

The Situation of Migrant Roma Groups in State Socialist Hungary in the 1950s

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Abstract

This study explores the situation of migrant Roma groups in socialist Hungary during the 1950s, with a focus on a major criminal case that culminated in 1961. It examines recent interpretations of state socialist Roma policies, emphasising the persistent marginalization of Roma communities despite official rhetoric promoting integration. Drawing on court documents, the paper analyses how the authorities constructed the image of Roma lifestyle and criminality, often blending ethnic and social prejudices. Through micro-historical investigation, the study presents the everyday life, social relations, and hardships of a large Roma family, as seen through the lens of the authorities' discriminatory practices. The research highlights the value and limitations of judicial sources in reconstructing Roma history, revealing both the oppressive structures of the state and the fragmented voices of Roma individuals during the period.

Keywords: Roma history, socialist Hungary, state policy, court documents, criminalization, assimilation, discrimination, microhistory

Recent interpretations of the state socialist Roma policy

In recent years, several comprehensive studies on the Roma policy of the state socialist period have been published.¹ One of the central questions of these analyses has been the extent to which the 1961 Party Resolution brought about a change in the approach to power. One approach is Erna Sághy's situation analysis. In her opinion, the most important principle of the resolution was the definition of the social status

¹ Majtényi–Majtényi 2016; Varsa 2017; Sághy 2008.

of the Roma. The resolution considered the solution to the 'Roma question' to be that the Roma could not be treated as a nationality, as this would preserve the social segregation of the Roma. The resolution also analysed society's attitude towards the Roma, stating as a fact the prejudices that existed in society. The decision also addresses the tense relationship between the Roma and the authorities. Sággy cites the Prosecutor General's Circular No. 104/1962 on the prosecution's action against adverse racial discrimination against Hungarian citizens of Roma origin. A particular virtue of the analysis is that it presents the decision of the Czechoslovak Communist Party as a precursor to the Hungarian Party decision. The Czechoslovak solution was assimilation and assimilation by violent means.² In 1958 a law was passed regulating the resettlement of migrants.

It is clear from Eszter Varsa's analysis that the situation of the Roma did not improve during the period of the socialist state, despite the slogans. They tried to 're-educate' the members of the community on the basis of the stereotypes of 'work-shy' and 'lazy', even using the tools of eugenics. In Eszter Varsa's interpretation, the 1961 party resolution represented this prejudiced vision translated into the language of socialist ideology.

Balázs Majtényi and György Majtényi were the most comprehensive in presenting the state socialist policy perspective. In their opinion, state socialist ideology clearly aimed at building a homogeneous nation-state. This was also what was sought in the case of the Roma, and the party leadership therefore clearly rejected the idea of the Roma as a nationality group. The solution was seen in the integration of the Roma into large-scale industry and in resettlement. Forcing Roma into wage labour did not mean their assimilation, but rather their exclusion from the workplace reinforced their community identity. The authors point out that physical violence was also common during the Kádár era. The use of coercion by the authorities, especially the police, was a method of coercion, and a prejudiced view was also introduced into the investigative methodology.

The source value of court documents

The political intentions and direction can therefore be discerned from the party files, while the analysis of court documents provides an opportunity to illustrate the approach adopted by the authorities in their proceedings. A difficult question, and one which is not reflected in the case files, is how the political direction of the party influenced the court decisions.

² Donert 2017; Sokolova 2008.

The court documents, in addition to revealing the perspective of power, also provide a picture of the outside attitude with which the majority society treated the Roma. In relation to the Roma defendants, the authorities appear to have gathered information beyond the legal requirements of the procedure, in effect 'snooping' on Roma culture and personal relationships. The documents produced by the authorities showed the power perspective of the majority society. The judicial process was based solely on the data collected by the police, and there is no evidence that the judicial process took into account any aspect other than the police process. And in the case of the police, there is material on how people of Roma origin were treated.³

However, the court documents also provide an opportunity to hear the voice of the Roma community. In the case file, which contains more than 10,000 pages, we can also hear the voice of the Roma. The administration also recorded their narratives, and while the court ignored this in most cases, it is of paramount importance for the historian in exploring the Roma politics of the period.

In my research, I am looking at how court documents can be used to describe the life of the Roma community. How information gathered for the purpose of the proceedings can be used through source criticism to illustrate the Roma politics of the period.

The analysis of the documentary material processed in my study gives me the opportunity to use it as a case study to present the situation of a large Roma family living in Hungary in the late 1950s. The aim of the micro-historical processing is to describe of the lifestyle and personal relationships of the individuals. Documents of the time use the term gypsy, which at the time not only denoted ethnicity but was also used as a social category. In my study, I use the term Roma throughout.

The trial at first instance

The story I will present in my paper is based on court documents, which, in addition to the court verdicts, also provide data on the way of life of the Roma community of the period.

On 9 June 1961, after a 91-day trial, the Kecskemét County Court handed down a very severe verdict against 29 defendants in a case that was regarded by the authorities as a series of crimes going back several years. Fardi Bakró I and Tamás II Rostás were sentenced to death, Péter Pecó Sztojka, György Tigris Rostás, Rudolf István Bajka Rostás, Lajos Laci Rostás and Lajos Rostás I. Fardiné Rostás Mura, sentenced to life imprisonment.⁴ The number of defendants increased steadily throughout the

³ Horváth 1955: 254–264.

⁴ Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA [Budapest City Archives = BCA], XXV. 4. a. 2809/1962.

proceedings, from nine at the beginning to 29 at the time of the judgment, for a series of offences considered by the authorities to be criminal offences.⁵

In its reasoning for the judgment, the court stressed that all but four of the defendants were of Roma nationality, and in describing the personal circumstances of the defendants, it noted that the Romas were a single kinship.

On the morning of 20 January 1960, a widow, living alone, was found with her head split open with a shovel. The victim, Gyuláné Csorba's widowed husband, was a Roma musician of national fame who had travelled abroad. The court found that the motive for the murder was money, as the widow had a high pension, for which she had sued and was paid a higher amount retroactively after winning the case. The size of the sum was the subject of fabulous rumours in the farm community. The court also wondered what the Roma caravan would have needed the large sum for. Id. Fardi Rostás and his family planned to buy a plot of land near Mogyoród and build a hut and a Roma house on it. The price of the land was 5000 forints, of which they could pay 2700 forints. For comparison, the average monthly income at that time was 1575 HUF. So the family had to save quite a lot for this project. The remaining amount was committed to be paid in February or March. There was no written contract, only a receipt for the money and a verbal agreement that if the remaining money was not paid, the money paid would be forfeited.

However, if we were dealing with "just" a murder-for-profit case, we could probably just outline a "simple" court case. In this case, however, it is a much more complex case, as the authorities have spent time and money investigating the 1950s lifestyle of a caravan of Romas. From October 1959 until the time of the murder, the court's reasoning followed the daily life of the Roma caravan led by Fardi Rostás almost day by day. The life of the large Roma family is, of course, seen through the eyes of the authorities, which in many cases gives a tendentious picture, since when reading the documents, one can almost feel the complete incomprehension and horror of the authorities at the events of everyday life. The fact that only written documents can be processed, and that a considerable number of tape recordings are not yet available due to a lack of technical facilities, is also hampering the work of the historian. This distorts the picture, since the records of the interrogations of the accused show that almost all of them were either illiterate or, at least judging by the way they signed

⁵ In the case of Fardi Bakró Rostás, in addition to murder, theft committed as a repeat offender, crimes against youth, including one case of corrupting a minor, intellectual public misappropriation for illicit gain, public nuisance by exposing himself and his family to moral turpitude, a crime against the public utility by felling trees, a crime against public property by stealing wood and a crime of leaving an accident victim in a hit-and-run. In the case of Tamás Rostás, in addition to murder, he was sentenced for 3 counts of robbery, forcible sexual intercourse, theft, tree felling, theft and destruction of identity cards and public nuisance.

their names, had little idea of the meaning of what was being recorded. The audio tapes may thus also testify to the credibility of the minutes recorded in police and prosecutors' offices.

The court also made findings about the Roma caravan's lifestyle that were not relevant to the subject matter of the proceedings. In its opinion, the defendants could be divided into three groups. The first group consisted of those who had consistently engaged in vagrancy, absconding and a criminal lifestyle. In the second group were those who oscillated between a settled and working lifestyle and between a wandering and criminal lifestyle. Finally, the third group included the most vulnerable, deceived non-criminals.

As an example of the first group of lifestyles, the court cited the main defendant, Fardi Rostás and his family, who, according to the authorities, had led a roving lifestyle throughout his life with his wife and sons. Between 1954 and 1956, Mr Fardi Rostás had a rudimentary house in Dunaegyháza, but he only stayed there during the cold winter months. He had registered homes in various municipalities, where he built a hut dug into the ground on land owned by the municipality or a tent made of foliage or stalks that could not be heated in winter. Fardi also had several carts and horses, and the horses were well looked after. He frequently bought and sold horses. What was most striking to the court about their lifestyle was that the defendants were used to sleeping on bare ground in the cold winter. The snow was piled up, straw was spread on the ground, and blankets and duvets were laid over them. They carried large quantities of underwear, which they did not wash but threw away at the campsite. The children did not go to school and the women of the family earned money by begging.

Some of the second group of defendants had served their compulsory military service and also worked seasonal jobs on a state farm. In this, he followed the example of his parents, who were Romas who led a partly settled lifestyle, working in the fields and tilling earth. Other defendants had a better family background, as their father owned a small house and a few acres of land. Although the house with a kitchen and a room was home to 20–30 people, it still allowed the accused to work as a labourer for a construction company and a crop-traffic company. The accused tried to settle down with his wife's family, but the Roma caravan proved to be more powerful. "It is a habit of Romas on the move that when an individual in their circle or kinship changes to a normal working life, they ignore this, go to him, invade his home en masse and try to involve him in committing crimes,"⁶ the court president concluded.

The third group was made up of those who "assisted" the Roma caravan's roving lifestyle. This included the defendant, whose farm was used to camp near the Roma caravan even before 1945. He also bought the stolen goods. Of course, he also had

⁶Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA, XXV. 4. a. 2809/1962.

an official source of livelihood, in the terminology of the time he was a middle class, and during the court proceedings he was already a member of the farmer's cooperative.

The court tried to map out the typical lifestyle of the caravan. One of the typical acts was theft of wood, which, in his opinion, was part of the caravan's way of life, which involved camping in the open air and starting fires. According to the court, in December 1959 and January 1960 the members of the caravan stole at least 50 hundredweight of wood. The defendants defended themselves by saying that they only obtained the wood by *gammosis* (putting a weight on the end of a long string and throwing it onto a tree branch so that the weight would twist over the branch and pull it down).

The other typical act was begging. It was a rule of the caravan way of life that women who were taken in had to beg. They would take an apron, sewn from several shawls, suitable for making *batyas*, and go to nearby farms and villages. They begged under the pretext of flood damage. To make it look official, they took a book with a red cover and wrote the donations in it. Two Roma women usually collected the food needed to sustain the whole caravan. The evening before the murder was described particularly vividly by the court, one of the women got a yellow hen, which they cooked and made *paprika* fries with. According to the graphic description, the hen was placed in the large pocket on the bottom of the skirt, which was worn in several layers, in accordance with Roma custom, and the Roma woman hid the item in such a way as to give the appearance of pregnancy.

However, the role of the woman in the life of the caravan was best summed up by the Supreme Court of Appeal.

"On the other hand, because among the Romas, a good "wife" is one who can be used for many things, such as stealing, pick-pocketing, fortune-telling, begging, fraud, in order to keep their partners in good health and to provide them with as much money as possible. This leads to the conclusion that Romas change their partners frequently, and this is particularly evident in the case of Tamás Rostás, who, according to his testimony, is only 29 years old but has already had more than 30 partners. The fact that he changed his partners in such large numbers suggests that they met the above requirements to a lesser or to no extent, or that he took another partner in the hope that she would be better able to meet the above requirements."⁷

Juveniles and children were also often forced to beg, often barefoot in the winter.

In particular, the court followed in detail the period from early November to 20 December 1959, which it treated as a distant precursor to the murder. During this period, the Roma caravan travelled along the Danube–Tisza, covering about 10 km a day. The long trek was not uneventful. The details of the description were intended to

⁷Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA, XXV. 4. a. 2809/1962.

show that the accused were leading a life of persistent crime, with no hope of recovery. The most horrific incident occurred in mid-November, when a member of the caravan gave birth to a child in the open air near the village of Gyál. But they continued to wander, despite the child falling ill. They were examined by a doctor, who prescribed medicine, but they continued wandering and the child died on 24 December (they did not take it to a doctor again). The dead child was buried on the night of 24 to 25 December, after having been carried for a day. They made a small depression in a hole in a tree and buried the child there. In relation to the death of the infant, the defence's position was that the defendants had not committed a crime because their conduct should be judged in the light of their own habits. According to the court, the defendants lived in a civilised society and knew the requirements of social coexistence. The ill-treatment of the children was the result of a vagabond lifestyle. According to the court, the main defendants deliberately sought to portray their criminal lifestyle as a way of life for the people, and to explain the authorities' action against vagrancy and crime as racism.

Similarly, the accident of an adult woman was not addressed. She was taken to the county hospital where she was fitted with a plaster cast and later ordered back for surgery, but she did not comply. The caravan sought to show irresponsibility by detailing the description of an accident in the judgment. The reasoning was that one of the members of the caravan was driving a light carriage (caisson) in poor condition, in which young foals about one year old were confined. The horses did not have a proper bridle, but only a halter made of rope without a bridle, which could not be used to control the horses. Fardi Rostás drove in the front of the road with his farm cart, followed by the caesar. He tried to overtake a motorbike from behind, the horses spooked, cut in front of the motorbike, the motorbike overturned into a ditch and the people on it were seriously injured. The caravan, however, continued on without helping the injured. The defendants defended themselves by claiming that the motorcyclists were drunk and that the police beat them on the spot. Subsequent court proceedings proved that the driver of the motorbike was the manager of a nearby distillery and had previously consumed brandy.

There was also a marriage in the farmhouse of Kiskunhalas between Lajos Rostás and Mária Jakab. In order to reveal the personal circumstances, the court detailed that this event brought to the surface a latent conflict because the parents were opposed to the marriage. The daughter was from a working Roma family, while the son came from a family of beggars and delinquents.

In its reasoning, the court pointed out that the first and second accused had repeatedly insinuated that they were being targeted for murder because they were of Roma origin, and that the crime was therefore the result of persecution against the Roma ethnic group. "The leading persons in this crime have developed and attained

the highest level of criminal determination, prudence and perseverance, determination, surprisingly keen criminality despite their otherwise low cultural standards and short temper, as demonstrated in the defendants' criminal acts and trial conduct,"⁸ the court said in a summary assessment of the defendants' defence. The court said its view was also supported by the fact that the county court, despite its best efforts, failed to clarify the defendants' personal circumstances accurately. The reason given for this was that the defendants considered crime as their only way of life and were geared up to fight the authorities, seeking to mislead them in every way. They also had to go through a lengthy evidentiary procedure to clarify personal details, and denied any father-son or brother relationship. They also kept their past secret, which could not be clarified in its own historical sequence. Another circumstance made it difficult to establish the exact circumstances, which the court described as being "linked to the peculiarities of higher nervous function." "Some facts were remembered with excellence, with a level of detail and acuity far exceeding that of the culture man, but in the field of abstract concepts their capacity for thought and perception was extremely deficient. Recording events in the order of calendar years was a problem."⁹ All this was established by the presiding judge without the involvement of a psychological expert.

The court dealt separately with the fact that the defendants claimed that they had been assaulted at the police station. The court, however, found this to be unfounded, arguing that the defendants were very often taken for on-the-spot checks in the presence of official witnesses, and that they looked healthy and were in good spirits, according to the official witnesses. One of the defendants stated that he had broken four stakes in his chest and was taken to the hospital, but the medical examination revealed only a bone swelling of old origin. Another defendant said that he had a facial laceration, was taken to hospital, but only a stone was cut open. There was also a much more serious accusation that police officers at the Kecskemét police station had had sex with a Roma woman, and Tamás Rostás said that the police had blamed her for the murder because she had shouted it out. The court found that this could not be true, because the Roma woman in question was not even detained at the police station. The abuses alleged by the defendants were not investigated on their merits. On the basis of the documents in the case file, the police simply accepted the allegation that everything the defendants claimed did not happen that way. The allegations of abuse of authority were made repeatedly and by several of the accused, yet no one from the police force was prosecuted. The appeal proceedings also clearly stated that the right of defence was seriously violated during the first instance proceedings.

⁸ Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA, XXV. 4. a. Criminal case files of the Metropolitan Court. 2809/1962.

⁹ Lajos Rostás and his associates: BCA, XXV. 4. a. Criminal case files of the Metropolitan Court. 2809/1962.

The court weighed everything and decided to impose the most severe sentence, as in its opinion the defendants were criminal in all respects and did not show any signs of shock. There is no hope of them changing their ways, so the most severe sentence is inevitable. The same applies to the need to prevent and deter criminal elements who are ready to commit any act of depravity. The prosecutor, however, did not even consider this severity enough, as he asked for the death penalty to be imposed on five more defendants.

Result of the appeal

However, the defendants' appeal brought about a significant change, as in February 1962 the Supreme Court overturned the verdict and ordered a new trial. The County Court found such serious defects in the proceedings that it appointed the Metropolitan Court to conduct the new trial. The most serious errors were found in the conduct of the trial and the minutes. In its judgment, the county court failed to question the defendants in connection with each of the charges and failed to give them the opportunity to present their defences in connection with each of them. The trial transcript is very detailed, but there are many irrelevant details which make it difficult to read. The judgement is also often incomprehensible, but the more serious problem is that the court, in its judgement, lists the evidence but does not indicate on which evidence it based its judgement. In order to protect the defendants, the Supreme Court found that their rights of defence had been seriously infringed because they had been defended by different lawyers on each day of the trial, which lasted six months, and they were probably not familiar with the whole trial file. It is also likely that the mandatory defence was only formal. This procedure was not challenged by the court and no action was taken to change it. The reasoning regarding the offence on which the death penalty was based was found to be particularly problematic by the Supreme Court. In the case of murder, it was considered that it was unclear which of the accused had raised the idea of robbing the elderly woman, and how it could be inferred that they knew that an old woman with a lot of money lived in Dunavecse. He found it unrealistic and did not see any evidence that the accused had agreed on a precise date, time and place to meet a month in advance. The court only inferred back. They did not clarify the defendants' statement that they were near Bugyi (60–70 km from Dunavecse) between 16 and 20 January. It was not clarified where they were before and after the murder, what route they took to the scene and how they left. One year after the incident, police witnesses were questioned about whether they had seen the accused in Bugyi village. Several times the court ordered investigations and evidence, but the decision was taken by the president of the council, not the court. In fact,

the president prejudiced the inquiry by taking a position on the relevant issues. The witnesses also gave differing testimonies about the weather conditions, so it needs to be clarified to what extent this corresponds to what the Meteorological Institute wrote. It is necessary to find out how long it took the Romas to cover the distance between Bugyi and Dunavecse with their carriages and horses in winter on frozen ground. The court based the facts of the murder and robbery on the defendants' confessions at the inquest, and there was no additional evidence. There are circumstances that are inconsistent with normal life experience and logic that the court did not resolve. There is no justification for the first defendant's financial distress in purchasing the property. Therefore, it is unlikely that he mobilised the whole caravan in order to make money. They searched the premises for the money without being very upset and left several valuable items behind. They arrived at the scene of the crime from a very long distance, not knowing whether the woman would be alone and whether they would be able to carry out the act. The circumstances surrounding the crime must be clarified.

On 11 October 1963, the Metropolitan Court of Justice handed down its judgment acquitting the defendants, who had previously been sentenced to death and life imprisonment, of the crime of murder committed with premeditation and with particular cruelty for profit. The defendants were found guilty only of lesser offences, the most serious sentence being eight years' imprisonment.

During the trial, sensationalist articles appeared in both the local and national press from September 1960. The press was horrified to write about the murder in their articles, and the news of the death sentence in the first instance was reported in several places. However, I have not been able to find any report on the acquittal of the retrial. In addition to the description of the events, one of the articles, written by Irénée Peruy, was educational and entitled *The case of Fardi Rostás and its lessons*.¹⁰ The political article, which emphasised the legality of the court proceedings, said that the punishment for Romas who had converted to a working lifestyle was much lighter. "The county court's verdict made an exemplary distinction between the most vicious criminals, on the one hand, and the Romas, on the other, who were prone to crime because of their centuries-old lifestyle and social status, but who had already made friends with the working life of a civilised man, and those who had converted to a life of work. This separating task, the education of the Romas to a working, honest way of life, is the task of our whole society and it is certain that the weed, which is growing again and again, will sooner or later be suppressed by the noble plant: the rise of the Romas to a cultured level of life."

The article in *Rendőrségi Szemle* (Police Review), written by Police Major Bertalan Mág and Police Lieutenant Zoltán Garamvölgyi, was exclusively for a professional

¹⁰ *Petőfi Népe*. July 6, 1961.

audience.¹¹ The article described the circumstances of the incident in detail, including police photos of the crime scene. It analysed the investigation. The personality and living conditions of the victim were mentioned as a starting point. He considered the first version to be that the murderer was one of the victim's or her husband's enemies, while the second version was that it could have been a sexually motivated act. The third version, which quickly became clear, was a murder for financial gain. The police followed this lead by trying to check known offenders in the area, but, as the authors critically note, the inadequacy of law enforcement work and records meant that this was not successful for a long time. It was only after several months that the Romas roaming the area came into the picture. Suspicions were raised in earnest when people living in the area said that a member of the group had told them about the murder on the day after it took place. The police started the interrogation with the "rookie criminals", used the information they had from them to find the others and gave a detailed account of the events during the interrogation. The article clarifies that the investigative work was based on the confessions. According to the authors, the police found the perpetrators beyond any doubt. For them, the case was clear for almost a year before the court verdict.

The court proceedings analysed above illustrate the stereotypes of the authorities involved in the administration of justice in Hungary in the late 1950s. The court's judgment almost echoes the viewpoint of the political leadership, as expressed by Lajos Czinege: "the majority of the Roma live essentially on the periphery of society, or often live on the margins. Most of them do not work regularly, some of them are engaged in traditional Roma occupations..."¹² According to the political leadership, the solution to the problem was to break up the archaic way of life of the Roma and put them into forced labour. For a long time in the 1950s, the party had no official policy on the Roma and no unified public position. The MDP's leading bodies finally took up the issue of the Roma in 1956, after receiving submissions from both the Ministry of National Education and the National Police Headquarters. The Party's competent department edited the proposals into a single submission, in which the notion of 'Roma criminality', stereotypes about the Roma community and the idea of dispersal recurred again and again. Typically, the document described the situation of the Roma in general terms: "The majority of the Roma live on the periphery of society, and often live on the margins."¹³ In June 1961, for the first time, the party's supreme leadership formulated a unified position on the situation of the Roma population. For the first time, a decision of the Political

¹¹ Mág-Garamvölgyi 1960: 831–842.

¹² Proposal to the Political Committee for the Settlement of the Gypsy Question in Hungary. HNA [HNA = Hungarian National Archives], M-KS-276. f [f = fond]. 91. 85, p.u [p.u = preservation unit].

¹³ Submission by the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party to the Political Committee regarding the Settlement of the Gypsy Question in Hungary. Budapest, April 9, 1956. HNA, M-KS 276. f. 91/85. p.u.

Committee of the MSZMP indicated the need to move beyond the simple stereotype of ‘Roma crime’ and to make the ‘Roma question’ a social policy issue.¹⁴

Fate of women

The documents testify to the situation of Roma women in the community. They show that their position as women was not as subordinate as the descriptions on the pages of the Aspects of Power, or at least not radically different from when they lived in the so-called socialist society. This is also reflected in the fact that many people who were not previously members of the community joined the travelling group by their own choice. These narratives also show that the Traveller communities were in dynamic contact with Roma groups considered ‘downtrodden’ by the authorities, and even with mainstream society, with whom they shared a sense of exclusion and with whom they had almost daily contact. This calls into question the contemporary discourse that presented them as representatives of the world before socialist modernity.

Gizella Patai came to the caravan from a settled family with an acceptable lifestyle according to the norms of the authorities, and was later prosecuted simply because the authorities condemned the lifestyle of the caravan members on the basis of their own criteria. Her words reveal that she was an abandoned wife, a single woman trying to find a new companion, and that she joined the community through her new partner. This is how she told the trial about her decision:

“Neither my brother, nor my father, nor my mother have ever been punished and if Thomas hadn’t married me and taken me wandering, I wouldn’t have been in this situation either.

I only got together with Tamás because my Roma husband István Kolompár left me and married someone else, and I was bitter about it, and that’s when Tamás approached me and was able to win me over.

When Tamás married me, there was no question of wandering around with him, because when he married István Radics, he and I stayed with Tamás for 3 weeks.

My mother asked me not to go anywhere with Tamás, but I was a young girl and reckless and disobeyed my parents, who only gave me good advice. My father and brother were not at home when I left with Tamás, but were working honestly on the state farm in Solti.”¹⁵

Her own account reflects the fact that, although he recounted his story at the trial in order to get a lighter sentence, she also recounted it from the point of view of power

¹⁴ Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. HNA, M-KS-288. f. 5/1961/233. p. u.

¹⁵ Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA, XXV. 4. a. 2809/1962.

(that the caravan's itinerant lifestyle was reprehensible, but that the work done in the state economy was valuable). At the same time, however, she makes it clear that in his own personal life, the decision to join the travelling community was based on emotion. Presumably, she saw life for her new companion and the caravan differently when she joined the community than did the representatives of the communist authorities.

Ilona Jakab was accused of stealing small objects. She had left her own community and tried to find a livelihood in the majority society. She took a job as a housewife with a man and received small objects as gifts. The man's wife later accused him of theft. The illiterate woman's words were recorded at the police station, so we can learn about the events of her life from her point of view.

"I come from a gypsy family. My parents were casual workers. My father has been working at the Solti State Farm for about 3 years. I understand that he is currently a night watchman. Before liberation they had no property. In 1959 my father purchased half an acre of vineyard property. During his lifetime he was generally engaged in tilling earth.

I have also been involved in tile work. I also used to do seasonal work on the state farm in Solti. I have 6 brothers and sisters. The eldest is 29 years old and works in the forestry farm in Jana. The youngest is 1 year old. I currently have 3 brothers and sisters living in my parents' household. The others are partly married and partly unmarried. They are usually engaged in casual work.

I married Peter Sztojka for the first time in 1954, when I was 13 years old. In the meantime I had divorced him and was living with a Roma called Anti. More recently, I have gone back to Sztojka and I am still living with him.

As a result of my marriage, I never had children.

I didn't go to school, so I am completely illiterate.

In 1958 I worked as an agricultural labourer on the Solti State Farm. It was during this time that I met a man called Márton Burgulya, who was working as an animal supervisor on the Solti State Farm.

On one occasion in the summer of 1958, Márton Burgulya asked me if I would like to go to her house for 3 months to do the housework. At the same time, he told me that his wife had been taken to the hospital in Freestadt, so that he was unable to do housework and look after his children. I discussed this with my father, who worked there, and he agreed that I should go to Márton Burgulya. After that I went and worked for him, cleaning, looking after the children, cooking, washing, etc. In general, I did what I usually did around the house."¹⁶

¹⁶ Lajos Rostás and his associates. BCA, XXV. 4. a. Criminal case files of the Metropolitan Court. 2809/1962.

Her story shows that there were those who joined the caravan because in reality socialist society did not offer a livelihood, an existence to Roma, especially Roma women, and they faced prejudice and exclusion in their everyday lives as Roma and as women.

Conclusion

The Party Resolution set out specific tasks for the authorities in relation to the uplift of the Roma. The courts were not among those targeted by the political authorities, but it is possible that it had an impact on the conduct of the Supreme Court's appeal proceedings.

As for the source value of the court documents, I see them as providing important data for the historian, but it is important to be aware of the contradictions and gaps in the documents. Litigation in the state socialist period is characterised by fact-finding in accordance with socialist ideology in relation to a particular act. The verdict in the case of the accused was significantly influenced by the extent to which the personality of the accused corresponded to these expectations. If you were of working-class peasant origin, which was a fundamental value in the system, you were treated more leniently. With regard to members of the Roma community, the authorities did not really find such a "value". The information gathered on their way of life confirmed to the authorities that the efforts made after 1945 to force the members of the community into a settled and working life were ineffective. For the authorities, the traditional forms of livelihood that provided a livelihood for members of the Roma community did not fit the socialist ideal. It is also clear that the vulnerability and powerlessness of the Roma in the official process was particularly evident during the investigation. This bias is clearly reflected in the cases presented and in the press and journals of the period.

Court documents containing personal narratives not only provide insights into the lives of Roma people as a minority social group, but also into the everyday realities of coexistence with the majority society. Contrary to the stereotypes often conveyed by sources produced by state authorities at the time, Roma testimonies make it clear that, in many cases, Roma individuals integrated into the life of small communities without conflict. The case study also demonstrates that Roma women developed their own life strategies despite their vulnerable position. Some assumed roles within the Roma community to earn a livelihood, while others found their place in local society by working for majority families. Ethnographic sources may be used alongside court and party records, but they offer insights into specific groups and cases and cannot serve as a basis for generalisation.

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