

The Everyday Struggles of Urban Youth
in a Roma School

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2014

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to examine various practices and struggles of urban young Roma in Budapest that constitute their identity and emerge from subtle and multi-layered mechanism 25 years after the political economic transition. Through anthropological investigation among Roma youth separated within the educational system, I examine the correlation between the identities constructed and negotiated by practices and the mechanisms of exclusion as determinant of differentiation. Moreover, I show through empirical evidence how the everyday struggles of urban youth between education, employment, kinship and tradition creates a dialogical and dynamic relationship between these two processes. Through this relationship a shared ethnicity emerges as imagined sameness and otherness at the same time. In order to reveal logic of shifting reference points of self-identification, I have collected qualitative data through participatory observation in a Roma school for three months. In the research I discover direct and indirect, systemic and experienced exclusion behind the strategy of “choosing” separation and imagined ‘sameness’. Furthermore, I discover everyday struggles rooted in their contribution of care, domestic work and income generation. Finally, in a separate chapter, I take an account of gender issues that even if it overlaps with the section on struggles, helps to understand the inner structure of the community and their relation to and within family.

Keywords: ethnicity, process of identity construction, exclusion, urban young Roma, economic practices and struggles, kinship, gender

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Violetta Zentai. Her broad knowledge and professional support provided the basis to be able to finish my thesis. His guidance helped me during my anthropological fieldwork as well as during writing my thesis.

Besides my supervisor, I would like to thank Don Kalb for his insightful comments. Also, my sincere thanks go to Vlad Naumescu for his encouragement to enter the field one year ago. I must also acknowledge Ágnes Tóth who helped me in the last minutes with her valuable comments. I would also like to thank the Roma Access Program for making me possible to write this thesis. Last but not least, I would like to thank Daniel Monterescu for his support through my studies.

This thesis would not have been the same without Alíz Balogh, my good friend who turned my attention to the direction of the thesis. I am also indebted to Juli Perczel for the time we spent together in the library.

I would like to thank my loving family for their lifelong support and my partner who encourages me in critical moments.

Finally, I cannot find words to express my gratitude to the students and the teachers. My sincere and deepest thanks are due to them

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INTRODUCTION

A couple of minutes before eight o'clock in the morning, I was walking on the street and I was excited to enter to my field site, into a Roma high-school. I did not know that I was early. Ten minutes after 8 am the first students arrived, although their first class starts at eight o'clock every morning. Before they entered the building, they smoked a cigarettes front of the school in the company of the porter. When they entered, the porter looked into their bags. As it turned out later, he checked whether they have a notebook and a pen. Finally the moment, I was waiting for, arrived. I entered into the classroom with a teacher. But it was empty. Slowly a couple of students arrived. Some of them seemed much older than their peers.

School performance of students depends on several factors. Among them, irregular school attendance is crucial, since it can be the main reason of the high drop-out rate of Roma students. Moreover, stereotypes such as "Roma do not 'want' to study and they do not 'want' to go to school" are based on this phenomenon. However, as always, the picture is much more complicated. Irregular school attendance is the consequence of subtle combination of social and economic factors and as every human action; it is embedded in a broader social structure with which it is in a dialogical relationship. Yet, seemingly this school is working isolated from the broader system. It is founded by Roma, and it enrolls Roma youth who 'decided' to study in that particular school. Thus, on the surface, the concept of the school is built on shared ethnic identity.

Scholars has paid attention on the trajectory of reaching this point, the exclusion and deprivation of Roma (Szalai 2002; Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi 2001; Stewart 2001) in the last decades. Studies on exclusion from the labor market (Kertesi 2004), inter and intra school segregation (Szalai 2002; Zenta 2009; Farkas 2007) reveal the mechanism and the logic of

exclusion as well as its impact on a minority group. What is commonly accepted in the field is that hostile attitude towards Roma plays role within these processes. In order to destroy stereotypes, Kertesi and Kézdi (2014) discovered whether ‘ethnicity’ belongs to the factors that define school grades. They claim that ‘ethnicity’ per se do not determine school performance. Still, as Szalai, Messing and Neményi (2010) show, belongingness to a minority group does have a role. Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi refer to ‘ethnicity’ as “cultural distinctions based on social differences” (2001:5). Similarly, Spencer claims that ethnicity, as a central aspect of identity, is constructed by social meanings (2006). Furthermore, identity constitutes economic and cultural practices.

Through my anthropological investigation among Roma youth separated within the educational system, I examine the correlation between the identities constructed and negotiated by practices and the mechanisms of exclusion as determinant of differentiation. Moreover, I show through empirical evidence how the everyday struggles of urban youth between education, employment, kinship and tradition creates a dialogical and dynamic relationship between these two processes. Furthermore, several questions rise. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and irregular school attendance? What is the logic behind maintaining the shared sense of ethnic identity on which a Roma high-school is built? How ethnic identity that is built on cultural and economic practices, defines the occupation of young Roma within the education system in an urban context? Thus, with examining the, I aim to reveal the dynamic of identities with a special attention to cultural and economic practices among Roma students who ‘chose’ to be enrolled in a “Roma-school”. Moreover, even if the space of the school is built on “shared culture”, my goal is to grasp identities through “differences” and constant positioning to ‘others outside’ and to each other.

In order to reveal the above mentioned questions, I spent almost three month in a Roma high-school in Budapest and participated in the everyday life of the institution. That school is run by foundation and it has been established 20 years ago as an identity project in order to maintain and preserve Roma tradition. Since at the time when I entered the school the directorate was looking for an English teacher, I found myself in a role of an English teacher who was responsible for preparing the students for their annual exam. As a result of participatory observation, I have collected qualitative data including stories, conversations or short remarks, students` opinions on any kind of event or issues.

Within the wider scope of the thesis, first I will discover the forces behind ‘free choice’, the relationship between three state regulations, the maintenance of the school and the sense of ‘sameness’ or shared ethnicity of the students. Secondly, I will reveal their everyday struggles embedded in strong kinship relations and derived from exclusionary processes. Finally, I will look at social relations defined by ‘traditions’ and I will examine the differences in their identity.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I present two sections of two fields of studies that draw a theoretical framework of my study. The aim of this chapter is to foreshadow the relational field between exclusion and everyday struggles and the process of identification of the self. Furthermore, its goal is to offer point of departure to reveal how the reproduction of social distinctions by everyday struggles maintains a sense of shared ethnicity, that of sameness within a heterogeneous community defined by institutional belonging.

First, I will give an overview on the literature that examines the process and mechanism of exclusion in Hungary during the transitional period. In this chapter, I put an emphasis on the main factors that played a role in the deprivation and marginalization of Roma in order to understand its trajectory (Szelényi 2001). However, I will limit the review to the transitional period, without closely looking at the contested history of Roma or the debate about the origins of poverty between neoclassical economists and traditional institutionalists.

In the second section, instead of offering a complete picture of history and the trajectory of the development of the concept of ‘identity’ within psychology, sociology and the intersection of the two, I will focus on the mechanism of creating ‘otherness’. Moreover I will draw attention to the main dimensions of positioning in order to “understand race and ethnicity grounded in the material representation” (Spencer, 2006:24). Thus, I will put emphases on the mechanism that is called self-identity formation through which one situates them within an imagined system.

1.1. The Process of Exclusion in Hungary

The process of exclusion during the transitional period in Hungary, and the effects of socialism on Roma and/or the poor has received great attention by scholars within the field of sociology and anthropology. Scholars explain the outcome of transition with theories of the social and economic characteristics of market transition (Havasi 2002; Szalai 2002, Szelényi and Ladányi 2006), the role of ethnicity in the creation of social boundaries (Barth, 1969; Emigh et al. 2001), “the racialization of poverty“ (Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi, 2001) and with the individualization of poverty and “blaming” and labeling the poor (Szalai 2002; Gans 1995). They claim that the above mentioned processes resulted in the emergence of a mass of uneducated people in life-long unemployment in great proportion made up by Roma and separation within education and/or intra or inter school segregation (Zentai 2009; Farkas, 2007; Szalai, Messing, Neményi 2010) and discrimination within the labor market (Kertesi 2004).

Since Roma are the largest and poorest ethnic minority within Europe, and 80% of them lives in post-socialist countries in East and Central Europe, scholars often approach issues related to Roma in a comparative way (Szalai 2002; Ladányi and Szelényi 2006). Despite the importance of comparative approach in the deeper understanding of social exclusion, and the impact of globalization on “disintegration”, I focus on Hungary, since my empirical study is embedded locally and limited on a space of a school in Budapest.

During socialism and within the rational labor market, industrial jobs were “available” (Enyedi 1996; Szelényi 1996) for unskilled workers in the industrial areas, moreover people were “forced” to have job (Szalai 2002:37). Furthermore demographic changes, inner migration from rural to urban, followed the economic order. Completing the picture of the ‘progress’, assimilation of Roma had been forced, moreover the space of trading narrowed for Roma who

kept traditional profession (Stewart 2012). However some Roma communities, mainly those who belong to the Olah group resisted and maintained traditional practices and Romanes language (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the “modernization”; “expansion of the primary education and growth of industries based on uneducated labor” resulted in an “illusion” of integration (Kertesi 2004:3).

After the political-economic change, a mass of these people lost their jobs, and found themselves in the vicious circle of poverty; insufficiently educated and unemployed. Moreover Kertesi shows that not only lack of schooling and “regional backwardness” but labor market discrimination also played a role in “crowding out” (2004:44) Roma workers to a greater extent than non-Roma. Thus “losing job” per se, was not the only factor within the process of emerging long-term, multi-dimensional poverty. (Havasi 2002; Szalai 2002; Ladányi and Szelényi 2006).

In order to understand the mechanism of exclusion I refer to Szalai’s theory of individualization of poverty (2002). She argues that ‘poverty’ was a taboo under socialism, since due to the economic and social structure; the picture of poverty did not fit into the egalitarian ideology on which the system rested. Yet poverty existed during the period, thus the phenomenon “sporadically” occurred. In order to eliminate the contradiction, the explanation became ‘behavior’ and the responsibility had been shifted to individuals. Furthermore, after the political change, the core reason of individualization shifted from the logical incompatibility of the dominant ideology to the conflict of economic interests. The priority of keeping government expenditure on the minimum level did not bring social justice into prominence (Szalai 2002:37-40).

The theory of individualizing poverty (Szalai 2002) and the racialization of poverty (Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi 2001) illuminate the origins of the systemic mechanism of exclusion

and as well as the experienced exclusion, or in other word “identity threatening experience” (Breakwell 1986), on the ‘ground’.

1.2. Identity

In the second part of the chapter, I aim to circumscribe the notion of identity focusing on its fluid nature, on the works in which the analyses of the meaning of the material and symbolic is extended to institutions (Spencer 2006; du Gay 2007) Even if “the conceptualization of identity led to a series of valid investigation” (Erikson 1968:16), considering the limitation of the space of my thesis, I do not intend to delineate the development of the various concepts of identity within the field of sociology and psychology. Instead, I will highlight the literature that underline the concept of the relativeness of socially embedded “sense of personal sameness” (Erikson 1968:17) Moreover, I will stress that the references of positioning to “others” changes depending on economic, cultural and political practices (Spencer 2006; Hall 1996). In addition to emphasize the dynamic nature of identity, I will highlight the function of identity in separation based on differences and in maintaining ‘sameness’, the sense of shared ethnicity (Hall 1996; Kymlicka 1995; Spencer 2006).

Aspects of self, such as ethnicity which is “the central of concept of identity”, gender, sexuality, community or geographical location constitute who we are (Spencer 2006:2). Nevertheless, Spencer stresses that ‘ethnicity’ is understood by “social meanings”, that is constructed by coding and decoding (Ibid., Hall 1996) Thus, the image is subtle and multilayered, and instead of projecting a static image, a snapshot of identity, I rely on selected authors who are concerned with the dialogical and multileveled process of identity formation. I use ‘identity’ in my thesis, as “interplay between individual and public messages”, as a space

‘under construction’ and negotiation between personal sameness and the ‘others’ that is dependent on positioning (Spencer 2006:2).

‘Otherness’ that is “not-self” and different in gender, race, class, costume or behavior (Spencer 2006) is a tool of affirmation. It is created by labels of legal status, such as criminals, deviants or by “ethnification” (Friedman 2003). The concept or imagination of ‘others’ separates and marks reference points of identity (Hall 1996). Thus, the existence of groups based on the sense of shared culture, ethnicity, values and livelihood is depending on the existence of ‘others’.

In my thesis in order to understand the existence of the community of the school that is based on imagined sameness despite the diversity of Roma population, Barth’s concept is useful. He argues that the existence of an ethnic group does not depend on shared values and culture, but on the maintenance of social boundaries. (1969) However, in the case of an ethnic group that is bounded within a nation state, the boundaries are more often invisible and are presented in the background (Kalb). Thus in my study the concept “boundary” is used both as the outcome of struggle and as the uncertain ‘division’ that produces and reproduces struggles in livelihood.

Therefore under the term ‘practices’ I refer to the construction in which one position themselves to “others”. Due to Spencer, the “process of forging identity” is uncertain (Spencer 2006:8) while Hall stresses the instability of points of identification (Hall 1996:225). Within the process of construction, identity depends on economic, political and cultural practices (Hall 1996; du Gay 2007; Friedman 2003). Economic practices constitute production, consumption and representation (Spencer 2006:24). Nevertheless, the practice of representation, in which identity appears (Hall 1996:236) including the depiction of ideas, values and feelings (Spencer), requires the position of communication to “others” as well (2006). Therefore, the actors of construction are not only the selves but also institutions such as the state, schools and families.

State institutions appear through regulations such as welfare policies, school and families represent concepts, ideas and values.

Thus, referring to the above mentioned literature, I understand identities in plural in my thesis, as spaces of individual as well as that of the (imagined) community. These spaces are constantly formed by factors and are in dialogues with other agencies. The actors such as individuals, peers, classmates, imagined communities —the “Hungarians” — or institutions like state authorities, the school or family are shaping and reshaping each other’s spaces of identity.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participatory Observation

During my anthropological fieldwork, I taught English for three months in a Roma high-school in Budapest. Since the students did not have an English teacher at that moment, the deputy director¹ allowed me to enter into the field as a volunteer and prepare the students for their annual English exam. The rules of participatory observation crashed in the moment I entered the school. It has two causes. First of all, being a “teacher” required interventions in the field. Secondly, my gender and ethnic origin also influenced the information became available in the field. (Bernard) My personality became the focal and reference point of their discussions comparing my perceived identity with theirs, causing emotional struggles, confusions and crises for both sides. Thus, even if my position made possible the collection of particular qualitative data that otherwise would have remained hidden for me, it also determined and limited strategies and defined my field work.

I did not record any of the conversations neither with students nor with teachers. Once, I had an informal interview with a teacher who has taught there since the very beginning about the concept of the school and the decline of its original mission. When I asked him whether I can record his speech, he rejected. “I cannot tell you officially anything about the school. I did not receive official permission from the “president” [the head of the foundation].” Thus, I have start to “built my memory” (Bernard 1995). Moreover, to take an honest account on the circumstances, I quote Abu-Lughod; “ my unwillingness to pursue questions aggressively or conduct structured interviews limited the extent to which I could study some matters

¹ I explained to her, that I would like to conduct my anthropological fieldwork, in the school. I was also aware, that the students, especially the one who took mature exam at the end of May needed someone who —more or less— speak English, thus I took the responsibility of preparation.

systematically.” (1986:23) Thus, I have gathered fragments of discussions and wrote them down every day, right after “teaching”. Before I “entered into the field”, I prepared a basic set of general questions, but it did not work out. Thus I decided to rely only on participatory observation and chose the strategies of probing such as ‘remaining silent’ or that of the ‘echo probe’ (Bernard 1995:215-219).

In some cases, spontaneously I had a chance to conduct informal, unstructured interviews, when I could pose questions. Not at the beginning but later on, they started to talk about their life to me when I only asked them, how they are. In that case I let them continue and I did not interrupt. For instance, when only one student came to the class, and I let her speak, and she did so until the end of the class². Furthermore, several times, I found myself in an unexpected situation where I became inevitably one of the ‘main actor of performances’. Still, remarks, comments on it, self-narratives in the occasion of the emerged situations serve also as my qualitative data.

In short, I have collected all kinds of data related to ‘my students’. The sources had been (a) narrated stories involving the explicit opinion of teachers who teach there for many years, (b) stories told by students and finally (c) their reaction and opinion related to different issues that appeared during the class such as, their education, absence or any aspect of my life per se. Thus, at the end of this period, I had to organize assorted, mixed data, ‘noisy’ information in order to find major lines.

Due to the nature of my anthropological investigation, the organization of the qualitative data required a certain method. Looking at the fragments of discussions, notes about events, or stories, I filtered my data according to their relevance of students` self-identification. Even if it is

² One class is 40 minutes long.

not completely scientific, I clustered my data and quantified them. The only function of the numbers, derived from my fieldwork-diary, was to illuminate the main lines of a subtle and multilayered image, to find focus and to filter information. The focal points of the data are the struggles between working and education (33%), defining gender roles (31%) and the forces or justification of ‘choosing’ a Roma school (21%). The stories related to their duties and care in their family (5%), the involvement into black economies (6%), and the differentiation of being Romungro or Olah (4%) had been stressed approximately equally.

By evaluating the domains and vaulting my data, the question of validity of the information appeared several times. However, since my focus had been perceived self-identity, imagined sameness and references to ‘others’, I focused on the students’ narratives. Moreover, teachers helped me to verify background of the students.

2.2. Limitations of the Observation

Most of us hold memories of the first day at schools. They are perhaps only pale pictures, but for sure, the feeling of excitement is part of the recollection. My purpose and position was different when I had started my fieldwork, but that certain feeling of entering into high-school at the first time came back on that day.

Since many of the students were curious to meet with the newcomer, even those who did not belong to the class stayed, stared at and listened to me. I was shaking, but I introduced myself and asked their names. The first answer that I had during my fieldwork was the following: “What is my name? Miss, it is better if you don’t know anything about me, even my name!”³ That time they did not answer me, but they told me each of the stereotypes that they

³ The quotes are translated by myself and are from my fieldwork diary.

thought I wanted to hear. They told me how many children they have, that they are much older than students in high-school and if I still want to have my phone at the end of the day, I should not leave it on the table. Suddenly, out of the context, one of them started at me and asked calmly: “You made your luck, didn’t you?” Thus, I decided to explain them my life story and tried to put it into the broader economic and political context. I asked if they heard about ‘the world economic crises in 2008’. “Miss, we hadn’t even heard about the world itself, let alone about its crises.”

During the same week, one of them apologized to me. He said, they “had to probe at the first class”. I soon realized that in that first class, I represented the “stranger”, the outsider, someone from the majority. They did not think of me as Gypsy. Thus, when they introduced themselves, they presented me a picture that they thought answers to the myth and narratives about Roma and what it means to be Roma. Although none of them was true, they have already got used to the phenomena of a “teacher” for whom “Gypsy” is an abstract category (Solt 1998) and used the chance to made fun of my “naivety”. “Maintaining my naivité” (Bernanrd 1995:149) was not an effort. Moreover, my ‘stranger’ position remained until the end of the fieldwork. Not rarely, as an outsider in a high-school, who even do not look different than some of them, as someone who could be their classmates, but speaks differently, “in a gentle way” as a girl said, and her task is to teach them, I have been probed in almost every class.

The above described situation took place at the very first class and I had similar experiences during the three months. The fact that I taught but I was not an accredited “teacher”, but doing my research meant to them simply that I am still studying caused confusions. I had been an ‘outsider’ and ‘native’ at the same time. Many times I represented the ‘other’ while my Roma identity became the subject of inquiry several times. My behavior, the language that I use,

the tone of my skin was the focal point of several conversations. Thus, in order to make my position clear within the field, I have to point out that I had been observer and observed at the same time. This means that in many cases, my character became the point of reference within a discussion about their ‘sameness’ compared with my ‘otherness’.

2.3. Moral Issues, Dilemmas

Entering into the field as a “teacher” infers inevitable intervention and changes of landscape within the class. “Fortunately”, sometimes because of the lack of means to discipline, my presence did not change anything within the classroom, comparing it to the break. One of the student, who did not fill out any English test during classes at all even if I prayed to her, complained about the class. Than her classmate stand next to her and judged me as a very bad ‘teacher’ who is not able to teach anything, because she did not hear me at all. Another day in the same class in a collective conversation, students asked me about my studies. I told them about my focus on Roma, than a student resignedly told me; “So, that is why you are here!”⁴ This two exemplifying incidents and my position raise very serious moral questions and I still do not know the answers. However, since I am concerned about the importance of raising the issue despite the problematic nature of my fieldwork, I also do not know if “it was anthropology or a personal quest” (Bernard 1995:154).

Moreover, even if I use pseudonyms and keep the name of the school hidden, the contents of the thesis are very sensitive and personal and in some cases I felt uncomfortable writing them down. I have selected the stories and kept many of them in my fieldwork diary, therefore some details remained uncovered.

⁴ I did explain them several times my purpose.

CHAPTER THREE: BEHIND “FREE CHOICE”

Exclusion within the educational system makes parental free choice of high-school highly questionable. As it was introduced in the Literature Review, schools are the space of exclusion implemented by inter and intra school segregation (Kertesi-Kézdi 2014; Zentai 2009; Szalai 2002; Farkas 2007). Apart from the institutional, regulation based exclusion, indirect exclusion through inadequate ‘supervision’ and differentiation or ‘labeling’ the students, self-exclusion creates separation as well.

Moreover Kertesi and Kézdi show that differences in school among the received grades are not dependent on ethnicity, but on socio-economic status including the education of the parents. Still ‘ethnicity’ is one of the factors that highly determine performance in high-school (Szalai, Messing and Neményi 2010).

Furthermore, as reactions to the above mentioned exclusionary tendencies and also to forced assimilation during the socialist era (Stewart 2012), apart from the established “separate set of institutions” (Szalai 2002), Roma high-schools came into existence. Minority based public schools aim to offer proper education for ethnic groups and to create the possibility of self-identification of Roma. My fieldwork site, a Roma school in Budapest belongs to these kinds of projects. It has been established twenty years ago to maintain and preserve the Roma culture. Although, it is run by a foundation, the school receives financial support from the state, which is dependent on the number of the students. It works as a public school within the Hungarian educational system.

In the first section of the following chapter, through my ethnographic evidences, I reveal the nature of (1) the relationship of the system and the school, (2) that of the school and the students and (3) that of the students and the system in the light of three regulations. Furthermore, in the second part, I discover how prejudices and discrimination affect urban young Roma and force them to exit from the mainstream educational system to a Roma school. The overall aim of this chapter is to show the mechanism of self- and systemic exclusion. Through the perceived or real experiences of the students and their everyday struggles, I discover what the logic is behind their decision to choose separation.

My assumption is that a Roma school, based on the sense of shared ethnicity is working as an ‘exit’ from the mainstream educational system. Thus, ‘sameness’ and ethnicity are in several cases can be defined as shifted reference points of identity forced by struggles. Conflicts, as the result of exclusionary processes, between majority and ethnicity considered to be “different” force students to leave and choose ‘sameness’.

3.1. Systemic Exclusion

3.1.1. “Those are only migrants”: Relationship of the system and the school

School-leavers of one vocational class and several teachers were sitting in the library and watching the video record of their performance at the leavers prom⁵. Three students started to think about how fast the years at the high-school passed. I heard their conversations, and asked them if they had started high-school here or came later. One of them who kept looking at the screen answered; “well... only three of us, those are only migrants”. The ratio between

⁵ A leavers prom is a formal event, organized for the school-leavers every year not only at this high-school, but at all high-school in Hungary. The school-leavers prepare a dance choreography and perform front of their families, colleagues and teachers.

newcomers and those who had started high-school here is clearly different, but the expression they used is certainly relevant. Students who ‘chose’ to come here ‘buy a one-way ticket’. In other words, their cultural and social capital became to a great extent determined. The term “migration” is valid in terms of ‘seemingly’ free choice of entering into a field that promises a better present and future.

The assessment of the total number of the students is very problematic. Despite the great number of names on the official documents of the institutions, I met with around 60 students during the three months. Twenty years ago the school had opened its door for 35 students. In February 2014, the number of officially registered students was 183. At the end of June, 43 of them have the possibility to gain mature exam, the rest are enrolled as vocational students who have a chance to receive a certificate of being clerks, chefs or waiters and waitresses.

When I entered into the field, a teacher explained the difficulties that the institution faces on a daily basis. The foundation itself has to sustain the school which “does not work”, since the “quota” was decreased by the state. Thus, it is easy to understand the principles: the more students, the more support. However, as she added, the causes of absence are often rooted in their given social and economic situations within the society as well:

We are fighting for those who end up here. In other words we try to ‘play’ with the the paper work. But we have to know where they really are. If there is a monitoring, and in a classroom only ten out of the thirty students are sitting, we have to explain it to the representative of the authorities, and tell them the reason of the absences... You have to know that these students are very ‘problematic’ [disadvantaged].

Another teacher, however, was more direct when she explained the logic to me: “To put in simple, if we kick out these kids, neither we [teachers] will have a job, nor the rest will have a place [school] to go.” Despite the simplistic manner of the latter, both explanations foreshadow

the complex structural problem behind the mutual dependency between the school and the students.

3.1.2. “We both know that it’s a favor that you can be here.”⁶: Relationship of the students and the school

Another reason why students are not expelled, even if they reach the limit of the absence, is rooted within Hungarian regulations. Those young adults are considered to be dependent in the eyes of state, although they are often responsible for the great proportion of the household budget which implies their occupation within and penetration into the labor market as well. Thus, according to the Hungarian laws, parents or the children receive family allowance if they can prove that their children are in contract with an educational institution until the age of 20.

Teachers, who are often exhausted from the everyday ‘fights’, use the above mentioned criterion as a means of discipline, as it happened on March 15 at the commemoration of the war of independence in 1848. As all the Hungarian primary and secondary schools organize the event annually, this school does so as well. Around 50 students —the total number of the students on that particular day— gathered together in the auditorium. The commemoration started very slowly because of the failure of discipline. At some point, one of the teachers has started to roar: “We know that most of you, respect for the exceptions, are here because of the family allowance and orphans aid. Jano, stop it! We both know that it’s a favor that you can be here.”

Family allowance, even if it is an important supplement of the household budgets it is not the main reason of enrollment. Students are heterogenous in the terms of occupations. On the one hand I met with a student who is planning to continue their education, therefore he claims for a

⁶ “Mindketten tudjuk, hogy szívességből vagy itt!”

better quality of teaching. On the other hand, disadvantaged students who are in difficult circumstances and time to time disappear for a week remain enrolled. While institutions within the mainstream educational system give little space for these students, the directorate of that school leaves no stone unturned in order to “keep them inside”. Despite the different reasons of enrollment those youth became visible through the institution. As one of the teachers declared “most of them, because of the lack of alternatives, would end up on the streets”, thus they would disappear from the system as well.

The heterogeneous composition of students is a subject among the students as well. David, a graduate student, complained about it while we had a breakfast in the backyard. He was worried about the final exam, and raised the question of the quality of the school:

Everyone is accepted, without any selection. You know who I am talking about, don't you? The guy, who carry knife with themselves and the only thing in which he is interested is their muscles.⁷ You know, on the one hand I understand. Where would those poor Gypsies go? Where would they have any chance to get any kind of paper [certificate]. So even if we take into consideration the disadvantages of the school, the aim to establish such an institute should be appreciated. Because what could those Gypsies do on the streets? At least, during the time while they are enrolled, they belong to an institute and can require family support by the authority. On the top of that, they will receive a paper at the end.

David manifested two things through this chain of thoughts. He takes it for granted that disadvantaged Gypsies, as “urban outcast” (Wacquant 2008) are not welcomed in any educational institution. However, having a ‘paper’ increases their chance out of the school. Secondly, the ‘deal’ is clear for the students, moreover they are aware not only of the importance, but also of the current situation of their classmates’ household budget. They often ‘helped each others out’. Although some of the students worried more about the reputation of their certificate than about other students’ circumstances, David’s opinion exemplifies that, even

⁷ The importance of being strong enough in order to be able to protect themselves prove to be a valid demand, when ‘the guy’ entered into the teacher’s room and had wound on his face. A teacher asked him about it. He was attacked on street, because he did not wanted to give cigarettes, but he was strong enough to protect themselves.

if two regulations, the one which determines state support and the criteria of family allowance dominate the discourse in the school, the relationship between the students and the school is multilayered and the result of a broader exclusionary process.

3.1.3. “I had no choice”: Relationship of the students and the system

The third event that affects the relationship between the students and the school is the modification of the school-age. It had been decreased from 18 to 16 in 2011. Although the possible consequences were well predictable and experts on the topic warned the authorities and wrote reports coordinated by the Decade of Roma Inclusion, a teacher gave an account of their ‘first hand’ experiences:

Since the school age was modified from 18 to 16, most of our students are coming from the mainstream educational system after the age of 16. A school is allowed to kick them out if the student reaches the limit of absence which is 30 hours and he or she is over 16. Half of them is going to the ‘streets’, the rest is coming to ‘us’.

In short, this regulation became an indirect means of exclusion of multiple disadvantaged, problematic students whose ‘fault’ sometimes is that he or she comes from a broken family with unemployed mother or father. After one become 16, their compulsory education is finished, thus schools are not obliged to keep them inside the educational system anymore.

One of the teachers referred to a kind of “deviance” as a cause of “kicking them out” from other educational institutions. The explanation, as I have referred to it, is much more complex, indeed. However two students alluded to a “naughty, rough-and-tumble behavior” as a cause of leaving their previous school and ‘end-up’ here.⁸ To shade the picture of “deviance”, I refer to Szalai’s description about the possible consequences of unemployment on the everyday

⁸ Since, I conducted my fieldwork within the Roma school, I do not know if they were told about it and internalized the explanation, or they see themselves retrospectively as being “naughty”.

life of a family; “conflicts triggered by overcrowding, (..) the children skip the school, their grades go down ” (2002:46-47).

To the question of why any of them chose that high-school, I often received the answer: “I had no choice”, “I came here because I had to” or “I did not want to come here”. The causalities and processes might differ, but in these cases the Roma school appears as the ‘only’ option. Moreover, some of them gain access to the school through their network and gain access to the school. One girl said: “Then I came here, but this man with a goatee [“ez a kecskeszakállas”, referring to the head of the foundation] did not want to accept me. But thanks God, my mother knows the deputy director and she finally let me in.”

At some point, the above mentioned circumstances became the basis for pulling each others` leg. In many cases, before one student could answer me, they colleagues interrupted and told more likely to each other than to me that “(S)he was not accepted to any other school.” To put it simply, “free choice” of school —and the fact that they had been accepted to another school as well— became a means of prestige. Moreover, I faced regularly during my ‘teaching career’ the practice of ‘freedom’ as a kind of resistance by “the leaders of peer group” (Kertesi-Kézdi 2014: p11).

In sum, this section shows how three regulations lay down the relational field of the educational system, school and the students. (1) The criteria of financial support of the school, (2) that of family allowance —the measure of deserving and undeserving—, (3) the legitimization of ‘drop-out’ of ‘problematic’ students over the age of 16, make the ‘state’ present and determine the limitation of the space of the school and the students.

3.2. Experiencing Exclusion

Spencer, as I have already referred to him, defines identity as an “interplay between individual and public messages” (2006:2). Erikson, defines it as an “interplay between the psychological and the social” (1968:23). Considering identity construction as positioning oneself to ‘others’, the experiences of exclusion affects identity in a way that through its practices, it affirms a certain values of ‘otherness’ and ethnicity and lead to dis-integration of the self. (Hall 1996, Friedmann 2003)

The reasons why “Minority students are more likely to become drop-outs in secondary schools than their mainstream peer” (Zentai, referring to Eurydice Network 2009:10) is explained by several scholars. Szalai, Messing and Neményi (2010) revealed, as defining aspects, the factors of the educational background of the parents, living standards, parents’ embeddedness in the labor market, gender and finally ethnic background as the most important features. However, Kertesi and Kézdi shows (2014) that student performance and low grades are influenced by socio-economic background and not by ethnic origin.

The above mentioned researches are based on questionnaires. In the second part of the chapter, departing from their findings, I will contribute to its scope with empirical evidence and introduce students’ memories about school-climate, the ‘supervision’ of the teachers and discrimination that led to self-exclusion.

3.2.1 “I felt there that I am Roma”: Escaping from identity

Many stories about changing schools and coming to a ‘Roma high-school’ are connected to experienced discrimination. Some of the students report their feelings more or less in the same way: “I did not feel good and the teacher was picky.” One girl, talking about her feelings and experiences looked at me and asked if I know the particular feeling, “when you feel lonely and

the only thing what you want is to get out”. David, told me several stories about how teachers blamed him for several incidents. He still seemed being disgusted, when he talked about his experiences: “Every time when something happened, the teacher came into the room, looked at me, only me and blamed me, but I did not do anything. Somebody slammed the door. I didn't even leave the classroom in that break.” After several incidents he persuaded his father, a Roma musician, and the organizer of several cultural events in Budapest, to let him apply to this school. He wanted to escape and become part of a community where he does not have to face his identity on an everyday basis. “I felt there, that I am Roma, at some point I fed up with that feeling.”

Several stories came to the surface through the discussions with the students experiences of exclusionary attitude. Peter`s confession about his shame of being Gypsy in a classroom of a Roma school highlighted the level of “epistemic violence” (Hall 1996:445). In one case, one of the most diligent students told me why she decided to leave her school and choose this one. What had been really surprising is that, she explained me the series of events in a very objective manner, yet with a subtle smile on her face. She had a German class, I had my English, but neither her teacher nor my students arrived yet. Thus we had started to talk and she told her story:

It [the judgments of this Roma school and the motivation of her classmates] was not always like this. It was much better. My sister was enrolled here as well. But [the main reason is that] in my previous school nobody liked me. Neither students, nor teachers, who were spiteful... When I was ill and did not go to the school, one of them [teachers] was talking about me as if I was a ‘dead singer’. Then she asked the students how they can bear my presence, since the Gypsies are stinkers. When my colleagues told me what happened in my absence, they added that they actually share the teacher`s view. Then, a couple of days later I left my bag in the classroom during the break and they put soap into it. Then it happened again. My mother went into the school and the head-teacher`s only reaction was that I should throw the soap back to my classmates. What should I have done? I left and came here.

The role of her teachers in losing the concept of school as the space of protection (Zentai 2009), is more than obvious. Furthermore, the ‘supervision’ of the teacher was clearly direct source of discrimination by her classmates. Solt underlined the role of the teachers in her articles written in the 1970s. She stressed that the outcome of ‘distrust’ among the teachers and the students and their parents is that ‘we’ even lose the ones [Roma students] from the mainstream educational system who are less vulnerable and more motivated (1998:298). The above described empirical section exemplifies “mutual distrust often emerges between schools and minority ethnic student and parents” today as well (Zentai 2009:8)

3.2.2. “We keep traditions”: Unaccepted values

At the beginning of my teaching “career”, I bumped into a mother in front of the secretary office. She was confused whether I was a student or a teacher, so I told her that basically I am neither of the two. Nevertheless she asked me if I saw the director. I did not, but we had a conversation. Two of her daughters were given by the status of “being private students” and they were on class while she was waiting for them. Every Friday she brings them to school, waits for them and takes them home to a village near to Budapest. I asked her why her daughters do not come to the school on an everyday basis.

Mother: I am happy that they can come at least once a week. We [she and her husband] had to fight for the ‘rights’ to educate them. I only had the chance to finish the primary school.

Me: Against whom did you fight?

Mother: Against the grandfather. We keep traditions. For example, you see, girls cannot wear trousers. [*I was wearing tight jeans at the moment.*] The girls at that age are not allowed to attend school according to our laws. We know the head of the foundation, and he gave permission to the girls to come once a week.

Later, when I met with girls, it turned out that their Grandfather passed away a year ago. However, through his words the Olah-Gypsy tradition has transmitted and determined the everyday life of the family.

The family was known by their last name, and the teachers called these two girls and their cousins as the “Raffael girls”. Since among extended Roma families, cousins and siblings are also called ‘sisters’ and ‘brothers’, I do not know exactly who among the five girls were her daughters. Later, two out of the five sisters became my students. We were studying English on Friday mornings, until the students of another class arrived, to whom I had to hold English class ‘officially’. One of the two confessed that her dream was to become a dressmaker, but because of the negative climate of the school, she left. When her ‘sisters’ came to study, she decided to join her sisters and to become a clerk.

The status of being “private students” means that one is exempt from attendance at classes, if he or she passes regular exams. Kóczé, *inter alia*, highlight the consequences of “irregular school attendance” (2010:77). On the one hand, the forces behind this ‘status’ are often rooted in strict and unequal gender roles. On the other hand, as the mother made it clear, schools within the mainstream system do not accept a different culture in the terms of “not simply as a set of transferred internal structures (...) nor as the passive result of the action of dominant ideology downwards (...), but at least part as the product of collective human action” (Willis 1993:4)

3.2.3. “I want to be strong”: Exclusion from the labor market, self-exclusion from education

The picture of exclusion is even more complicated. Systemic exclusions are not necessarily ‘limited to the field of education, but affect everyday practices, therefore the identity of urban young Roma. ‘Hits’ break continuity of the self by adolescences coming from broken families. Exclusion from labor, that affects their parents, cuts education and reproduces the same patterns transmitted to generations. A student who disappears and comes back to school one

months later is a regular story. However, the real cause often remains hidden. Shame and fear often keep the students silent. Moreover, because probably the issue falls out of the schools' responsibility, students easily find themselves out of a space that could provide 'protection' or help for them.

On a 'typical' school day, I entered into the teachers' office. The room was extremely loud because of a 'fight' of a teacher with four students. The teacher was screaming because they did not tell her the truth, and it became obvious in the case of three students after she called their parents. The fourth students' father was not available. Since I had a class with him right after the incident, I prayed him to go back to the teacher, be honest and ask for help if he was in trouble. The only answer I received was, "I don't want to talk about it. If I tell anything to somebody or ask for help, I seem to be weak. I want to be strong." Finally he went back to the teachers' office. His father has been raising him alone, but he was fired. Losing their source of income, they could not pay for rent, they lost their flat and — as a 'temporary' solution— went to live into a worker's hostel. The only goal of the student was to find a job. After this day, I did not see him again.

Szalai (2002) as well as Szelényi (2001) emphasize the different nature of long-term poverty and income poverty. Through the example of the previously mentioned student, the difference is clear. After the students' father lost his job, he did not find the way back to the labor market. I do not know the case in more detail, but I assume that the family was isolated and lacked of social capital. Also, it is obvious that they did not have savings. The payoff of the event is clear. The student fell out from the Roma high-school, and the event broke the continuity of his identity of being an adolescent. (Erikson 1968) He grew up and became responsible for his father.

3.2.4. “Where do you go if we kick you out?”: Penetration of the notion of exclusion

This institution, as some of the employee said: is “a trap”, or as one of the students stated, it means that “you cannot go anywhere”. These statements raised the question whether the institution corresponds to the term “social prison” introduced by Wacquant (2002). Within the three month, two students ‘changed’ high-school for a better education. One during the academic year, the other one will start in another high-school next year. The latter who just started high-school realized that the value of the education in that school does not respond to his expectation. His parents supported him, and accepted the fact that he should start high-school again, thus “lose a year”. His classmate reaction was really pessimistic about his ‘mobility’: “What do you want? Do you want to change school? Get out of here! You won’t be accepted anyway...oh, you did already? C`mon... Then, believe me, you will come back soon!” This statement corresponds to a kind of internalization of being excluded. I have experienced the same stance of the teachers. Even if no one’s interest was to let the students leave the school, “kicking-out” became a means of discipline, as it is proved by the following empirical evidence:

Teacher: Where do you go if we kick you out?

Student: This is my last school for sure.

Teacher: So then behave yourself! Except if you want to continue in another school among Hungarians. They are famous for their empathic values!

The values of the protecting space of the school generally transformed to the notion of “being protected among Roma”, among the people with whom you share cultural and social capital. Moreover, what is clearly articulated through the previous evidence is the tension between the mainstream educational system and Roma students.

3.3. Conclusion

“Thus, while blatant forms of segregation in new Member States may be characteristic of exclusionary policies, issues of early drop-out and underachievement are telling of structural, institutional discrimination in old ones – even if they are not perceived as “appropriate for legal categorisation”. Partial assimilation in these circumstances tolerates diversity in the private sphere, but expects conformity in the public sphere.” (Farkas 2007:10)

The aim of this chapter had been to reveal the mechanism of exclusion. In sum, apart from several factors, according to the research conducted by Szalai, Messing and Neményi (2010), ethnicity and school climate (Zentai 2009) play roles in low performance of minority students. However, referring to the study written by Kézdi and Kertesi (2014), ethnicity, per se, is not the reason of receiving low grades. Thus, the question raises, on what basis ethnicity as a “social meaning” (Spencer 2006:2) plays a role in separation.

In the first part of the chapter, through anthropological investigation, I discovered the field and the broader processes that reinforce the patterns of separation. The broader field consisted of (1) the system of three regulations and practices of mainstream educational institutions, (2) a Roma school and (3) Roma students are related to each other. The existence of voluntary separation is maintained through agreements that limit the practices of the school and the students as well. Moreover, they create mutual dependency between the school and Roma students. Also, what is crucial in order to understand “migration” to the Roma school, is that sending away “problematic students” over the age of 16 from the mainstream educational system is legitimized through the third regulation, highlighted in the section of Systemic Exclusion.

In the second part of the chapter, I showed how this mechanism maintains the existence of a Roma school as the “only” solution of the students. Exclusionary processes push Roma

students from the uncomfortable space, in which the reference points of self are ‘others’, to the space which is based on the sense of shared ethnicity. Also, the case of the Raffael girls exemplify how ‘tradition’, including gender roles became the force behind “free choice”.

In the following empirical chapter, I will examine struggles of the students, practices. Zooming from the broader perspective to a smaller scale, I will reveal the role of family as an institution in defining everyday life.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRUGGLES

In this chapter, I will examine the everyday struggles of urban Roma youth that are embedded in kinship relations as well as originated from socio-economic factors and gender roles, and the construction of the social meanings of ethnicity. Focusing on struggles within a Roma school, I underline difficult circumstances rooted in the factors of domestic work, care and the need of income contribution to the household budget, that result in irregular “school-attendance” (Kóczé 2010:77).

Absence determines not only students` school performance but also the way of teaching that belonged to my fieldwork. I could barely build any of my classes on the previous one. When I gave them homework and told them what we are going to discuss next time, they told me whether they can come next time or not. Similarly, it was also unpredictable whether the two students who were preparing for the English mature exam could stay in the afternoon to practice or not. These two students had to leave regularly. One left often because of his job, the other one had to go for her younger brother if he was sick, since her mother could not leave her work place.

As I have mentioned, out of the 180 enrolled students, I met around 60. I talked to some of them almost every day, but there were some with whom I met only around two or three times during the three months. Since the absence of the students was striking from the very beginning of my fieldwork, I asked a teacher immediately when I entered the school: where they are. She said: “Well...They are at home taking care to grandma`. And who knows if she is really sick. Or doing domestic work at home, or became married. Whatever...”

According to the information that was available to me during my fieldwork, I discovered three causes that explain absence. These are the duty of domestic work, contribution to care and

income generation. In several cases, the reason of not coming to school was the combination of the three factors, which created difficult situation in which school attendance fell down in their priority list. The emerging circumstances obviously have serious effects on performance, grade and the high rate of drop-out of minority students (Szalai, 2002; Zentai 2009).

Thus, within the scope of the chapter, first I will present my empirical data on (1) domestic work, and contribution to care and (2) income generation. Furthermore, I will look at the structure of social relations from the perspective of (3) gender and (4) ethnicity.

4.1. Kinship: Domestic Work, Contribution to Care

When I held my last classes, I told to the students that I have to leave, therefore I finish teaching. Évi came to me and we started to talk. We both regretted that the chance to meet disappears, even if I would visit the school, because she comes to school very rarely. [However she never forgot to give me a hug.] I asked her why she don't come every day. She was honest:

I cannot come, because everyone is working [in my family]. I want to help my mother. She is working too. If I come to school there is no time to do my everyday job. I start to cook and clean in the morning and when I finish, it is already 3 o'clock. I don't have time to come every day.

Thus, domestic work is taken seriously and mostly done by the girls. Two additional pieces of information will complete her case. One is that she is married already; the other one is that she was well aware of the 'unwritten rules' of the school. Thus she came to school time to time in order to be able to finish her study. As it is obvious, her case is related to the domination of gender roles within the family. Since I do not have any data on her family background and the dominant values within her close environment, I cannot evaluate, only underline that her role as a daughter and a wife was to fulfill household duties.

Évi stay at home regularly not only because she ‘has to clean’ but also, because she ‘wants’ to help her mother. Strong kinship relations and health problems of the parents also determine if someone ‘can’ come to school or not. As an obvious consequence of multiple disadvantages, the students themselves or their relatives suffer from serious health problems. Being ‘old enough’, they are the ones who can and have to take their mother to the hospital if she needs it. Csilla is living with her mother and her sister left Hungary. Once I asked her where she had been.

I had to take my mother to the hospital. Her condition is getting worse and worse. But we live together. My father is an alcoholic and remained in the rural area. He was beating my mother regularly, so I prayed and cried for leaving. My sister had a flat in Budapest, she went abroad. So we moved in and we have each other. But she is not well.

Later she told me that she and her mother decided together that her mother should leave her workplace: “She had to clean, and you know, the salary was ridiculously low. I told her to quit. For that amount of money? She is not well anyway.” After this decision, Csilla started to take the responsibility of their financial situation. However, after a couple of weeks, she confessed that they have conflicts at home more often than previously, and added: “I am telling you, I’ve started to escape from home in the afternoons to avoid fights.”

Care often matches with income generation. ‘Helping to their mother’ aims to take a weight of hard work off their shoulders. Klára’s case is one of the examples. She came to school every morning after cleaning apartment blocks with her mother. Sometimes, when she did not come, I asked her classmates whether they knew how she was. They told me very often that “she is working” or “she was working so she is at home now”. Once, when Klara was there, she asked me how I can still study at the age of 30. I told her that I do like to study. Her answer was heartbreaking: “I wish I weren’t so tired all the time to study.” Another case proved how busy she was: In a sunny day, with a couple of girls, we were hanging around in the courtyard of the

school. Klara seemed worried, so I asked her if I could help. She wanted to call her mother, because she was not well in the morning, but she did not pick up the phone. Since the day was almost over, and they were over the annual exam, I talked to her form master and to the porter to let her go home. When the porter agreed, she opened the door of the lodge, took her broom and dustpan that was in the corner and left to see if her mother was alright.

Yet, Klara's case was not unique. I met with a heavy-eyed boy in the middle of the three-month period. His head was shaved, his hands were always dirty and usually was sitting alone. He wrote down everything I wrote to the white board and came to school pretty much regularly. After the annual exam, I asked him about his final grade.

You know, I was so afraid of it. I was really nervous. I did not have time to study. My little brother is in the hospital and he is waiting for surgery. And I had to help to my mother. She has eight buildings to clean, some of them are four-storied buildings without elevators. She cannot clean those staircases on her own. But I've got grade 3. I am so relieved...

The case of the three girls and a boy show that the boundaries between care and domestic work and also income generation are blurred. As Szalai (2002) emphasizes, the consideration of the effects of the exclusionary process on the institution of 'family' is important in order to understand the logic of the emergence of long-term marginalization. The above mentioned few cases help to understand Szalai's explanation: After parents became excluded from the labor market, families find themselves in a vicious circle in which inter alia, one of the logical outcome of inner conflicts is that the children's school "grades goes down" (2002:47). She adds that when the family collapses "exclusion is irreversible" (Ibid.).

Although Szalai referred to the transitional period in 2002 and the students were born between 1995 and 2000, the logic of the mechanism is applicable, since they were born at the time when the exclusionary process after the political change already created a mass of unemployed people. Even if the parents of these young adults have or had a job, referring to

Wacquant “wage labor as vector of social instability and life security” emerges economic uncertainty rooted in the broader social structure (2008:234-236). This uncertainty as it is clear by Csilla’s case, is working like a ‘time-bomb’.

4.2. Income Generation

The second group of explanations of ‘absenteeism’ is connected to work in order to be able to pay the bills and contribute to the household budget. At the beginning I asked a girl what her parents were doing, then she started to laugh at me. By her tone, she expressed what she thinks of my question: it is absurd and stupid and shows that I know nothing. Since their parents are excluded from the labor market, they become the ones, as grown up adults, who have to support the family and pay the bills. Thus they had to have an occupation within the labor market as well as within the educational system. They could not come to school every day and I kept asking if everything was alright. The common answer was “Sure! I’m ok, I had to work.”

4.2.1 “TESCO or McDonalds”

Peter, Klara’s brother, in one afternoon, gave a great and certainly entertaining ‘performance’ in front of the teachers’ room, in the presence of his classmates. He carried on with the same story that he had started in the previous days. He was talking about his high fever and his ‘serious illness’ that caused coughing. “Then the doctor gave me medicine. I had to shove it [supposity] up my ass. And I am telling you, after that, very strange organisms came out of the same place.” Then after he told us that he have to visit the doctor again, he changed the tone and asked me to talk one-on-one.

Ok, you know that it is not true. I don’t have to go to the doctor. But, let me go, I cannot stay today, I have to work [at TESCO]. She [form master] won’t understand. She’s right that I have to study, but who will pay our bills?

Another way to contribute to the household budget is joining family businesses. In those cases, mostly Olah Gypsy students, they do not come to school, only to the annual exams, where I had a chance to meet several students whom I had never seen before. One of them spoke English very well and was well dressed. I asked him why he did not visit the school at all. His answer was blurred: “We enterprise. We deal with hazardous waste. We collect the used storage batteries of cars and then take them to the dumpsite. Well...we do not go for them but we have some people who deliver them to us.” Due to the lack of further evidence about the family, it is hard to evaluate his circumstances. However, it is predictable that in these cases ‘business’ belongs to ‘tradition’ in a sense that it is practice which is determined by social and cultural capital, that is transmitted from generations to generations.

For others TESCO and McDonalds are the two options to work and to contract with legal agencies. Peter, for example, went to work every afternoon until late night. This explained why he was too tired even to listen to me in the preparation classes. But he did not really have a choice, he had to work. One year ago, her mother sent him away, because he did not contribute to the household budget. For a while he lived with his classmate`s family and then decided to work at TESCO, in order to go back home.

Within the school, it is ‘commonly acknowledged’ that the above mentioned two multinational companies accept their application through the union. In a class, when I was explaining ‘present perfect’, a girl suddenly interrupted me: “Excuse me! Could you tell me what you think? What is better? TESCO or McDonalds? I want to go to work as soon as possible.” Since my fieldwork was limited to the space of the school, the reason for this emerging trend among the students needed further inquiry. Nevertheless, it is important to note that working at

TESCO or McDonalds, as I examined within the school, led to the same social instability and uncertainty.⁹

4.2.2 “Good old days”

Jane Jacobs in the Prologue of *System of Survival* emphasizes bias in the moral and value system between working life and the individual who tries to be “good” (1992: xii). The following cases will exemplify this bias of two urban young Roma who enter into and exit from black market and develop strategies to solve their financial problems.

When Csilla and her mother moved to Budapest to escape from her father’s violence, she and her sister started to procure prostitutes for customers in order to make a living. She remembered this period in a nostalgic way. They were the “good old days”, as she said, when they had enough money not to worry about the everyday expenses. However, she added: “I am telling you that sometimes I had to be careful on the street in those days.” After this period, after “the girls left the country”, she went to work at TESCO, as the seemingly only option for a legal job. At the end of my fieldwork she confessed that she plan to leave and look for a job in Germany, since even if she works really hard, they have serious financial problems on an everyday basis. Meanwhile she gave up her dreams to become a stewardess and started to wonder if she had a childhood. Moreover, this school cannot offer her a proper education either. However Csilla belongs to the most motivated students. As a ‘teacher’, I could always rely on her. She made her homework, and prepared not only for tests, but for the classes as well. Also, she was not confused by my position and treated me as a respected partner who is participating

⁹ It was a gossip, but a relevant one, that Peter postponed his mature exam in order to have the certificate of enrollment for one more year, since it is the requirement to become a member of the ‘students’ work union’. However at the end of the year, TESCO fired him for stealing food.

temporarily in her educational development. Csilla's self-reflection related to the particular stage of self-development was unique.

I met with Karcsi after a couple of weeks after I had started to teach. He arrived, as he usually did, in the middle of the class. He stared at me, but did not care about my presence. He went to some of his friend to shake hands. I asked him to sit down, but since we met for the first time, he started to probe. When I gave him the material of their annual exam, he started to claim that his sister got more serious readings in the elementary school, so this test must be a joke. Then I asked him to talk in English. He refused, but kept his eyes on me and talked constantly to their colleagues. At some point I asked him to let his classmates study. He became angry and told somebody that he was in the mood to hit someone. One of his classmates then screamed at me to continue the class and not to deal with him. I understood her warning not to deal with Karcsi anymore, since up until that moment she refused to do any English exercise. Thus, I ignored him and he soon left the room. After this incident, his teacher told me that "he has currently a court case, and he also didn't have any money which can make him nervous. He has a really hard period." When we met again, I asked him how he was. He started to talk about the litigation of his father and his brother. He went into details and explained to the whole class what his father did. Then he continued:

He is worried, bro`. I bought his flat. He screwed up. He did not pay the utilities. Neither water, nor electricity bills...he paid nothing. So I paid the bills and officially transferred the flat into my ownership. Where would he go after 20 years? He will be an old man. How would he integrate again? I was in the jail [for youthful offenders] and I couldn't do it after one and a half years. I have to be there for him for sure.

Because of the above mentioned burdens, he obviously had to make much more money than a teenager having a legal 'student-job' could earn. He even did not expect any institutional or additional help, but took it for granted that he, individually has to find a solution very quickly to

pay bills. When he took marihuana out of his pocket and wanted to sell it to me, it was easy to find out which kind of commodity had been available for him in the free market to gain economic capital.

On the occasion of the above explained two stories, the question raises whether Csilla and Karcsi represent the new faces of urban marginality. Certainly, it would need further inquiry out of the space of the school to reveal this question. What is obvious is that, since they are living in an urban context, a certain kind of commodity, such as drug and ‘girls’, are available for them in the ‘free market’. The logic of rejection of youth in the labor market originated to class and race affects their strategies. Thus, as Wacquant put it “a ‘negatively privileged’ category (to speak like Max Weber) is forced to develop its own institution in response to rejection of the dominant society” (2008:231).

4.3. Gender

During my anthropological investigation, although originally I did not intend to underline them, ‘gender’ related practices, struggles and values appeared on a daily basis. Because of the limitation of space, I will highlight only some of them in order to emphasize the power of gender based laws, that determine everyday practices. Moreover gender is an important factor in defining one’s position within the inner structure of the community bounded by the school. Transmitted ‘tradition’ related to girls’ school attendance in the case of the Raffael girls, or the expectations of fulfilling domestic work have already shown the determinative power of gender. In this section I will use ‘gender’ as “the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena, and of social practices” (Connel 2009:11, cited in Jones, Bradbury and Boutillier 2011:208). Through the following cases I will reveal how gender roles “in ways

sustain massive inequalities”, as well as how ‘tradition’ and ‘gender’ hand in hand regulates “collective and individual lives” (Ibid. p209).

4.3.1. Marriage and Early Motherhood

I have already talked about the laws, transmitted through the words of the Grandfather, which barely allow Olah Gypsy girls to study after the primary school. As I was told, the reason behind is that after they have got married, as wives they negotiate it with their family if they continue their study or not. Generally, being married is a reason to apply for ‘private student status’. However, some of them after the ‘divorce’ go back to school. When I asked, absolutely naively, what ‘divorce’ means, how it goes, they said: “they simply run away from their husbands, if they are not on the same wavelength”. I am sure that the answer is more complicated, but the thing is that divorce is possible and even did not seem as a ‘rare case’, since I met several girls who ‘reappeared’ in school after marriage.

Since making the annual exams for those who belong to the vocational school is mandatory, there was one day during the three month when I had a chance to meet every student who is going to be a clerk. Thus, I had a chance to talk to one of them, who was going to marry on next day. Since we were in the company of her cousins and brothers, I hardly received an answer from her. I asked her if getting married was her decision or not, but her brother intervened and used the opportunity to make fun of the serious issue: “Oh no... we sold her and made good money”. She foamed at the mouth and wanted to hit him. Than she said to me calmly that she was the one chose him.

On the occasion of Zsuzsa`s marriage, his classmate commented the values of marriage within Olah Gypsy families. Since I did not know that Zsuzsa was going to be married, although

I met her regularly, I told to her classmates that I was surprised and asked them what happened.

Her classmate, an Olah Gypsy boy answered:

How do you mean what happened with her? Nothing. Nothing happened. She is married now. That`s all. (...) Marriage belongs to the Olah Gypsy life as the fact that the sun is shining belongs to your life...Or how should I put it... I am afraid you won`t understand. It is so far away from you. Girls are getting married, that`s all. They come to the school on Friday and they have their marriage the next day. I don`t think that you can understand.

He is right in a sense that teachers usually are not surprised anymore when an Olah Gypsy girl becomes married. However, Zsuzsa`s marriage made some teachers wondering as well. As it became clear, she was married before the age of 14. The marriage was forced by her family. Then she ‘divorced’ and moved to her grandmother, who is living two hours away from Budapest. She did not want to hear about marriage at all. Zsuzsa has started to work for free at the television and started to communicate her ambitions and plans for the future. In the school, she is considered to be one of the most beautiful girls. Indeed, she paid attention to self-representation; to her everyday outfit and make up, perfect appearance and attitude towards her teachers. Moreover she was persistently talking about her plan to go to university and study communication. After her marriage I met her and asked about it. “I’ve told them [to her husband`s family] that I am all for the marriage if I can still go to school. I have known him for 3-4 years already. And it`s much easier because they live closer to Budapest.”

Kovai (2008) explains that establishing a nuclear family is a way of falling out of the education system. She adds that after marriage, the space of school not only loses its ‘importance’ and value of everyday life but also she considers school as a space of jealousy. The explanation I received when I asked the students why girls, wives cannot go to school after marriage supports Kovai`s observation.

In two concrete cases early motherhood had been the subject of discussions even within the classes, among students. ‘One of my students’ just turned back to school from ‘maternity leave’, right after she gave birth. One of her classmates, a boy with whom I met only once commented on her situation: “She is too young! She screwed up!” Later she told me that she did not know that she was pregnant. She recognized it in the fifth month and she kept the baby. While she is in the school in the morning, her mother looks after her child. The second case is that of a girl who wanted to take a mature exam. She did not know either that she is going to have a baby in the first months. She thought that she was sick.

What is important to note is that in the case of urban youth pregnancy is not wanted. Durst examined early motherhood in the rural area and, referring to Kelly, claimed that ‘becoming a mother’ is an indicator of stepping into adulthood (2006:130). She supports her argument with the fact that for girls, within the ghetto, ‘motherhood’ is the only means that marks adulthood and gains dignity for them. The social meaning of motherhood is not in contradiction at all in the case of urban youth, however differences between her case in the rural area and my case in the urban is rooted in willingness and unwillingness and the ‘achievable symbols’ in the urban context that could gain ‘respect’.

4.3.2. Simultaneously Being a Prostitute and a Virgin

The rules of behavior patterns related to gender define girls` identities no matter if they belong to the Olah Gypsy or the Romungro group. However, in some cases the values of virginity and pureness often mixed with representation of strong self-consciousness, power over men. Within a class, consisting of five girls and one boy, gender roles, ‘how a girl should

behave' and the important values/signs of woman's dignity was a central topic in the English classes. Meanwhile, they constantly played me up with imagined stories about each other:

Juli: Miss, did you know that she is a whore? That is her job. She's a prostitute.

Kati: Oh really? And what about you? You do not have a single hole on your body except the holes of your nose that is not fucked. Or maybe your nose had been fucked already. [laughing]

On another occasion within the same class, Kati arrived late and did not pay attention at all to what is going on in the class. When she entered the room, she asked under her breath if someone have a pad because she got her period. When she realized that everyone started to listen to her, including the boy, she became puzzled and started to scream with the boy and tell him not to listen. Then I offered her a tampon causing outcry of the whole class. Except for the girl who had her period and the boy of course, all of them were absolutely sure that using tampon would take their virginity. Moreover they told me many stories about several situations in which they and their virginity were protected by their uncle, cousin or older brother against courtship.

The above described phenomena appear in the literature. Hall argues that "Racism (...) and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness" (1996:445). Moreover, referring to Spivak, he raises the question of "epistemic violence of the discourses of the Other". The reaction and the construction of the girls "femininity as double—simultaneously Madonna and Whore" (Ibid.) are in line with his argument about the internalization of the self-as-other" (Ibid.).

4.4. Ethnicity

The school is originally built upon shared ethnicity, culture and tradition. However, since the Roma ethnic group is very diverse and heterogenous even within one nation state, the community is divided and structured.

One of the factors that ‘differentiate’ the students is whether they belong to the Olah or the Romungro group.¹⁰ Alongside language, names, profession and gender roles the students easily position themselves among each other. The ones who belong to the latter, usually do not speak the Romani language, while Olah Gypsies are more likely¹¹ to “follow traditions” and speak the language, meanwhile musicians usually are Romungro. Several times, including the head of the foundation, I was asked at the moment of introduction if I speak Romanes or not. Furthermore, several students asked me to call them by their “Gypsy name”, as Rachel did causing collective whoops of joy within the classroom. Then, she defended herself: “This is my Gypsy name, ok?! Olah Gypsies do have a second name.”

Belongingness to the Olah group can define professions, and implies economic status. Trading with antiquities belongs to traditional economic practices. Since my fieldwork had been limited to the examination of a certain space of the life of young urban Roma, I cannot give an account of ‘trading’ and the income inhere with that particular activity. However I give an example of the discourse about it among Romungro students. In the last class, Csilla’s classmate was observably tired. He said that he could not sleep, because he was constantly thinking of how he could earn money for living. Csilla joined him with a chain of thought:

¹⁰ In Hungary, within the Roma population, three groups are dominant; Olah, Romungro and Beas. However within the discourses of the student, the differentiation is limited to the Olah and Romungro.

¹¹ I use the expression ‘more likely’ because there are Roma, who belong to the Olah group, yet they do not speak Romanes. During the Communist era, because of the efforts of assimilation and “fear” of causing disadvantages for their children in the school, parents do not taught their children to speak Romanes. Meanwhile many of the Romungro still use Romanes.

I am also fed up with poverty [“elegem van a csóróságból”]. Perhaps I should start trading with antiquities. But I am not an expert. Whole families are dealing with antiquities. But they are born into it. No...it’s maybe not a good idea.

David, coming from a musician Romungro family, plays together with their families. Playing on an event means that these students finish ‘their shift’ late in the evening, but it does not prevent them from the obligation of arriving to the school on time. Once, I had a chance to see David playing in an event. Next day, I went to the school and I asked him if he was tired in the presence of his teacher. Unfortunately, he arrived significantly late on that day, thus received a ‘talking-to’ from that particular teacher. David commented it:

I really don’t know why being a musician is not considered as hard work as working in TESCO. Can you imagine getting home at 1am then come to school in the morning? Why cannot those cannot accept the fact that for me, playing is a job to earn money. They accept tiredness of my classmates who are working at TESCO, but they do not accept that sometimes I am late. That’s not fair.

‘Ethnicity’ is understood through social meanings, coding and decoding (Spencer 2006; Hall 1996) and constructed by the process of positioning. Various levels of ethnicity appear within the students’ identities positioning them within the structure that is defined by ‘traditions’. As my empirical data implies rules, norms, behavior patterns, even economic practices are defined through diverse concepts of ethnicity. Thus ethnicity has a central role in building identities not only to position themselves to the majority but also in creating the structure within the community that is built on the sense of shared ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

“When it comes to central aspects of man`s existence, we can only conceptualize at a given time, what is relevant to us for personal, for conceptual and for historical reasons.” (Erikson 1968:43)

The aim of my thesis was to discover the everyday struggles of urban young Roma in Budapest. Moreover, looking at forces behind the self-exclusion and the maintenance of the sense of shared ethnicity, I discovered the relationship between the mechanism of exclusion and the logic behind the shifting reference points of the students` identities. In other words, I examined the dynamic spaces between the representation of shared ethnic identity and the diversity within the community with a special attention to economic practices. Furthermore, looking at their economic practices embedded in strong kinship relations, I intended to find the mechanism of transmitted values and practices that are also derived from ‘tradition’ and gender related social structure.

In order to fulfill the aim of the study I chose participatory observation; I spent three months in a Roma high-school. My position highly determined the data that became available for me. Being a ‘fake English teacher’ I have collected all sorts of qualitative data based on informal discussions. Moreover, being a ‘stranger’ with whom they might share identity, however, as one girl put it, “I speak and behave like a Hungarian” my presence created confusion and forced them to examine their own position related to ‘others’ and to each other based on either differences or sameness. During my investigation I did not have an ‘informant’. As I was a ‘teacher’, ‘my colleagues’ guided me and provided information that helped me in the validation of my data. However, my role defined limitations of my observation. Finally, I filtered my

qualitative data and instead of focusing on individual trajectories, I organized them into different clusters.

Within the wider scope of my thesis, in the first part I revealed the mechanism of self exclusion based on the relationship among the wider educational system, a Roma school and the students. Relying on my empirical evidences, I came to the conclusion that the maintenance of the sense of shared ethnicity is embedded within the mechanism of exclusionary processes. Moreover the existence of a Roma school within the wider educational system is dependent on the hostility towards the ‘problematic’. Nevertheless, behind this label there are the struggles and economic practices of the students embedded and rooted in kinship relations. In other words, their shared cultural identity, “common historical experience” and “shared codes” are the tools of “imaginary reunification” (Hall 1996:224) in the school. Thus the existence of the school and its shared ‘sameness’ is the result of “the dialogue of power and resistance within cultural identity” (Ibid. 233).

In the second part of the study, underlining the everyday practices of the young Roma in Budapest, I revealed struggles, social and economic factors behind irregular school attendance. None of my findings proves the stereotype that Roma do not want to study, but are originated from system based problems and are in connection with unemployment within their family and the individualization of poverty (Szalai 2002). Moreover, in its literal meaning, these adolescents try to balance their life between the space of education and that of work. School represents the space of childhood while work related to adulthood. Therefore, I also claim that in most of the case, ‘adolescence’ is not the space between childhood and adulthood but the space out of the two.

My study has its own limitation and it is incomplete. In order to grasp not only a moment of the life of urban Roma youth, but offering a deeper understanding of its trajectory, further inquiry would be needed. Moreover, since my observation was focused on a particular space of their life, many of its parts remained hidden in front of me. Anthropological investigation of the space of family approaching it either from economic or gender perspective, the space of work at multinational companies, would offer a sharper image of the subtle and multilayered factors that 'write and rewrite their drama'.

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