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**Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fire? From Municipal
Lords to the Global Assembly Lines – Roma
Experiences of Social Im/Mobility Through Migration
From North Hungary**

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Abstract

This article argues that an essential role that economically backward regions from Hungary play in the global economy is to provide a cheap, flexible and expendable labour force. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, it explores the multi-directional cross-border movement of this labour force, and in particular, that of low-skilled Roma people.

It demonstrates how these seemingly resourceless transnational migrants use their almost only capital: their kinship network as a resource, and ‘rumour publics’ as a strategy to manoeuvre in the ‘one-world capitalism’ in order to pursue a better life, or what they consider socio-economic mobility. This paper claims that while the dominant political and public discourse in Britain and Canada sees precarious migration as a problem, these undesired, low-skilled migrants, through their flexible and cheap labour, contribute to the increase of global capital. They cannot be considered, however, passive victims of capitalist forces, but rather active social actors who find some space for manoeuvring and ‘getting by’, even achieving socio-economic betterment for their households while navigating unequal global power structures.

Keywords: spatial and social mobility, transnational migration, recurring mobilities, roma, precarious migrants, Canada, England.

1. Introduction

Since 2011, and the beginning of mass out-migration from Hungary, labelled a new ‘exodus’ in the national media, at least half of the local inhabitants of Peteri, a North Hungarian, economically disadvantaged small town of almost 10,000 dwellers, has experienced work-related, trans-national mobility.¹ According to our household survey conducted during the last three years, 80 per cent of local households have at least one member who has practised various modes of spatial mobility during the last ten years, with the aim of generating income when opportunities were scarce in the local labour market. Even those poor with low (primary) schooling and no command of any foreign languages of whom textbooks and courses on migration studies speak as resourceless to migrate (Castles and Miller, 2009; Melegh, 2013), began to exercise mobility: mostly transnationally, across national borders. These migrants seem to be invisible not only in the context of national survey results in Hungary - according to which the young, educated and professionally or vocationally qualified part of the Hungarian population make the most out of the country’s emigrants (Blaskó and Gödri, 2014; 2016) - but their movement remained broadly unrecognised by their local governments. In 2013, when I began my ethnographic research in Peteri, by then half of the “Gypsy colony” (a segregated settlement on the outskirts of the town with almost 4000 inhabitants) had left for Canada, Toronto. In an interview, the local mayor tried to convince me that his town was not the best site for my research on migration as there was no significant movement there:

‘Have you not yet been to the Gypsy colony?’² How do you think these poor people can find the means to finance their trans-Atlantic travel and then find a way of livelihood when they can hardly make ends meet at home? When most of them have no more school than eight grades (finished primary school), they do not speak any languages, and they do not even know how to get to Miskolc, Búza Square?’³

The very few persons in the local establishment in the town who showed any sign of awareness of the transnational mobility of the local populations were the headmasters of the local primary schools, but only in respect to the ‘problem’ caused by pupils from the precarious, Roma returnees:

‘Yes, I can confirm that there are a few families here from the Gypsy colony who tried to migrate to Canada. But it proved to be an unsuccessful story. After a year, or two or sometimes three, they all came back to Peteri. And what did they bring home with them? Nothing. The only thing they managed to achieve with this

¹ All names, both settlements’ and people’s, used in this paper are pseudonyms. When referring to the local communities, both in Peteri and its neighbouring villages or small towns, I use the terminology employed by the locals themselves. In this region where there is a strong binary social order between Roma and non-Roma population, those who are labelled as Roma according to the politically correct language used across the European Union, refer to themselves as Gypsy (*Cigány*), and everybody else - that is non-Gypsies (*Gádzsó*) - as Hungarian (*Magyar*). The distinction between the categories ‘Gypsy’ and (non-Gypsy) ‘Hungarian’ has until now been one of the main rules governing interaction and determining social position in rural societies such as Peteri, in Hungary (Horváth, 2012; Kovai, 2018).

² Segregated Roma settlements are called ‘Gypsy colonies’ (*cigánytelep*) by Roma and non-Roma locals in this town.

³ Búza square (*Búza tér*) is a well-known assembly place, only 15 kilometres away from Peteri, where, among others, informal workers meet their work recruiters for casual labour in the region.

migration is that their children missed one or two, or sometimes three years of schooling. Because even if they went to school in Canada, they came home by knowing nothing. So, we must put them back in the class that they left from. For example, if a child left our school finishing Year Five⁴ and went with her family to Canada, on her return let's say after three years, we have to put her back in Year Six, among 12-year-old pupils, even if she is 15 (years old). It gives a lot of headache for our teachers how to teach these overaged children. The Hungarians are more forward thinking. In Hungarian families, it is only the father who goes abroad, mainly to Germany to work. The mother stays behind with the children. In this way, the education career of these kids does not get interrupted.⁵

In this paper I explore the almost 'invisible', mainly work-related or income-generating, multi-directional geographical mobility of the local populations. I argue that instead of the well-established category of 'circular migration' that is used in the case of many Roma groupings of different countries (Grill, 2015; Sardelic, 2017), we should call the multi-directional, transnational movement of our Hungarian Roma (and sometimes non-Roma) networks from this region as recurring mobilities (Limmer et al., 2010).⁵ Many of these people are of precarious social standing – income poor, 'unskilled' (according to the category of the formal labour market) with low formal education and no vocational training. I show how these seemingly resourceless transnational 'migrants' (or rather mobile labourers) use their almost only capital, their kinship network as a resource and 'rumour publics' as a strategy to manoeuvre under conditions of uncertainty, both in the sending and receiving localities, and under unequal circumstances of domination in the globalised economy, or as Hann and Hart call it, in the "one-world capitalism" (Hann and Hart, 2011: 142). I demonstrate how they organise their economic lives in societies in which the future has become synonymous with transnational mobility (Narotzky and Besnier, 2014; Pine, 2014). I argue that work-related spatial mobility is an act of hope (Pine, 2014), a last resort for those who perceive that the field of opportunities in their home societies does not make possible to live a viable 'economic' life. Here economic (*oikonomia*) is understood in its original meaning of the 'government of the household' and field of opportunities 'refer to a set of possibilities and constraints that define at a given moment the conditions for life' (L'Estoila, 2014).

After analysing the multi-directional, transnational mobility trajectories of the people from the North Hungarian region to England as EU citizens and to Canada as asylum-seekers, and having explored the role of various factors, among others ethnic capital (Portes, 1998) in the form of kinship networks, facilitating this geographical movement, I turn my attention to the outcomes of their spatial mobility in terms of social mobility. Although social mobility is best understood as a longer temporal process, highly structured by class, race and gender (Cohen et al. 2012), and is measured by standard sociological indicators, such as advancement in level of occupation and income (in the case of intragenerational mobility), I take social mobility in this paper as it is understood by my interlocutors. In their perception, it is about the search for opportunities, money-making possibilities, but more general, as

⁴ As children start primary school in Hungary mostly at age six in Year One, by Year Five they are 11 years old.

⁵ See also Pontrandolfo (2018) on 'multifocal migration'.

they put it, ‘advancing in one’s life’ or ‘making a step further’ (materially and socially) and to achieve a ‘good life’ for their families and a ‘better future for their children’.

For analytical purposes, I differentiate the outcome of their social mobility by using the concept of ‘getting by’ (in respect of the social and material well-being of the household) and ‘getting ahead’. In development studies, ‘getting by’ refers to (at least) restoring the social base of displaced household, meanwhile ‘getting ahead’ relates to improvement of its social position (World Bank, 2001; Quetulio-Navarra et al., 2017). Anthropologists argue that in post-socialist Europe, for the abandoned socialist working class, which many of my interlocutors belong to, getting by, or ‘the ability of making a livelihood by surviving and thriving in spite of reduced resources and under circumstances of uncertainty’ (Kideckel, 2008, in: Pulay, 2017) is the only opportunity at disposal. Many people in precarious social status in North Hungary see cross-border mobility as the only way not only to get by but even to get ahead, that is, advancing in one’s life under these circumstances.

However, as the ethnographic cases in this paper demonstrate, the chances of getting ahead through transnational movement are conditioned by many intersecting factors. In the case of my interlocutors, the most important ones are the: 1) different regimes of mobility politics (Glick-Schiller and Salazar, 2013), along with the non/presence of anti-Gypsyism in the destination societies (Pontrandolfo, 2018); 2) the demand and structure of the localised global labour market 3) and the original social positions, attitude and social capital, migrants bring with them to their new localities. The analysis of the empirical material, divided in three sections, serves to illustrate the working of these factors.

2. Theoretical framework: Mobility regimes and social transformations affecting the Roma

The term ‘regimes of mobility’ (Salazar and Glick-Schiller, 2013) was coined as a refinement of the mobility turn paradigm (Urry, 2012) which, according to its critics, with the emphasis on fluidity and the free flow of people and goods across national borders in a globalised economy, does not reflect geopolitical relations between sending and host countries. Proponents of the regimes of mobility approach, in contrast, draw attention to the several intersecting regimes of mobility that normalises the movement of some sojourners while criminalising and hindering the ventures of others (Glick-Schiller and Salazar, 2013). In his paper on the implications of the mobility-ridden life of a Chinese transnational migrant worker in Israel, and by investigating the link between his subject’s spatial and social mobility, Barak (2013) calls for research projects which ‘study human mobility holistically, privilege the perspective of moving subjects, and explore the impact of movement on the lived realities of involved actors’ (Ibid., 2013: 56). By following this thread of enquiry and by interrogating the multi-directional transnational mobility trajectories of different social networks from Peteri, and from the surrounding villages, this paper attempts to illustrate the consequences of these movements for the mobile people’s and their families. There is burgeoning academic literature on Roma transnational mobilities, which rejects the hegemonic and homogenising distorted notions of Romani migration, widespread in European public discourse (Kóczé, 2017), and more and

more research findings indicate that different Roma networks' westward transnational migration from CEE countries can best be described as labour migration (Vidra, 2013; Grill, 2015; Váradi et al., 2017; Virág, 2018; Yildiz and de Genova, 2017; Leggio and Matras, 2017; Greenfields and Dagilyte, 2018). However, there is still little knowledge on 'invisible', transnationally mobile Roma workers, even if the number of such workers have been growing in the last decade. Slovakian Roma from Tarkovce, such as my studied networks from Peteri, go to England's urban cities to 'fixing up money' (Grill, 2015) through combining wage labour and informal income generating works. Even those Roma from Hungary, who tried to start a new life as asylum seekers in Canada, whilst also fleeing from structural and institutional racism (Feischmidt and Szombati 2017; Vidra, 2013), labour market discrimination (Kertesi, 2005) and hatred incidents in Hungary from around 2010, the period of the Roma serial killings in some Hungarian rural settlements, take up casual work on top of welfare benefits, which they are entitled to as refugees (Kovats, 2002; Hajnal, 2012; Vidra, 2013; Vidra and Virág, 2013; Durst, 2013). However, up till now, there is very little literature focusing on the transnationally mobile Roma workers who join other CEEs precarious labour migrant's flow as a response to globalisation, under circumstances of opening up the global economy (Melegh et al., 2018).

3. Research methods and the field

Pursuing the anthropological thread of following mobility trajectories and by studying our moving subjects, I have over the past three years pinpointed the two most typical and widespread mobility routes of people from Peteri and its surrounding settlements to their destinations in Canada and in the UK: Toronto and Manchester.

The empirical findings and the argumentation of the paper benefits from a mixed method, but mainly ethnographic research: apart from a household survey, I carried out several short-term participant observations fieldwork, both in the sending locality (Peteri) and in the receiving ones (Toronto and Manchester). I also conducted 120 narrative life trajectory interviews with transnational migrants, returned to Peteri, or relocated either in Toronto or Manchester.

The value of this ethnographic case study approach lies in its heuristic character. Although the empirical findings of this paper are only valid for the studied social and spatial context, its relevance stems from its explorative nature. As Eysenck (1976) revealingly argued, 'sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything but rather in the hope of learning something' (Ibid., 1976: 9, in: Flyvbjerg, 2006: 224).

In the economically disadvantaged region of North Hungary, Borsod county, amongst whom are those from the rural town of Peteri where official unemployment rate is around 20 per cent, during the past ten years, people have started to practice a work-related mobile life. In what follows, I depict and interpret three typical spatial mobility trajectories of mobile workers from Peteri and from the neighbouring settlements to illustrate the most common ways in which these seemingly resourceless people's agency variously respond to the shrinking opportunities in their home country and to the shifting mobility regimes in their destination societies to make a living for their family. This article provides what is lacking so far: an ethnographic

account of different geographical mobility trajectories of those ‘invisible migrants’ who are considered welfare dependent or, ‘superfluous mass’ on the imagined body of both sending and receiving societies (Nagy and Oude-Breuil, 2015).

4. The role of kinship and rumour publics in asylum seeking in Canada

Harney (2006, in: Humphris, 2017) calls unsubstantiated information, true or untrue, that passes by word of mouth (see also: Stewart and Strathern, 2004): ‘rumour publics’. By circulating news obtained from those already migrated, through social media, personal encounters and gossip, individualised understanding, discourses and experiences of formal and informal income generating opportunities abroad, and most importantly, how to navigate the labyrinth of the refugee claimant process in Canada (or how to find jobs and housing support in the UK), it creates hope, migratory imaginaries and aspirations for potential migrants, in a context of uncertainty and lack of formal news. The news is subjectively evaluated against standards of experience, knowledge and the trust in or prestige of those from whom one receives them (de Certeau, 1984, in: Humphris, 2017). These rumours also offer models for income earning strategies and entrepreneurial activities to be longed for, mimicked, or condemned.

Public rumour and how truth claims are incorporated into a system of beliefs takes on particular significance in the context of new Roma refugees/migrants (many are illiterate in English and therefore cannot have access via formal information) in an uncertain situation created by a fluid and changing refugee policy in Canada (or immigration policy in England, see: Humphris, 2017) as we will see in the case of Jani and his family in Toronto. Here, rumour publics is about how to play the game of institutions (Clave-Mercier and Olivera, 2018) that aim at getting rid of ‘undesirable’ migrants/refugees and how people adapt to structural constraints, for example, different regimes of mobility/refugee policy, and any forms of power inequality.

Since 2008, due to institutionalised discrimination and organised hate crimes, thousands of Hungarian Roma have fled to Canada to claim refugee status in the hope of a better life (Kovats, 2002; Vidra, 2013). In 2012-2013, to discourage the Roma’s flee to Canada, there was a substantial reform to the refugee determination system, in addition to some actions aimed specifically at the Eastern European Roma (Levine-Rasky, 2016), who, in the political discourse, were accused of being ‘bogus refugees’, or ‘economic refugees’, who ‘came to Canada to abuse the generous welfare provisions of the country’ (Levine-Rasky, 2012) and all that those with refugee status are entitled to.⁶ This discourse was widespread in the media, despite well-respected emigration lawyers trying to convince the public that there is no such a category. “The concept of economic refugee does not make sense to me”, argued one of them to me in an interview. “When someone is discriminated against on the labour market in his home country because of his darker skin, I take it as structural racism. This person has to flee as he cannot make a living for his family from legal work.”

⁶ The essence of the change was the introduction of the Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) list, on which Hungary was among the ‘safe’ countries where no one should flee from for political reasons. In the new Refugee Convention, since 2012, the Safe Countries list was particularly moulded against the putative ‘bogus refugees’ from CEE countries – the majority of them being Roma (Levine-Rasky, 2016).

In order to discourage ‘undeserving’ refugees/migrants to move to the country, the Canadian government tried to encourage unwanted groups to leave ‘by choice’.⁷ With the introduction of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program in 2012, Canada paid thousands of Roma 2,000 Canadian Dollars per family to abandon their refugee appeals and leave the country.⁸ Citizens of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Slovakia made up 61 per cent of the total of people in the programme: 1,800 by March 2013, according to the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB 2014), which was cancelled after a year.

Despite the new legislation, Hungarian Roma have been continuing their transnational mobility towards Canada, facilitated by their well embedded social ties, kinship networks, and also through their strategy of spreading news through their networks about new possibilities and how to navigate a shifting refugee system.⁹ An important part of the rumours distributing in the last few years, since the introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), which serves as another device in the new mobility regime that impedes the mobility of unwanted refugees/migrants (Ciaschi, 2018), is to advise new migrants which route they should take on their way to Canada. From Peteri, there were a few Roma families who were taken off their flights (despite their valid tickets and ETA) in a transit country (among others in Amsterdam and in Frankfurt) by Canadian emigration officers, without any acceptable explanation. The new Canadian government, which is very proud of being a tolerant, welcoming and liberal governor of this multicultural country, is turning a blind eye to this overtly racial sorting of undesired refugees on their way to Canada.

Hungarian Roma refugees from Peteri, who have long been socialised in their home country as to how to navigate through unfavourable circumstances and constantly changing legal systems, have also been sharing news and information within their social networks (and through their ‘disposable ties’ (Desmond, 2012) with relevant social workers and interpreters) about what elements a successful refugee story should contain. To avoid refusal of their asylum claims, they learn to innovatively manipulate the descriptions of their social circumstances, the reasons they fled from their home society, and they (re)construct their ‘stories’ according to the favoured profiles by the judges who decide their fate: whether they can stay in Canada by providing them permanent residence status or whether they need to return home by rejecting their refugee claims. Most of my interlocutors in Canada have been in the precarious, vulnerable refugee claimant’s position for many years, anxiously waiting for the hearing process that will determine their fate. This precarity was caused by the liminality of their legal status: they were (or have been) constantly on the verge of being rendered illegal and hence subject to deportability (Sardelic, 2017; de Genova, 2005; Tóth, 2013).

⁷ In the context of the UK, Greenfields and Dagilyte (2018) and Nagy and Oude-Breuil (2016: 540) report about the same logic of the social workers used for getting rid of unwanted Eastern European Roma migrants through the mechanism of ‘governing by choice’ (Aas and Bosworth, 2013).

⁸ Although critics warned that the program takes advantage of people’s poverty, Roma ‘beneficiaries’ from Peteri, regarded it as another ‘generosity’ form the Canadian government.

⁹ Along with other research findings from Hungary (Kállai, 2002; Hajnal 2012), my interlocutors do not trust media or any formal, official news but only personal communication through their network.

Jani moved to Canada with his wife and his two little children as an asylum seeker in 2011, along with a big wave of many other low-skilled, low-educated Roma families from Northern Hungary and in particular, from Peteri and Miskolc. His story about why he decided to follow his network to Toronto, is a case in point that illustrates the validity of the network theory for Hungarian Roma which shows that migration decisions are taken trans-locally through social networks (informed and less informed choices on migration) (Massey et al., 1998; Hajnal, 2012; Virág, 2018) or through one's 'migration bubble' (*migrációs burok*, see: Sík, 2004). That is how Jani recalled this when I first met him:

“At that time, the whole Gypsy colony was full of news from their Roma kin, who had made a better life and good money in Canada. The news spread on Facebook that there are plenty of occasional jobs, that you can earn even a 100,000 forints in a week if you work. That was the time when both my wife and I lost our father. We told ourselves, what could we lose? Even if only we earn that money, we can repair the roof of our house at home. By that time, we ourselves experienced many racist incidents, so like many of us in the settlement, we had enough of being Gypsy in Hungary. So, we took our chance.”

Jani had to wait for seven years until he, his wife and their two children were granted residential status, after their refugee claims were twice rejected on the first and second level of the legal procedure. This was a final victory, in which a well-established emigration lawyer's firm and especially their emigration advisor of Hungarian origin, the by then much-respected Nicole who specialised in the case of the Hungarian refugees, have had a huge part.

When I first went to Toronto, in 2012, Jani's wife, who hosted me for my then one-month fieldwork, anxiously spoke to me about them living in two suitcases during the whole previous year, waiting for the result of their refugee appeal as a last-ditch attempt at not being deported out of the country:

“Judit, I swear this is about our life. If the judges believe our story – which as you know is all true – okay, with a bit of an exaggeration [...] then we can stay in Canada and I can give better opportunities to my kids to have a better life than we had at home. But if they do not believe it [...] On our second hearing, the judge asked me the weirdest question, how can I prove that I am Gypsy when he looks darker than me [...] He asked me whether I can do Gypsy dance¹⁰ [...] I cannot even think of what is awaiting us if we'll be sent back home [...] We discussed it several times with my wife that we need to go on to a different country then [...] most probably to England as many of our Roma friends did – because there is no life, no future in Hungary for a Roma. If they see your dark skin, then all job vacancies immediately are told to be filled up [...] Security guards in the shops follow you as if all Roma were thieves. Policemen stop you with your car, or even when just walking on the wrong side of the

¹⁰ Some non-Roma Hungarian use the strategy of making use of the situation of Roma in Hungary by deceitfully reporting themselves as of Roma origin. Although they are few in numbers, their deceitful strategy even more confuses the judges' decision-making process which is revolving around the question – for a Canadian a very difficult one – who is Roma and on what conditions can someone be considered Roma? Their limited knowledge about these people is centred around the common narrative in which 'Roma's bodies are historically marked by their racialised darkness' (Grill, 2017). In this real-life, Canadian context, it is not an academic constructivist question, but it has life-defining real stake, who is considered a real Gypsy by the judges.

street – here it is different. You are not a Gypsy here but a human being, you are considered a Hungarian.”

41-year-old Jani, who used to work in a manufacturing factory as a semi-skilled labourer before he moved to Canada with his family, cannot imagine his life anymore in Hungary. His social position, however, is still precarious, especially now when he has used up all his savings for paying lawyers, interpreters and settling the costs of all official documents necessary to fully acquiring his residency right. Although he does not see a chance to advance his occupational position in the Canadian labour market, due to his low educational credentials and his limited English-speaking skills (with these, he can easily get by in Toronto though, as he works and socialises among his Roma friends and other Hungarian refugees), he feels content. In Toronto, with the help of his Roma networks, he retrained to be a painter and has recently been working as a casual worker on different construction projects for a fellow Hungarian entrepreneur. On days when he is not called for work, he goes to collect scrap metal – a relatively good but incalculable income-earning economic strategy among Hungarian Roma refugees:

“If I’m able to work six days a week, I can earn around 750 dollars, clear money. It means I leave the house 9 am and come home by 11 pm. But it’s still worth it. When would you be able to earn this money (210,000 HUF weekly) in Hungary, with no vocational training?”

He often proudly said to me while I was living with his family, that here, unlike at home, he “can buy everything what the kids need. You see, our fridge is always full, my wife can cook the Sunday lunch even out of three kilograms of meat. We can live much better here.”

He also emphasises, however, that this (in material sense) better life came with a huge price. For seven years, he and his children could only see and talk to their families through Skype and on Facebook. Jani painfully realised how much he and his children missed his mother when she was allowed to visit them after they were granted ‘land’ [landed resident status]. He recalled his feeling of loss last time, when I visited them in June this year. ‘We have gone along a long way, we got the land and can stay in Canada. That’s what we were dreaming of during those last seven years. But when my mother came to visit us last December, it struck me how much we have lost. My children have missed the love of their grandmother, and their other close kin. We do not have a Christmas, a birthday when we can celebrate happily. Money is good, but it doesn’t make you happy.’¹¹

When I asked Jani about his perception of how his spatial move entangled with his social mobility, it was obvious that this is a complex and ambivalent relationship. On the positive side of the scale is his satisfaction that with this move, he managed to escape from his and his family’s ‘racial stuckedness’ which significantly curbed his

¹¹ This feeling of loss and the guilt coming with it, is very common among the Hungarian Roma refugees in Toronto. One of Jani’s friend recalled me how deeply conflicted he was when his beloved mother got fatally ill and he realised that he cannot even go back home to Hungary to the funeral, without losing the chance that his family’s refuge claim will be finally granted. He only found a little relief in that that his mother’s wish was him staying in Canada for the future of his family. Although he settled all costs of the funeral and watched it through Skype video, even after four years he keeps talking about this loss as one of the biggest prices of moving to Canada.

advancement in his home society. In a material sense, he is also able to provide a better life for his family – they sometimes go for a picnic or fishing at the weekends with his Roma friends, to beaches around Toronto, even to the Niagara Falls – all of which he would have never dreamt of before, from his segregated Roma settlement. It makes him happy to be able to show his children that there is a better, ‘big world’ outside the ghetto, where most of his relatives’ lives are confined in Hungary. However, the most important outcome of his spatial move to him is that both of his kids learnt fluent English in their schools, and that hopefully, in a multi-ethnic society like Canada: ‘their Gypsiness will not hinder them to find and take a job they want to do, unlike in Hungary.’

On the negative side of the scale, however, are his feelings of the loss of their close relatives. Sometimes he ponders about his Roma acquaintances, who left Canada after a period of working here for one and a half or two years (the average time the Roma from Peteri spent in Toronto, according to our survey), and who saved up enough money to buy or refurbish their houses in their hometown, and then moved onto England, again, temporarily, to make money. Perhaps, this would have been a better choice with a more positive outcome for his and his extended family?

Jani’s case supports the commonly accepted thesis that for the low-skilled poor, social capital (here in the form of kinship ties, strengthened by rumour publics, spreading in their network) is a substitute for other capitals (material and human) they lack (Putnam et al., 1993). However, there is a downside to it. Under circumstances of constantly changing and not welcoming mobility regimes for unwanted, poor Roma refugees, and in the absence of bridging social ties with people of higher social status, many Roma, like Jani’s family, are stuck in the ‘getting by’ state of social mobility, even after seven years of being in Canada.

Whether the strategy of recurring mobility leads to a different state of social mobility, that is, to getting ahead, will be illustrated by the case of my next interlocutor, Rozika and her family.

5. Recurring mobilities: The mobility-ridden life of Rozika and her family

Scholars analysing the transnational movement of different Roma networks commonly label this process as ‘circular migration’ (Grill, 2017; Pine, 2014). According to sociologists of migration this term refers to temporary migration, in which migrants come to a receiving country for a few months or years, and then return to their homelands (Castles and Miller, 2009).

During the last decade, however, social scientists studying work relations have argued that job-related spatial mobility has increasingly become an essential feature of late modern societies and this term is better suited to describe the widespread movement of people in a globalised world. According to a recent study on job mobilities and family lives in Europe, almost every second individual in Europe aged between 25 and 54 has experienced job-related spatial mobility during his or her professional career (Schneider and Collet, 2010). Researchers of this comparative European study found that people’s job-related mobility can take many different

forms, out of which one can distinguish two overarching mobility types. The first one is *residential mobility* - exemplified by residential relocation through internal or international migration. The other is *recurring mobility*, that is, a recurrent or intermittent but potentially multi-directional spatial movement, with stages of stasis and change of location (Limmer, Collet and Ruppenthal, 2010: 15-20).

Based on my ethnographic findings, many local Roma from Peteri have been choosing the strategy of recurring mobility during the last few years, after they were either been deported from Canada or left the country voluntarily. Rozika's migration story is a case in point.

Rozika moved to Canada as a refugee with her husband and at that time three children in 2011: "We went there to have a better livelihood, so that we can give everything to our children. We went there to work: both my husband and I had been working in a carrot factory¹² since the second week after our arrival." Rozika loved Canada, as there was no distinction between people of different colour. "It does not matter there whether you are a Gypsy (*cigány*) or not. Over there you can work in a shop or wherever you want. You are a Hungarian in Canada not a Gypsy."¹³

She bought the tickets for the flights of her family of five from the money she got after having sold her house in the Gypsy colony of Peteri. 'We thought we would never come home again', she explained to me. She even managed to transplant her whole extended family to Toronto where they lived all together with her fellow neighbours from the Gypsy colony from Peteri in a huge building, a block of flats in the periphery of the metropolis.

"I was the first who came here with my children. Then I sent money to my brother for the flight ticket. He also sold his furniture from his house at home and he took a loan from the bank Provident to cover the cost of the fare for his family of three children. When he arrived in Toronto, after three months he managed to pay me back the flight ticket from his family's welfare. Then he and I pooled our resources together and brought out our other extended family members. It was good; in the end, we had the whole family [which meant six nuclear households of 34 individuals], and also almost half of the Gypsy colony from Peteri, with us here in Toronto. We liked to be there."

However, after a year and a half, they decided to go home to Hungary as her husband developed anxiety and stress-related illness. 'The doctors in Canada didn't know how to treat him. We didn't trust the medicine they gave him. So, we decided it would be safer to come back home, for the sake of my husband. Although the children and I really liked Canada - there was a lot to do and to see there, from the Niagara Falls to the free beach, everything. And there was plenty of opportunity to work. But my husband could never get used to Canada.' Upon their arrival back at Peteri, from their savings of five million Hungarian forints (an equivalent of 18,500 USD - an amount which they could never dream of to possess should they stay

¹² An agricultural enterprise where many Hungarian Roma and (non-Roma), low-skilled and low educated refugee managed to find work without speaking any English. The boss used them and their cheap labour as unreported labourers.

¹³ This should be read as she felt equal in Canada and not an inferior member of the society as in Hungary.

home), Rozika managed to buy a house in the Roma settlement, this time a nicer one with a closer location to the town centre than their previous property.

Half a year later, however, after having used up all their savings (by not being able to find a proper job with a decent salary out of which they could keep their children), they decided to move again, this time to England where they had relatives to work and reside: “I would have never come home from Canada if it were about me. Canada was just a dream. England is different. In Canada you saw many nice places, unlike in England where there are only bricks and nothing else. There is no green space where you can let your children go to play. Over there, everybody is on his mobile phone and tablets. There is nothing to do for the children. It is like a prison. But where could we have gone? Only to places where we had kin and where they helped us. And where there is work. But, I cannot complain because regarding the work opportunities, England is a first-class country. That’s why we stayed there, intermittently, for many years.”

Since 2013, Rozika’s family had been in England five times with some breaks.¹⁴ First, they went to Wales for four months as her husband’s brother who had been living there already, helped her husband to find a job in a Pakistani family owned Pizzeria, Papa John’s. There he learnt how to make pizza. When they had to leave as the owner gave the job to his co-ethnic fellows, they moved to Manchester for another five months. Then onto Nelson for a further half a year. Everywhere they went they had to rent a new flat from a private landlord but Rozika says it was worth the two months deposit as her husband and 17-year-old son earned four times more money than they could have received in Hungary. In all these cities the husband and son managed to find jobs in pizza making factories as they had acquired the skill at Papa John’s earlier in Wales. Then Rozika’s little daughter got ill, and again, they did not trust the health system in a foreign country, so they moved back home. This time, they stayed another year but when their savings were used up, they left for Luton at the invitation of one of Rozika’s brother-in-law. Her son and husband got a job, in the food industry, in a factory at an assembly line, as agency workers subcontracted by a recruiter (staffing) agency – one that gives many Hungarian migrants with no command of English the opportunity to work for three-four times the salary they can earn in their home country.

A few months ago, I bumped into Rozika on the streets of Peteri. When I asked why they came home and whether they would stay this time, she said that her husband had had enough of working 12 hours a day during the last six years. Also, they managed to save up enough money, she said proudly, to buy a nice house, this time in the town, out of the Roma settlement. She also mentioned that her husband plans to set up a small entrepreneurship by getting a track and going to Slovakia to buy cheap wood and sell it on at a higher price in Peteri’s Roma settlement¹⁵ – the only business which gives locals a livelihood with a promise of socio-economic mobility.

¹⁴ This recurring mobility pattern is historically embedded in this region. Mobile workers from the lowest social strata such as day labourers and unskilled construction workers ‘regularly moved temporarily’ to grab the opportunity to work across the borders (Sik and Szeitl, 2015).

¹⁵ In this segregated settlement, most of the families heat their houses equipped with no electricity with wood not only during the long and cold winter months but also in the summer when they use wood for cooking.

When I asked her about the outcome of their long and multi-directional transnational mobility project, it turned out to be an ambiguous one, in respect to the pursuing of a better future for their children – the initial aim of their whole geographical movement. While the family, without question, secured a better life in a material sense, her two older children did not manage to finish even the primary school due to being away from Peteri for altogether four years. “When we came back from Canada, they put them back in the Year group where they left from. Here in the primary school the, teachers do not recognise the school certificate that they received in Canada. Nor the ones they got from England. At that time when we left, seven years ago, I didn’t grasp what would happen to them at school. Looking back now, this was a mistake. That’s why I regret all these movements now. Because my son cannot even get his driving licence as he did not have his primary school credentials.¹⁶ He is already 19 years old, they do not want to take him in any primary school [...] He should have two more years to finish Grade Eight [...] But luckily, we got cleverer and learnt from this mistake when it came to my youngest daughter. With her, there will be no missing grades as I always brought her back to sit the summer exam at the primary school in Peteri which she successfully managed to pass.”

Rozika’s mobility trajectory is a case in point that the transnational movement of Roma from North Hungary can more adequately be described by the term ‘recurring mobility’ than that of circular migration. This type of spatial movement, however, with its stages of stasis and move, can have a downside to it. While it led Rozika’s family to getting ahead, at the same time, it may have jeopardised the future of (some of) her children, by interrupting their school career. It remains a question and should be a topic of future research: that of what happens to the children of these transnationally mobile families’ in the long run, over successive years.

6. Transforming global labour markets, informalisation, and work-related mobility to England

There is a widely accepted thesis among scholars that migration should be seen as part of social transformation (Castles, 2010). In current times, a significant part of this transformation that migration processes are embedded in, is the restructuring of global labour markets in highly developed countries through economic deregulations and new employment practices such as subcontracting, temporary employment, casual work (Castles, 2010; Szelényi 2016). Closely linked to these changes are the expansion of informal segments of the economy and the informalisation of the formal low-wage labour market (Scott, 2017).¹⁷ On the one hand, the search for competitiveness in a globalised economy, combined with demographic change (aging population in the

¹⁶ In Hungary, the only condition to apply for a driving course is to have eight years of schooling.

¹⁷ Here the term, informalisation is used to refer to the loosening of regulatory regimes and associated downgrading of pay and working conditions within the low-wage formal economy (Slavnik, 2010, in: Scott, 2017). This is the case in the UK food industry where many mobile workers from Peteri find either contracted or agency work. According to Scott, in this segment of the mainstream labour market there is a huge concentration of Eastern European low-skilled migrants, who must deal with the exploitative facets of this informalisation process, namely job insecurity, work intensification and worker expendability.

developed West), leads to high demand for flexible and cheap migrant labour. On the other hand, in less developed countries, such as many post-socialist Eastern European countries like Hungary, the social transformation of the labour market (that is, the massive loss of jobs due to structural changes, among others the closing down of industrial factories) further encourages outmigration of the uprooted, 'superfluous' or 'abandoned' former socialist working class (Melegh et al., 2018), among them the currently unemployed, low-skilled Roma, in search of a better life and livelihood (Toma et al., 2017).

These changes on the globalised labour market have fostered new mobility streams to the developed Western European countries since the 2004 EU accession, which provided legal rights for residence and work for the newly accepted EU member states' citizens, among them Roma people from Hungary. Since then, over a million mobile Central Eastern Europeans (CEEs) have found work in Britain (Ciupijus, 2011). From Hungary approximately 300,000-400,000 people have a job in the UK (Kováts and Papp Z., 2016; Hárs, 2016). My ethnographic findings on the Roma migrants from North Hungary support research results that although CEEs migrants can earn much higher wages in the UK than in their countries of origin, in exchange they must perform long working hours, in exploitative working conditions (EHRC, 2010). Their long working hours and time spent almost exclusively among co-nationals, their Hungarian migrant Roma networks, or other CEEs mobile labourers at workplaces, which do not give them space for language learning and social interactions with British citizens (see also: EHRC, 2010). According to existing studies on labour migration, due to this working condition and to the 'language cost' (namely, that many low-skilled CEE migrants do not have a command of English), it is a kind of entrapment which hinders upward social mobility (Ciupijus, 2011). However, if we consider social mobility as it is understood by my interlocutors, working at the assembly lines in factories in the UK, as the search for opportunities in a broad sense: income generating possibilities, the search for a good life, and for better future for their children – the outcome is more positive.

Robika's story is a case in point to illustrate this and how people of precarious status can still rework their position even when their agency is constrained by exploitative labour market conditions. Robika of low formal schooling (completed primary school), but a huge amount of natural intelligence and other profitable skills learnt in the school of life (Pulay, 2015), had long been a successful small entrepreneur in Hungary, coming from a scrap metal trading family. Due to economic restructuring in the country and new economic regulations in this trade, his business was not sustainable from the beginning of the 2000s. Although he kept trying many different petite trades, there was no solvent demand for his goods. Some of his business mates, being in the same situation, and struggling with a shrinking opportunity field in North Hungary, started to commute as mobile workers to Austria, taking up work in the construction industry as semi-skilled labourers. However, most of his Roma networks who did not want to leave their families behind, went to Canada, and when having been deported as their refugee claims were rejected, they went on to the UK. To work in the UK, one needed some initial money, savings, to be able to pay for the usual two-three-month deposit for privately rented flats – where most of the Hungarian Roma migrant workers live in with their families. While

Robika's Canadian returnee migrant friends had this money from their savings from living and working in Toronto, Robika used up all his family's savings collected during those years when his business was still successful.

I have known Robi for five years now, from my previous fieldwork, from the time when the culture of migration had spread all over this region (Durst, 2013; Vidra 2013, see also: Hárs, 2016; Váradi et al., 2017). At that time, he was considering going to Canada, following his Roma networks, to escape from his and his family's racial stuckedness, and to grab the opportunities available there. However, after long and thorough consideration, he changed his mind: "I just realised that I do not want to show the example for my son that I am a refugee. I do not want to be nobody in a foreign country, not even speaking a word of English, when I am still somebody at home [in his social circles in Hungary]." Therefore, he kept trying to search for all opportunities to make money (in a legal way).¹⁸

When the opportunity field in Hungary, according to his perception, had completely vanished for him, as a Roma with low formal schooling, he decided to take his chances in England. He had migrant friends in a big urban city in the UK who accommodated him for the first two months. In exchange for the shelter, he contributed to the hosting family's monthly rent, and the meals. It was a win-win situation until both parties started to feel that the other made use of his generosity. Luckily by then, Robika, as a Hungarian agency worker in a food factory, was ready to rent his own flat and brought his wife and two children to the UK. On occasions when I asked him whether it is not a step back to his earlier social status, having been a respected, independent entrepreneur back home, he always replied to me in a revealing way: "It's obviously not my dream job. I cannot call it *kerele* - here we do not make the money as we did at home. Here you do the work for somebody else. But we are still Roma - we live the same way, under the same laws such as at home. Although you are not your own boss here in the factory, at the assembly lines, but I also did not become subservient (*szolgalelkű*)."

On some bad days, Robika complained (to me), that enough is enough, and he would not obey the nonsensical commands of his Lithuanian assembly line manager who always favoured his co-nationals and tried to get the other Eastern European migrants to perform the hardest, most enduring physical work. After a while, with the help of his employment (staffing) agency, he managed to find a physically less straining menial job for the same (minimum) wage. Being a hard worker, after a three-month trial period, he even got promoted to a contract worker, meaning a more secure labour position and a higher wage than agency workers possess.¹⁹ Part of the

¹⁸ Some of his friends started the business of informal money lending, with an 50-100 per cent interest rate. For Robika, however, this was not a 'good life', even if he could easily have started and conducted the business relying on his good business skills and widespread network: 'I want a life where I can put my head on the pillow relaxed, and do not have to wake up during the night fearing when the police come to check on me.' (Since 2012, due to the change of the criminal law in Hungary, informal money lending, called usury [*uzsora*] in legal and public discourse, is considered a crime).

¹⁹ The reason for him changing factory was that after Brexit (May, 2016) when the country voted to leave EU, Eastern European migrant workers started to be treated even more unequally, compared to their very few English worker mates - the latter almost exclusively in managerial positions. On that day when he first decided to leave, Robika was told that even on Bank Holiday (a national holiday in England) he has to come to work, at a usual wage. When he complained that it is a work-free national holiday, his

transformation of the globalised labour market in Britain in the era of the neo-liberal, late modern global capitalism, is the set up of employment or staffing agencies who offer cut rate agency workers to the big factories to keep them competitive globally by employing cheap, flexible and expendable (easy to replace) labourers. According to EU laws, these agency workers should be given staff employment after a given period. An agency worker position in the labour market is much more precarious than as a staff employer's. Not only that, but they get a lower pay than the rate of the job locally. They also have to be on standby at the recruitment agency's disposal as they have to be on call at all times, should their work be required by the factory. The problem with this is that most of the agency workers can work irregularly and mostly seasonally, only a few days a week; or in a worse season, a couple of days in a month, whenever there is surplus demand for the factory's product therefore the factory needs extra hands beyond its usual staff.

While many of Robika's Roma friends prefer to keep their status as agency workers because, as they explained to me, it gives them more flexibility, Robika is very proud of his rare status as a contract or 'factory worker' (*gyári munkás*), as he calls himself.

As an illustration of his pride, he messaged me a few months ago to share with me his joy at being praised, symbolically and materially for his hard work at his company. By sending me via Messenger a picture of his certificate, displayed on his kitchen table in the company of a bottle of champagne, and a box of Lindor chocolate, a symbol of luxurious celebration compared to his Roma friends' social standing, he wrote to me with undisguised complacency: 'this is my new collection.' The document, called the 'Certificate of Appreciation' said the following: 'You are our company's perfect catch and an ideal employee whose performance no one can match! Thanks for all your dedication and hard work. We are better because of you!'²⁰

Robika's work in England is hard and lacking prestige; his living conditions are much worse than they were at home; his employers are mostly exploitative – yet he still considers living in England a better life than he had at home, in Hungary:

"I think being a factory worker is not a step back. We are new in this country, we must start somewhere. For the time being, this is what we got [a position at the assembly line in a low-wage factory, full of low-skilled migrant workers]. We do not speak English, it's a disadvantage compared to other migrants, for example to the Pakistanis who are the most successful businessmen in this neighbourhood. But I'm not worried, I have plans. I want to save up some money to start a petite business here [to open a Hungarian restaurant], but first I need to learn English. It is still a better life than we had at home. Here there is job, and you do not need school to work. Here

manager told him, from now on, in this factory, this law only applies to the native-born British workers. And if he does not like it, he can leave. When Robi tried to awake the solidarity of his Romanian assembly line worker colleagues, they said to him: "Sorry, my brother, but we cannot afford to lose our job for supporting you. Here we earn money in a week that our family can live off for a month. Back home on many days we couldn't even afford a cup of coffee. It's still much better here for us than back home in Romania."

²⁰It had a symbolic meaning, however, that he only shared this appreciation of his company with me, privately, and not with his Roma friends, publicly, on Facebook. In a different regime of value, for his Roma friends, back at home in Hungary, wage labour had been undervalued (Stewart, 1997), although during the socialist period this was the main and regular source of income for most of the households.

you can be a Hungarian, not a Gypsy. Here you can make a living. My child can have a good education. In Hungary, if you are a Roma who did not study [has only primary school certificate], what can you do? You can earn 80,000-100,000 forints, maximum. That would just cover my utility bills and some basic food.”

Robika's case shows that that the 'superfluous' groupings or 'reserved army' of the labour force or the 'suffering slot' as some economists and social scientists label the long-term officially unemployed, the protagonists of my study, are not 'submissive players of global capitalism' but active social agents managing precarity by striving for some autonomy (Pulay, 2017). Resonating with Sigona's call (2015), who coined the term 'campzanship', to argue for appreciating the strategies and tactics of those who need to manoeuvre under restricting structures (such as the Nomad Camps for Roma migrants in Italy, or the exploitative labour market conditions in England), Robika's story contradicts the 'discourse of victimhood' (Bíró et al., 2013, see also: Ivasiuc, 2018). For Robika, his family's relocation to the UK eradicated racial stuntedness and provided a better education, and future for his children. However, his upward social mobility was facilitated by his middle class social status at home, with ensuing skills and high aspirations (along with his choice of using the strategy of 'ethnic invisibility' to get ahead in life).

7. Conclusion: Getting by or getting ahead? Or how spatial mobility entangles with socio-economic mobility

The current neoliberal moment of global capitalism encourages people from North Hungary to search for social mobility as an individual or family endeavour, in the hopes of achieving economic betterment and a better future for their children via a spatial move. For most Roma migrants from this economically underdeveloped region, the quest for social mobility is a home-oriented endeavour as Rozika's family's mobility-ridden life well illustrated. There are many other Roma, however, who see spatial mobility as the only way to escape from their 'racial stuntedness' which curbs their aspired social mobility chances in Hungary where, according to their lived experiences, 'there is no life, no future for a Roma' without higher schooling. While the first group of migrants practice recurring spatial mobilities, the latter chose the strategy of residential, relocating mobility.

Although Roma migrants/asylum seekers' agency is constrained by the labour market structure at their destination countries, and the characteristics of labour demand there, they still have room to rework their position. Even if their migration, in line with research findings on other CEE migrant workers, leads them to high level of clustering in the low and unskilled segments of the 'informalised' formal labour market (Scott, 2017), which is characterised by workers' flexibility, poor wages, intensive working hours, job insecurity associated with dependence on staffing agencies (Enright, 2013), and which in many cases is followed by limited progression thereafter (Pereira, 2014), Roma migrant workers from North Hungary still consider their new position better than it was in their home society. Viewing matters through the eyes of transnationally mobile workers, social mobility has a more complex meaning for them than purely achieving income or occupational advancement. In most of my interlocutors' case, their spatial mobility was a 'constrained choice', a way

or exit out of shrinking fields or loss of opportunities in their home countries to live a worthwhile life in a destination settlement, where there are plenty of job opportunities even for unskilled labourers, and where the focus of their imagined future and hope was on their next generation (see also: Ivasiuc, 2018).

As my ethnographic material showed, transnationally mobile, low-skilled Roma workers' cases from North Hungary presents mainly a 'getting by' picture of the migration-induced household's well-being. The rare cases of 'getting ahead' with their family's lives, as Robika's story has shown, is conditioned by many intersecting factors. Namely, the particular mobility regimes of the host society, and the non/presence of an anti-Gypsy social milieu; the demand and structure of the global and local labour market; and the original social position and ambition of the migrants, coupled with the supportive kinship networks.

I claim in this paper that while the dominant political and public discourse in Britain and Canada sees precarious migration as a problem, as 'welfare tourism' or 'bogus' asylum-seeking, these undesired, low-skilled migrants, while searching for a better life for their children, contribute with their flexible and cheap labour to the increase of global capital. As my ethnographic accounts show, by the very act of their 'moving', these migrants cannot be considered passive victims of capitalist forces, but rather active social actors who can still find some space for manoeuvring and achieving socio-economic betterment for their households while navigating unequal global power structures (see also: Harvey, 2003; Rogaly, 2009; Acuna, 2016; Levine-Rasky, 2016). In the economically disadvantaged region of North-Hungary, this 'invisible' transnational mobility of the poor also serves as a buffer (Portes, 1998) against chronic poverty, such as their other informal income generating activities or fiddling jobs (MacDonald, 1994) do.

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