purpose. As Krisztina puts it,

"there are only a few of us, but we are a solid core, people who are always there!"

This pretty much sums up Krisztina herself, as she is "*always there*" whenever someone needs help, either in Th. or in D. Our Roma informants referred to her as a real local leader; despite of the fact that she is like a 'Hungarian', then again, maybe it's for this exact reason.

One of the main analytical challenges of understanding these local responses to the challenges posed by the extreme right by members of Roma communities is being able to distinguish two, highly diversified dynamics in the local communities. Roma activists like Krisztina often criticize the passivity or ignorance of people they serve, claiming that their miserable living conditions keep them from even realizing the very threat they are exposed to. One widespread assumption in Roma civil society circles was that the recent wave of attacks against Roma, as well as the general threat of anti-Gypsy mobilization by the extreme right, might result in some sense

10 During the first week of March, 2011, the New Hungarian Guard carried out a symbolic attack against Roma Hungarians in Gyöngyöspata, a village of an app. 2800 people in Northern-Hungary. The operation was designed to wage a symbolic battle against the Roma community. The Guard was successful in humiliating the community. Athena Institute (<http://www.athenainstitute.eu/en/news/read/128>)

of self-awareness amongst potential victims – as members of the victim community. Civil activists thought this might reinforce solidarity – if not a total ethnic consciousness – amongst the Roma in Hungary. However, the persistent fragmentation of these grassroots communities, which we also documented in our research, seems to suggest the opposite. Interestingly, the observed forms of ‘inaction’ – such as the efforts made to avoid physical violence in interethnic conflicts – might very well be a deliberate choice, the result of a sort of collective decision-making processes. The accounts we provided in this report seem to support such a claim. The unique processes that led to the formulation of a cohesive local individual and group opinion might be too subtle to be discerned (and utilized) by leaders and policy makers, yet they provide us with enough solid evidence to make the argument that Roma in these communities are indeed participating in a political discord of their own, choosing together the option of preventing any further escalation of violence in their community.

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Facing the Far-Right

Ethnographic Portrayals
of Local Civil Resistance

Interethnic relations of Roma and non-Roma in Hungary are marked by a long history of local (ethnic) conflicts since the regime change of 1989. Conflicts persist to this day, although they are changing in nature. From the mid-2000s, Hungary has seen a political crisis leading to the rise of the extreme right, accompanied by a 'racial turn' in mainstream discourses and in certain policy areas. Political changes, in turn, have also shaped the nature of local ethnic conflicts. The usual scenario is that the far right, through its unofficial paramilitary organizations, has been organizing hate marches in local communities with ethnically mixed populations to mobilize locals and instigate hatred against the Roma in order to win the political support of the majority.

With the two anthropological case studies presented in this volume we hope to offer some insight into this issue through the analysis and portrayal of some 'best practices' of Roma self-mobilization and local civil resistance to the far-right. In addition, we explore how local communities where the far-right had organized demonstrations and hate marches have been subverted, how social ties were torn and, in general, what social, moral and symbolic damages have been done within the communities following these events.

Edited by

Zsuzsanna Vidra



CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY