Minority within the minority: roma women trapped by origin and gender

Kisebbség a kisebbségben: a származás és a nem csapdája roma nők esetében

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Abstract
It is still very difficult to analyse the role of Roma women within the family, which is influenced by numerous factors. This minority forms a heterogeneous group. Romungro, Vlach and Boyash have female roles with complex cultural systems, and each group has a distinct group identity that has been held together for centuries, binding the group together. Place of residence, education and labour market position also influence women's roles. As a consequence, a colourful picture emerges when we examine the role of Roma women. We can observe the traditional role of women, who, giving birth at a young age, have many children to raise. This traditional role is still present where residents live in an environment without perspective. Young Roma women who have fewer opportunities to work because of their home environment, start families at an earlier age: the old custom re-emerges. Preferring to become more educated, more and more women are breaking with the tradition of sacrificing their lives entirely for the family. Gender roles in the household are becoming less and less distinct as women work and husbands do their share of household chores. Despite the division of labour, women feel that their burdens have not diminished, and men with stronger traditional roots can experience this kind of change as a loss. Having more education contributes greatly to this change in roles, as the driving force of the community is no longer dominant, but rather individual goals. This provides an opportunity for self-realization and independent living. The aim of this publication is to present the changes in the social roles of Roma women over time, from those required by the traditional family model to more modern (contemporary) female roles.

Keywords
Roma, traditions, women’s role, history

Kulcsszavak
roma, tradíció, női szerep, történelem

Background
The Roma minority are the largest ethnic group in Europe, with numbers estimated between 10 and 12 million (European Union 2017). According to a 2011 census, almost 315,000 people declared themselves to be of Roma origin in Hungary (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal 2014), their number becoming more than twice as many, i.e., 867,000 according to a 2018 survey (Területi Statisztika 2018). Despite the vast population of Roma in Europe, there are currently no effective measures to determine their population accurately.

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The European Union has long sought to investigate the economic presence and the health status of the Roma population. The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, studying the situation in nine EU member-states, highlighted the low participation of Roma in the labour market, with just one in four Roma being employed (25%). In Hungary, 36% of Roma are estimated to be employed. In other words, despite an estimated population eclipsing 867,000 in 2018, just over 300,000 Roma are employed in Hungary. Perhaps due to their low presence in the labour market and subsequent low income, 80% of Roma live at or below the poverty line (Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings 2016). The low level of education, the weak labour market participation and the low income of the Roma population are likely to create disparities in their living conditions compared to those of the general population (Mózes et al. 2021).

In the 21st century, many Roma live in settlements without running water or drainage nestled along illegal dump-fill sites. Other Roma households suffer from a lack of access to gas, electricity or indoor plumbing (EQUALITY Discrimination Against and Living Conditions of Roma Women in 11 EU Member States Roma Survey 2016). Approximately 20 to 25% of Roma Gypsies in Hungary live in segregated settlements (Albert 2011). The self-reported health of Roma is noticeably poorer than that of the general population and is likely to be influenced by their low socio-economic status (Vokó et al. 2009).

An environment without indoor plumbing and a lack of knowledge of hygiene is likely to increase the spread of communicable diseases, such as facal-orally transmitted diseases or droplet infections. Additionally, Roma suffers from many types of non-communicable diseases including hypertension, obesity, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, stomach ulcer, chronic migraine. (Roma health report 2014). For example, among the general Hungarian population, the incidence of diabetes mellitus type 2 was 7.47% whereas in Roma residents it was 27% (Jermendy et al. 2010), (Kósa et al. 2014). Consequently, the health status of the Roma population is worse than that of the general population of Europe (Carrasco-Garrido et al. 2010).

Why is important to highlight Roma women?
Roma women live as a “minority within the minority.” In addition to being disadvantaged because of their Roma origin, they are also at a disadvantage within their own population because of their gender. Traditional Roma women get married and start a family at an early age resulting in low education levels. For this reason, it is difficult for Roma women to succeed in the labor market. Roma women are often unable to acquire a well-paid job due to their lack of education and are as a consequence dependent on their husbands and family. Usually, the main income of Roma is state-provided social help or child allowances. However, these sources are not enough to cover overhead and food and to maintain everyday life. Roma women spend large portions of their time at home, so they are the ones who suffer the most from the squalid conditions of their housing, e.g., smoke in the house due to poor ventilation and heating, a lack of basic household equipment such as washing machines or stoves and poor sanitation (“EQUALITY Discrimination against and living conditions of Roma women in 11 EU Member States Roma survey – Data in focus”, 2016).

Tradition in many cases plays a significant role in the lives of Roma women. Mothers do not teach their daughters about menstruation, sex, contraception, pregnancy and labor, and in most cases, what knowledge

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mothers pass on at all is insufficient. Therefore, Roma women do not know how to avoid, identify or prevent sexually transmitted diseases, nor do they think these are a danger to them. (Kelly et al. 2004). Obstacles to improving reproductive health for Roma women include negative attitudes towards healthcare, lack of accessibility and resistance to conferring with general practitioners and specialists. In addition, healthcare professionals have inadequate knowledge regarding Gypsy traditions, and this is why they fail to empathize with the situation of Roma women (Logar et al. 2015).

Often Roma women do not go and see doctors despite suffering from an illness because of the costs of healthcare services, because the doctor’s practice is too far from their homes, because they may have no ID card or state-funded health insurance. In the latter case, they often borrow official documents from a friend to get healthcare. Roma sometimes ignores the disease when they are sick, and will only see the doctor when a serious condition develops (Corea/ Cvorovi 2017).

Roma women are, on average, three years younger than non-Roma women when they deliver their first baby. The weight of Roma neonates is less than that of non-Roma neonates. This is likely to result from inadequate access to nutrition, such as lower fruit, vegetable dairy product consumption, the mother’s BMI and smoking as Roma women tend to smoke more. In addition, children’s weight is affected by insufficient housing conditions and social factors such as the mother’s lack of education. (Balázs et al. 2014), (Šegregur et al. 2017), (Diabelková et al. 2017), (Colombinia 2012)

In light of the above data, it is obvious how important it is to deal with Roma women separately within the minority. However, in order to realize exactly what role women play in the lives of Roma families, we must first learn about the extremely colorful history of this minority, which in many cases determines the present.

**History of Roma from the Middle Ages to the present.**

It is very difficult to do research into the history of the Roma minority as they do not have a written history, being a migrant people. Our existing knowledge comes from anecdotal stories, which are, so to speak, a reflection of the majority society. Changes in the role of women are especially difficult to describe, as historical records provide clues either to the entire population or to men, their craft and their role in supporting the family. Women and children are pushed into the background. In this article, however, the authors will follow the changes in the social role of Roma women in Hungary.

Gypsy emigration started from Northern India in the 14th-15th centuries. They appeared in Hungary in the 16th century, after fleeing from the Turks in the Balkans. Narrowing focus to the Balkans, a continuous migration from the Romanian principality and the territory of Transylvania can be detected from the 14th to the 20th century. Their migration was mainly determined by monitoring job markets, migrating to places where there was a greater demand for their work. In the wake of wars, political decisions, famine and epidemics, Gypsies migrated to Hungary in several waves. Due to his misunderstanding of their religious beliefs, King Sigismund, as a good Catholic, provided them with a residence permit and a passport seeking to help the condemned ethnic group on their travels. From Kings Sigismund and Matthias until the end of the Rákóczi War of Independence the Gypsy population was employed in metalworking, arms production and maintenance, horse trade, postal service and even construction work due to constant wars, and they paid taxes to local towns and provinces. In the 17th and 18th centuries, some Roma groups settled in Hungary. They were partially assimilated, but retained their customs and traditions, such as collecting and processing dead animals. The consumption of carcasses was prohibited by law, as Roma exploited parts of dead animals, especially the skin, so well that they were banned to protect tanners. After expulsion from the
Balkans by the Turks, however, they were forced to take the lowest jobs, so in a few decades the impression of Roma as free-living, good professionals was replaced by the negative image of being only migrants who only sustained themselves by theft (Kállai 2009), (Tóth 2006), (Hortis 2009).

There is very little information regarding Roma women in the 18th century. The censuses conducted at the time focused on men, only a few lawsuits provided insight into the life of Gypsy women. These lawsuits provide documents charging women with adultery. These accusations were, however, unfounded because Roma couples did not use to have their relationship sanctified by the church at that time, just as they do not necessarily have marriages today according to the rules of written law. As in the past, a declaration by the Roma community is sufficient to start a marriage. Nevertheless, cohesion in Roma families is very strong. Roma women have rarely been accused of leaving their children. Criminal lawsuits provide another very interesting type of accusation. Roma women were charged with employing divination to divert the attention of their victims while Roma robbed them. Fortune telling as a service played an important role as there was a demand for it. This was done in two ways: either the fortune teller was approached with a problem, or the fortune teller offered their service, as nearly everyone suffered some kind of problem for which they were trying to find a solution. Roma women, outsiders of the majority culture, were considered special and extraordinary: they were thought to have supernatural abilities. Roma women were pleased to be identified with this perceived role and often had very good psychological and empathetic skills that helped them. Fortune telling proved to be a good way to earn money, while at the same time those who were curious about their future could “learn” something about it. Authorities considered Roma to be deceptive, and fortune telling was strictly forbidden because, based on the litigation files, through their work they had easy access to peasant homes, and could steal items from there (Tóth 2005), (Vasvári 1993).

The Habsburg rulers sought to regulate the lives of Roma in the late 18th century. The main problem was that Roma could not be registered and taxed due to their constant migration, so the Habsburgs tried to encourage Roma to settle and imposed radical measures to keep them as a productive part of the community. Under the decrees of Maria Theresa, the Habsburgs sought to integrate the Roma minority into the Hungarian society by hiring them to work in guilds and giving them land, while simultaneously destroying the huts of migrants. She instructed Roma to adapt in attire as well, abolished Gypsy folk names and allowed them to enlist as soldiers. The queen thought she could replace the population who had been killed or had fled during the war with the Turks, as well as find a solution for the labour shortage in agriculture. However, she did not take into account that, due to their nomadic lifestyle, Roma did not understand and had never engaged in animal husbandry or crop production. Nevertheless, she drastically removed Roma children from their family, saying that if they were socialized in a peasant family where they were taught by priests, they were going to participate in the reconstruction of Hungarian agriculture as adults. This move only provoked conflicts. Let us note here that cohesion is very strong in Roma families, and women, who reject abortion as an option, are extremely attached to their children. As a result, children preferred to flee from the peasant families and returned home. The exact opposite is happening these days, with the number of abortions being very high among Roma as a result of regulations imposed by the Habsburgs, 90% of Roma settled in the country. Despite compulsory schooling only 30% of Roma children participated in education, and 90% of the adult Roma population remained illiterate. These regulations were carried out by Maria Theresa's son Joseph II who continued the measures of the Queen, and banned the use of the Gypsy language. Despite these efforts, the disintegration of Roma communities was only partially realized, and the fragmented settlements were reunited and strengthened (Tóth 2006), (Kemény 2000), (Mezey 1998), (Feith / Lukács 2018).
In the 19th century, however, the majority of Roma settled. Once settled, they always chose a profession that met the needs of the local population. Roma played music, worked as blacksmiths, pounded baskets and made basic wooden utensils. In the middle of the 19th century, a large wave of immigration started from Romania, as a result of which the Roma population was counted for the first time. In January 1893, 274,940 Gypsies were counted, but Budapest was left out of the census, which was estimated to have a Gypsy population of 500. At that time, 89.2% of the Roma population lived fully established, 7.5% partially settled, and 3.3% still had a nomadic lifestyle. A survey of the occupations of Roma men and women over the age of 15 yielded interesting results: while 10.4% of the total Roma population was classified as homemakers (women only), the majority of the female Roma population worked according to the survey. The most common occupations for women included plastering and mud work, adobe sowing, string making, spinning and weaving, making wooden spoons and paint brushes as well as basket weaving. Within this group, nearly 20 times as many female nail-smiths were registered as men. Interestingly, at the time of the census, 55 people listed their occupation as “harlot”. The educational system of the time did not bring the desired changes, as 93.7% of the Roma were illiterate at the time of the census (Dupcsik 2015).

By the end of the century, the majority society had developed two images of gypsies. The first was that of those who tried to integrate by working, teaching their children and respecting the law. The second group, sought to preserve their autonomy and was completely aloof from formalized civic life. They continued to enjoy their freedom and did not respect the law. In the 20th century, unfortunately, the latter negative image remained in public consciousness.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Gypsies in Hungary were divided into three groups. There was a group of Carpathian Gypsies delivered from the Middle Ages who had been assimilated. These were the Romungros, who largely distinguished themselves from the rest of the Gypsies because they did not speak the Roma language and did not preserve their culture. In Hungary, the Romungros represent the largest proportion of the Roma minority population, making up about 70%. A second group came from Romania in the second half of the 19th century; they speak their native Gypsy language and are called Vlach Gypsies because of their origins. In Hungary, 20% of the Roma population identify themselves as Vlach Gypsy. The third group of the 20th century Roma population migrated to the country from Transylvania and Wallachia. They are the Boyash, who settled in the southern part of Transdanubia, who are mainly engaged in woodworking and speak an archaic version of the Romanian language. They used to live in forests and make wooden troughs, spoons and other utensils. Today, their number is approximately 8-9% of the Roma population in Hungary (Várnagy), (Kemény 2000).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the nomadic lifestyle of Roma was still considered the main source of their conflicts. Measures introduced at the time aimed at ending this lifestyle, which was considered deviant. During the age of dualism, a rapid economic growth began. Therefore, traditional Gypsy crafts were becoming fewer and fewer, and began to disappear. Roma adapted somewhat to the circumstances. Men, women and children were fit to work in agriculture from early spring to autumn. Another group of women were domestic workers in private households. Unfortunately, in the period between the two world wars Roma were no longer able to compete with technical progress. Unemployment rose, compounded by an increase in immigration after the Treaty of Trianon (Kállay 2009).

After the German occupation, the situation was exacerbated by the growing anti-Gypsyism, which found its way in the government too. Gendarmes began to collect Roma and deport them to forced-labour camps as a result of central decisions affecting the Roma population. Camps were characterized by extremely violent treatment. Many women became victims of sexual abuse, while others were sterilized against their will,
sometimes with the promise of being able to return to their villages. After March 19, 1944, the “solution of the Gypsy question” culminated in genocide. During World War II, hundreds of thousands of Gypsies were killed in concentration camps. (Sieve 2002)

After 1945, the impact of democratization affected Roma as well. The Roma situation was considered an important problem to be solved, as a large part of the Roma population lived in slums on the periphery of villages or towns even in the 1950s. Their source of livelihood was usually construction industry. However, unemployment was high, especially among women. In Gypsy settlements, forced bathing was carried out as a preventive manner on the instructions of the Ministry of Health as authorities feared the outbreak of epidemics. The bathing was extremely violent with policemen and soldiers surrounding the settlement and then, they carried out the disinfection, under a tent with various substances such as DDT, which was harmful to health. Based on the 1961 resolution of the MSZMP KB (Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party), the Roma issue was a social issue, where the special social situation of the Roma should not be taken into account. Therefore, the committee’s goal in the 1960s was still the assimilation of the Roma. The 1961 party resolution declared the education of Roma children the most important task, calling for the employment of Roma, especially men, as the opportunities for women were limited due to the high number of children. Despite this, the problem of unemployment remained unresolved. Goals included the liquidation of 2,100 Roma settlements in the country, by replacing them with flats built with the help of the Central Committee and the National Savings Bank (OTP Bank). The housing program was launched in 1965. Gypsies with permanent jobs could take out a soft loan to build houses of reduced value / comfort level or buy an existing house. Unfortunately, these new houses were built like settlements, and already existing farmhouses could only be bought in less populated areas. Although the living conditions of the population improved, a new kind of segregation began. This violent upheaval of Roma lifestyle gave rise to further conflicts between the majority society and the Roma population. Forced settlement did not solve Roma segregation of the labour market, or the backwardness of education. It only exacerbated the segregation of settlements and, even in the affected areas, marginalized as the majority of the population moved out when Gypsies moved in (Hajnáczky 2015), (Hiónáczky 2017), (Diósi 1998).

The estimated number of the Roma population was 360,000 in 1984 and by then every Gypsy had settled. Most of them lived in the capital city and its suburbs, as well as in little villages in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár counties. Employment had risen, with 53% of women in permanent employment. The population was able to work mostly in cities where industry operated, causing many to commute or live in workers’ “hostels.” Half of the active earners still worked as unskilled labourers, with 60% of the children attending kindergarten schools and learning professions. It was at this time when the first generation Gypsy intellectuals appeared. Because the prejudice was not diminished, placement in special education was becoming more common among Roma children (Kállay 2009). Even under socialism, they were hired only for jobs that required the least skill. In his survey, István Kemény concluded that privatization had reduced employment again. In the total Roma population, it fell from 85% in 1971 to 29% in 1993. If we examine the entire female population, the change was not so substantial as in the case of men between 1970 and 1994: 66% of women were employed in 1993. If we analyse the situation of Roma women separately, on the other hand, there were some dramatic differences. Among them, the employment rate of 30% in 1971 fell to 15.1% in 1993. The livelihoods of Roma were endangered, with many unable to pay their home loans. Homelessness increased daily (Kemény et al. 2005), (Kemény / Havas 1998).
The Hungarian government took an important step in 1995 with the establishment of the Roma Coordination Council to address social issues. The 1125/1995 (XII.12.) Government Declaration decided on the most burning territorial action programs related to Roma. Thus, regional talent development programs and halls of residence were established, which tried to eliminate educational segregation. The government program included the liquidation of Roma settlements and the establishment and development of employment projects with the integration of Roma students into the vocational training system. Complex crisis management programs were developed in areas of the country where the majority of the population lived in conditions of multiple disadvantages. In order to eliminate discrimination, knowledge about Roma was incorporated into higher education institutions. It was considered important to facilitate the access of Roma students to the higher education system. In addition, efforts were made to improve the health status of Roma, and the organization of screening and care programs was considered urgent (Kállay 2009).

In addition to various educational policy subsidies, non-governmental organizations and individual initiatives helped the Roma population to catch up in the decades after the change of regime. After joining the European Union, these programs continued unabated. Key policy areas included education, the fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism, and addressing housing and health issues. According to the 2016 Report of the Second European Union Survey on Minorities and Discrimination, there were still problems to be solved among the Roma minority in Hungary, but a slow progress could be seen. The greatest success is in education. The proportion of Roma who have not completed formal education at any level appear to be declining in terms of age groups. Statistically, 8% of 16-24 year olds, 10% of 25-44 year olds and 25% of those over 45 have no education. Looking at the 2015/2016 school year, 99% of Roma boys of compulsory school age and 98% of girls attended school. Employment data have also improved. In the 20-64 age group, 62% of Roma men and 32% of Roma women work. Education data show a significant improvement, which has led to a strong acceleration of the Roma middle class since 2010 (Forray 2017), (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016).

According to the Labour Force Survey of KSH (Középonti Statisztikai Hivatal – Hungarian Central Statistical Office), 28.5% of the Roma population aged 15-74 achieved primary completion in 2010. This rate decreased for 2019, with only 22.5% of women and 19.1% of men having primary completion. However, research found the proportion of female college graduates who had white-collar jobs higher than that of men. Despite the higher educational status, unemployment among women is still higher, especially in disadvantaged groups, where the high number of children inhibits access to the labour market. Based on the experience of recent years, the government has set new goals in the Hungarian National Social Cohesion Strategy 2030 program. The government develops support systems, which help Roma victims of discrimination. Awareness-raising campaigns support the financial awareness and improve the access of Gypsy women to better medical care, examinations, screening and family planning programs (Magyar Nemzeti Társadalmi Felzárkózási Stratégia 2030. 2011).

Roma women in traditional roles
As the Roma minority was no longer represented homogeneously in recent years, researchers have begun to address the situation of Roma women separately (“EQUALITY Discrimination Against and Living Conditions of Roma Women in 11 EU Member States Roma survey - Data in focus”, 2016), (Balázs et al. 2014), (Šegregur et al. 2017), (Diabelková et al. 2017). This means that we no longer read about Roma women as “numbers” when gender distribution is reviewed because researchers study different aspects of
Roma women around the world. Highlighting women is extremely important because they are the nucleus of the family. Women are the ones who take care of children and the elderly. They continue to pass on culture and family values, and they are the most open to changes. Therefore, they play a key role in any health promotion activity.

Lay people typically have a stereotypical image of Roma women. They visualize women with many children, wearing long, colourful, mostly floral skirts and large gold jewellery. They are sometimes unwashed or have missing teeth, and they are possibly victims of family abuse by their drunken husband. Alternatively, they may picture a young temptress, seductively slender with brown skin and dark glittering eyes. Furthermore, there is a mystical view that Roma women are fortune-tellers or witches who can put a spell on anyone or remove the curse (Bakó 2006).

Belonging to a Roma group means being part of a very strong traditional community, so it is rare that a member of the community becomes separated from it. If the community feels they are threatened, it may close up and isolate itself from the majority society. When remedial programs are successful, and children go to school, adults go to work, and people can cross the lines of the community with greater security, women have better chances to develop. This is accompanied by the fear of the majority society because of its history, dating back to the times when Roma cared for the safety of their women and children during their migration as a vulnerable group. There are still communities where this kind of memory has survived, and efforts have been made to isolate women from the outside world. Because of this, freedom in their community may not be adequate. If a Roma woman wants to break free from such a closed community, she faces a double threat. She may lose her family, and possibly be cast out by their own community. Women then face the risk that the new community does not accept them, and they cannot integrate successfully (Hegedűs 1996).

1. Female children in the family
The family of Gábor Gypsies is dominated by a patriarchal family structure. The fate of a female is decided at birth. According to their thinking, the family needs girls, but one is enough. According to wedding customs, the husband and his family receive money from the bride's parents, so there are women who do not want to have baby girls at all for financial reasons; they prefer to leave them in hospital when their baby girls are born to avoid the financial burden on parents. The treatment of children is strongly reflected in the view that girls cost money, whereas boys make money for the family. Children are born into a social role and behave accordingly and expect the same behaviour from others, because failing to do so leads to exclusion from the community. Teenage boys and girls are considered as small adults by the community. If a teenage girl is still playing with dolls, others think she is stupid. Girls do household chores, while boys, around the age of 14, join their father to learn a profession, sell goods at the market and make money. Girls go to school until they can read and write, but they complete three or four grades only. After the age of 10-11, they are not allowed to continue their studies in the education system because parents fear that their daughters might be kidnapped from school, and, thus, girls over this age are traditionally ashamed of going to school. Women's clothing is very colourful. They wear light basic pieces until they are 25 years old. Middle-aged women wear darker-toned colours like purple, blue or green, whereas elderly women often take the colour brown. Pants which are suitable for girls up to the age of 10 are replaced by long floral skirts. Girls always have long hair in which they tie a ribbon, mostly red. When they are married at the age of 13-14, the ribbon is replaced by a headscarf that is mandatory to wear and is tied at the back (Faust 2015), (Tesfay 2006).

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Vlach Gypsy groups share a concern regarding the behaviour of girls, where maintaining the girl’s “purity” is essential before marriage. From an early age on, they are taught to cook and keep the house tidy, mothers try to pass on all the knowledge needed to care for the family and a new-born child (Diósi 1998).

2. Matchmaking

Within the Vlach group, parents arrange marriages in advance because they choose their-daughter’s future spouse as early as in childhood. Girls who go against their parent’s will, elope with their love. Eventually they return, the parents reconcile with the situation, accept the love of the young couple, and they continue to live together. (Vajda 2001). Gábor Gypsies within the Vlach group have stricter matchmaking rules. Marriages for Gábor Gypsies are also pre-arranged by parents. In many cases, children are still pre-schoolers when their parents choose future spouses for them from their own community; however, marriages are contracted exclusively between Gábors (Faust 2015).

If a girl is lucky, she has the opportunity to attend community events, such as a wedding, christening or Gypsy balls, but only when she is accompanied by an elder brother, where she can meet someone. Wherever girls go, there is always a family member to keep an eye on them and warns them if they behave inappropriately, or deters the approach of boys. This austerity is taken seriously, as a girl could be ridiculed if she talked to a boy face to face, if she was seen with gadjo (non-Roma) men, or if she drank a little alcohol. They are considered spinsters if they are single at the age of 18-20. Their peers will often exclude these “spinsters” from the group because they did not perform their community duty. If it was their additional education beyond the typical level that caused this delay, their peers will often treat them unpleasantly out of envy. A smarter woman is viewed to have a better chance of breaking out than her uneducated peers. However, there is a risk that they will not find a partner within the community, as men will have been married by that age. Divorced or suddenly widowed men remain as options, or they can choose a partner from the majority society (Vidovics, 2015), (Demsa 2015).

3. Family planning

Despite teenage marriages and elopements, Roma people are very shy. They do not pass on any information about menstruation, consequences of sex or contraception to their daughters who will usually be informed about it when their first child is conceived. Because of early introduction to sex, they become mothers at a very young age. In this case, there is no conscious family planning until after their first child is born. If we examine the male-female relationship among Vlach Gypsies, menstruation, pudendum and the garments that cover it are taboo. For this reason, men's and women's laundry are done separately, and women's underwear is covered when they hang out underwear to dry (Neményi 1998).

4. Marriage and the issue of equality in marriage

The traditional marriage habits of Boyash and Vlach Gypsy groups are characterized by rigid endogamy. There is no intermarriage between these two groups. The ecclesiastical consecration of the marriage is not necessary. The wedding is presided over by the most respected member of the group or the voivode. In addition, they also live in a cohabiting relationship. This is especially true of the Boyash. In traditional groups, marriage to a virgin girl is of tremendous value nowadays. After the wedding, paternal custody is taken over by the husband, so the marriage does not bring about any significant change in the woman's life (Vajda 2001). As usual, the wife is not prepared by her mother about how to run the household, but by her mother-in-law when the couple moves in to live with the husband's family after the wedding, as housework

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has to be done according to the needs of the husband's family (Lőrinczi 2013). The greatest virtue for a woman is to give birth to children. Infertility is a great shame. If no children are born within eight years of the marriage, the woman is returned to her father, together with the money which was paid to her husband's family. On the other hand, the sooner a child is born, the greater the pride is for which they deserve community recognition. Young women can always go to the village to do business with someone. Dressing is also strictly regulated. Much of the body is covered by clothing, dressing in an ornate ankle-length skirt and a wrist-to-wrist blouse. The use of makeup is not desirable because the community does not want to highlight the individual. Moreover, the usage of nail polish and other cosmetic products such as eyeshadow reminds them of the lifestyle of gadjis they consider licentious and gives the impression of a kind of “sexual attraction” (Faust 2015).

5. Female and male roles within the family
Roma traditional families live apart from the majority society according to their own values. Women do the laundry, clean the house and take care of the children. They often cook as one of the most expressive ways of their devotion to their love and family. In addition to their role in maintaining the family, men only do “male work,” such as gathering and chopping wood, and making repairs around the house. (Hegedűs 1996), (Diósi 1998). Roma traditions exclusively control women. They are expected to be loyal and affectionate, and to dedicate their time to their husbands and their families. If a woman commits adultery, it will lead to great contempt, even among fellow women. A husband can cut a woman’s hair to indicate that she cheated on him, which is a huge humiliation because it will make everyone know what the woman did. In contrast, cheating is not a major sin for men. Even with this inclination on the part of men, divorce is not common. In many cases, women are more tolerant because they are aware that, as a divorced woman, they would no longer have many chances of finding a new partner within the group. An example of a man's superiority can also be witnessed on the street, as the man goes before his family empty-handed, while his wife and children carry the shopping bags. (Diósi 1998), (Rostás-Farkas / Karsai 1992), (Demsa 2015).

For Gábor Gypsies, men are the only breadwinners who can lead a free lifestyle, coming and going, as they wish, because of trading. The role of women for Gábor Gypsies is characterized by a duality. They do not get involved in their husband’s businesses. They also sit and eat separately from men at festive gatherings. Despite this, in their roles such as mother, mother-in-law, or even a paternal grandmother, they can still influence a family’s decisions. Only husbands have a connection with the outside world because, according to stereotypes, women cannot control their sexual desires. Women are viewed as prone to cheating. For this reason, they can move outside this very narrow range described above, e.g., see foreign Roma and non-Roma men only under the supervision of their husband (Bakó, 2006) (Faust 2015), (Tesfay 2006), (Berta 2005).

6. Raising children
Women have a very strong intimate relationship with their children. Child-rearing is the sole responsibility of women. Children are also introduced to work at an early age. Only little children can play while the big ones need to help take care of their little brothers and sisters. Household chores and caring for the family have a priority over education. Therefore, girls do not go to school at all or they are not allowed girls to continue their education after primary school. However, Gypsy families do not apply many rules in childrearing, but rather believe that such decisions should be left to the child. Another habit, which can be a source of conflict with educational institutions, is that parenting is not consistent because they do not use many rules, and sometimes a parent forgives the child one minute and the other they shout at their child.
Mothers try to satisfy all the needs of their children. Therefore, the virtues of patience and waiting are not taught. Later this creates difficulties because children struggle to sit and pay attention during classes, and, similarly, the teacher himself struggles to hold their attention. The feminization of the education system acts as a factor in reducing prestige based on the traditional Gypsy value system, as children listen less to female teachers. The way Roma parents relate to school is normally characterized by the fact that teachers usually resent them because Gypsy parents do not attend parental meetings or communicate with teachers. When they have a problem, they go to school angrily. There is no effective cooperation even in the case of children who are difficult to handle because parents are not willing to see their child’s problem, so they simply ignore the teacher's remarks (Hegedűs 1996), (Dupcsik 2009).

7. Roles related to health maintenance
Unfortunately, maintaining health is not a top priority in the Roma minority. They interpret the concept of health in a different way. For them, it does not mean physical, mental and social well-being, only the absence of diseases. A medical diagnosis is mostly perceived as a stigma. Roma often downplay the problem, and if symptoms disappear while being treated, they will ignore doctor’s orders and discharge themselves from hospital. According to their customs, Roma have great respect for the sick and the weak, and women care for sick family members at home. Based on their customs, the whole family goes to see the patient in hospital. When someone recovers, they celebrate it because their health goes beyond the individual and influences the wider family. Gypsies can also easily confront health care workers. Healthcare workers often find it difficult to tolerate the different cultural habits of Roma minority or the lack of basic knowledge due to the low education of Romans; in addition, Roma do not follow up on treatments or recommendations. As a result, Roma may not behave as expected when entering health care facilities. From the point of view of Roma patients, their patient rights can be severely violated due to cultural and knowledge differences because healthcare workers do not usually see Gypsies as cooperative patients. Young Roma girls may feel very vulnerable during patient care, especially in the case of premature pregnancy, as their bodies are underdeveloped and they lack the knowledge and experience to make an appropriate decision about themselves and the baby’s health due to lack of education (Szuhay 1999), (Rostás / Farkas 1992), (Lakatos et al 2007), (Lukács / Feith 2016), (Feith Lukács 2018).

Changes in female roles
In the 1970s and 1980s, when men were commuting between their home and their workplace, women stayed at home and maintained everyday life. They ran the household, raised the children and did farm labour in the countryside. Roma women formed a very cohesive community with the grandmother playing a central role in their lives. A strong matriarchal family model emerged, and the grandmother in the centre had a major influence on children's career choices. In some cases, female family members were motivated to act against family norms that restricted women, leading young girls to stand out from the community (Kóczé 2010).

Unemployment rose in the 1990s as a result of deteriorating labour market opportunities, and more and more people fell into deep poverty. Women had an extra burden; they cooked, ran the household, went shopping, cared for their children, and had to adjust to a rather meagre family income. In addition, there was their unemployed spouse who lost his role as breadwinner. This loss of role was accompanied by depression, alcoholism and domestic violence due to intoxication. All these problems affected family dynamics. Women took on extra responsibilities to try help their husband restore their self-esteem because men had lost their roles, thereby contributing, if not consciously, to maintaining traditional roles. Young Roma women had
fewer opportunities to work, so as a result of the environment at home, the old tradition of some women starting a family at an earlier age re-emerged. As a consequence, the number of children increased, and this in itself contributed to preventing Roma families from breaking out of deep poverty. However, this is not the case for everyone. Where integration was successful, unemployment did not significantly affect demographic behaviour. Women with many children who give birth at a young age are still present where residents live in an environment without that perspective. The risk of having children at teenage years must be emphasized because it reduces the chances of obtaining a minimum level of education, thereby leading to poor integration into the labour market. This is exacerbated among those who live segregated in hopeless conditions, as women who give birth in their teens have a large number of children who can become dependent on social welfare and casual labour throughout their lives. Failure to obtain an education at a young age determines their destiny, as poverty and a large family make it impossible to attend secondary education (Janky 2005), (Boros / Bucher 2020), (Voicum / Popesscu).

Escape attempts
Even today, it is very difficult to analyse the role of Roma women within the family, which is influenced by numerous factors. This minority forms a heterogeneous group. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize about the female Roma population. On the one hand, Romungro, Vlach and Boyash have female roles creating complex cultural systems, and each group has a distinct group identity that has been held together for centuries, binding them together. On the other hand, their place of residence, education and labour market position also affect female roles.

Currently, the global society is struggling with a crisis of values, which first appeared in the seemingly insignificant decline of family values. The transformation related to family, relationships and fertility started with changes in these values. In addition, the individual has been given a much more prominent role. As these values weakened in the family and the community, the emphasis moved to the individual’s self-realization. This is due to the education system becoming more inclusive, the rise in educational attainment and the dominant presence of women in the labour market. Individual life paths are arranged around careers, so that traditional norms no longer have as strong an impact on careers. As a result of individualization, traditions may disappear. Changes include individual responsibility and decision-making, as well as life paths that are no longer pre-determined but are rather less and less predictable. With this unpredictability, it is difficult to think about long-term goals, instead decisions focus on the impact of short-term success. In Europe, as a consequence of globalization, gender equality has become accepted within the family. In post-communist countries, beside the two-income family model, roles within the household are still traditionally divided (Boros / Bucher 2020).

The transformation of traditional gender roles is strongly linked to industrialization processes that started in Europe, when Roma women left their old trades and started working in factories. Today, the past expectations of family responsibilities seem to be disappearing among Roma. The only obligation is that children are to go to school. It is important to emphasize that the goal is that children complete their compulsory education; however, good marks are not necessary. Marriage is more prevalent among those aged 30-40 and older, and cohabitation is more popular among the young who get married after childbirth. Unfortunately, there is also a high proportion of women who are divorced and raise their children alone. Parents with young children often live with their own parents. Relationships are no longer as stable as they used to be. Couples break up more easily and look for new partners. Children from previous partners are...
not an obstacle because gypsies love children very much, so they raise them together in mosaic families (Boros / Bucher 2020).

The subordinate role of Roma women is already beginning to disappear, as most of them have a decent salary or, if they are raising a child, receive a childcare or a family allowance. Thus, they can provide some income for the family even if the husband is unemployed. As educational attainment increases, men are also more active in contributing in household chores, while women are less likely to get support in uneducated, poor families. They also have the opportunity to have a say in family decisions, it is no longer the man who has the last word, instead the couple make a decision together (Albert et al. 2011).

When past and present get merged
If their home is located in an economically and geographically isolated rural area, traditional constraints which are completely different from the motivations of ordinary Hungarian society affect the young living there. Women will return to the old family pattern with premature pregnancy and a large number of children. Their presence in the labour market is neither expected nor supported by the community. Thus going to school will not be important to them either. Dropping out of school early makes it impossible for young women to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, serious financial problems resulting from unemployment do not make parents see that they need to motivate their children to go to school. In this environment, due to the lack of adult female intellectuals, there is no role model for children to follow. Instead, strong traditional values dominate. As a result of having children early, women are considered victims because young girls have no say in social processes; they are expected to blindly follow only. As for them, due to illiteracy, they are unable to view themselves through the eyes of outside observers. They are not aware that by becoming pregnant at a young age puts them only in a vulnerable position. Lack of education and income limits their integration and perpetuates social exclusion (Czibere / Molnár 2016).

Globalization also has a strong impact on Roma communities. Relations based on mutual trust are fading, and the internal social cohesion of Roma seems to be dissolving. Among Roma, supportive relationships that once made poverty and existential crises within the family endurable are disappearing. With the marginalization of families, supportive relationships are shrinking. Financial differentiation is emerging, making better-off families no longer want to help and communicate with poorer ones. This kind of attitude contradicts the traditional values of the Roma community (Messing 2006).

Neoprotestant churches such as the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church or Jehovah's Witnesses have had a major impact on the culture of Gábor Gypsies in recent years. There is no longer drinking and smoking, and there are fewer children in these religious communities, and it has become very important for everyone to have their houses clean and tidy. Of course, these positive changes have also affected women’s lives as family relationships have become more intimate. However, strict gender roles still exist, with the strong patriarchal authority remaining. New medical tests predict the child’s gender as early as in the third month. If the couple think they already have too many daughters, they will consider aborting the fetus. Today, Gábor Gypsies have modernized somewhat, but most of their traditions have remained in connection with the early marriage of young people. However, in the old world parents used to decide who the future spouse was going to be, now parents ask their child if she likes the partner they have chosen for her. (Faust 2015), (Tesfay 2006), (Lőrincz 2013).

Towards a brighter future through integration

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More and more women are breaking with the tradition of sacrificing their lives entirely for the family, preferring to become more educated. The first-generation Roma graduates, who were raised in disadvantaged families, pay a high price for further education in addition to their success. Being a Roma in the middle class is a dubious feeling of privilege on the one hand and exclusion on the other. Three main models of minority mobility patterns have been identified. The first is the assimilation model, during which a complete fusion can be observed; the person does not admit to their Roma origin and does not specifically participate in the Roma cause in their work either. In this case, their Roma identity is called into question, and the “left behind” Roma family may be outraged by the denial of origin or by the fact that the knowledge they have acquired is not being used to work in Roma-related fields. The second is the upward mobility model, during which Roma are integrated into the private sectors of the Hungarian labour market as experts. They do not deny their origin, but they do not attach any special significance to it either. The third and most common is the Roma minority mobility model, which can be divided into three further sections. The first is the bicultural Roma middle-class identity, in which not only the Hungarian but the Roma culture is valuable as well. This identity is characterized by dual roots, but the alienation from the Roma community caused by higher education must be tackled, as women “change into Hungarian” through further education at university. They do not deny their origin, but they do not attach any special significance to it either. A third path related to this mobility model is the social practice of “returning” to the community of origin, i.e. Roma are located in a sector of the labour market where those in need can also help Roma people (Durst / Bereményi).

For women, social advancement also has a significant impact on relationships. It is very difficult for them to find the right partner who understands and accepts their cultural background. However, if they find him, they are very committed to both their work and their family. Educated Roma women, whether they are first- or multi-generational intellectuals, have a tradition that preserves or assimilates the nature of their families and feel that their work goes beyond self-realization. They think commitment to work and family plays an important role in life, and that work and family are not mutually exclusive. If they have a job that they can fulfill even after their children have been born, they will be committed for a lifetime. Of course, in order to manage their lifestyle, they need the support of their spouse and family. Further education and a career involve sacrifice because the individual breaks away from his or her own environment. However, after graduating from school, most of them continue to deal with Roma affairs. This preserves their sense of identity as Roma female intellectuals, using their knowledge to help others. For this reason, the most preferred areas of social sphere among Roma female intellectuals are pedagogy and media. Unfortunately, while Roma are the most discriminated minority group in Hungarian society, Roma women entering higher education only pursue studies that can improve the living conditions of their own people. Most of their work is in the public or non-profit sector, so they often have lower wages and fewer career opportunities than in the private sector. Of course, career choices are made out of the individual's own free will, but it would still be beneficial if they had more opportunities to work in the private sector, possibly in an area that is not exclusively related to Roma affairs. In the case of educated Roma, an identity crisis may develop as they are less accepted in the workplace, and, if the physical appearance allows, they often tend to deny their origin for the sake of hoped-for benefits. This difficult decision usually involves cutting off traditionally strong family-community ties, and in most cases, family members move away from each other both emotionally and physically. Therefore, finding opportunities to maintain connections between the educated majority and minority women is essential as it would open up new dimensions for both parties and significantly reduce exclusion. Two perspectives emerge from this. Some see the “healing power” of Roma

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culture in the respect for tradition, as they would consider the resurgence of a seemingly lost community spirit extremely important. Others believe in renewal, arguing that when cultures mix with each other, it gives them an opportunity to understand the other side better, thereby making it easier to be accepted. Of course, there are not only these two extreme viewpoints; there may be transitions in the mind-set, but from whatever perspective we examine the issue, the conclusion is the same. The fact that a woman of Roma origin becomes an intellectual does not mean that she loses her identity or that she completely breaks with tradition, as this can cause a break in her life that is difficult to process. (Zsámbáné 2016), (Durst et al 2016), (Nyírő/Durst 2018), (Dés 2021), (Bereményi/Durst 2021).

It is commonly heard in public discourse and in the media that Roma women are traditional (marry early and have many children) and that Hungarians are modern. Contrastingly, many highly educated Roma women are much less traditional nowadays. Ethnicity is still a force in society that can influence a person’s life. However, ethnicity does not always or in all contexts determines a personal preference. More and more educated women live, think and behave the same way as their non-Roma, urban middle-class counterparts. Through luck and positive experiences, being Roma means “only” the family to them. Therefore, they have a free choice of career, and they are not burdened with additional responsibilities by being a member of the Roma group. (Durst et al 2014).

Summary

The role of Roma women is clearly changing. Gender roles in the household are blurring as women work, and husbands take on a share of the housework. Despite the division of labour, women feel that their burdens have not diminished, and men with stronger traditional roots can experience this kind of change as a loss. Children are no longer considered as help in the household as parents want them to have a carefree childhood. The increase in education contributes greatly to this change in roles, as the driving force of the community is no longer dominant, but rather individual goals. This provides an opportunity for self-realization and independent living. As a result, women achieve an independent existence, so they will not be in as vulnerable a position any more.

However, if their place of residence is in a segregated area where the nearest town is difficult to reach, it remains in many ways very disadvantageous for women. In such a segregated environment, Roma traditions are much more pronounced, which of course influence young people's decisions to start life, choose a partner, have children and enter the labour market. There is no change in female gender roles for them, as there is no compulsion in their lives that would make such a change necessary. Thus, the traditional role prevails. However, this is not perceived as repression, as, due to the absence of education, they are unaware of other options they could have. Seeing this example, the next age group will also face exclusion, as there is nothing in a stimulus-poor environment that would break the vicious cycle of poverty.

In summary, it must be stated that the Roma minority must move forward with the times, as rigid cultural traditions do not facilitate the integration process. Transformation is most effective when it starts within society resulting from organic development. Therefore, educated women have an important role to play in setting an example for the need to combine tradition with modern conceptions of life. If change were initiated by a person from within their own group, traditions that ensure the cohesion and survival of the Roma community would be fractured as little as possible. It is also essential for this development that traditional groups be open and "readmit" their peers, because if women intellectuals are excluded from the community, they will move away and become outsiders, denying their Roma origin and widening the gap between the minority and the majority society.

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