

Roma women's marginalities in the recognition struggles of a Hungarian Roma Women's NGO

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Abstract

The intersectional aspects of Roma women's marginalities are politicized. In the ongoing recognition struggles diverse aspects of their inequalities are lifted into the forefront¹. Whereas public institutions perceive Roma women as clients of the welfare state or of charity, Roma women's civil organizations have the potential to offer Roma women subjectivity to define their concerns within their own communities and in relation to majority society². However, even these organizations act within the context of dominant discursive frames addressing their situation.

This paper explores through the study of a Roma Women's civil organization, Roma Women Public Advocates, the way how this organization manages to bring forward the complexity of Roma women's situation and give voice for their identity struggle in the context of the dominant discourses of majority society and discourses within male dominated Roma organizations. It is to explore how vulnerabilities of different origins, such as ones related to work life balance, gender based violence and intimate citizenship become framed in relation to the own community vs dominant discourses in majority society.

Furthermore, the paper explores sources of ideation and economic support for the NGO. What are the economic dynamisms and dependencies behind NGO-isation and how do dependencies influence the processes of ideation of gender equality? Most importantly, the paper explores whether the ideation processes are empowering, participatory, bottom-up processes growing out of the culturally and socially specific conditions of the NGOs' constituencies as well as it explores the interplay between bottom-up and donor driven ideation processes.

The paper is based on a broader study on Roma women's NGOs, Roma NGOs and Women's NGOs in Hungary addressing concerns of Roma women. The study of the particular organization in this paper included several interviews and participant observations in events.

Keywords: Roma women, Hungary, civil society, NGO, gender equality, framing

¹ I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

² V. Vincze, "Roma Women's Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes." Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics, 2014;

Introduction

Roma women's marginalization processes emerge along the intersection of social, gender, ethnicity and age based inequalities in their communities as well as in their relationships to majority society and as consequences of global inequality relationships. Roma at large have been hit hardest by the post-socialist integration into a globalised world economy, due to mass loss of work opportunities that followed deindustrialisation and economic restructuring³[1]. While job-opportunities were lost mainly in industry and mining, the expansion of the institutional framework of the post-socialist welfare regime created increasing work opportunities. However, these openings came to the benefit of primarily educated white women⁴ (Fodor, 2002). Economic activity rates are among the lowest in Hungary among EU member states both for men and women, but they are lowest for Roma women[2]. Beyond their greater exclusion from work, Roma women score low on health measurements compared to both non-Roma women and Roma men due to economic deprivation and a higher number of births starting earlier in life⁵. As female victims of domestic and sexual violence and in areas of intimate citizenship Roma women experience vulnerabilities accessing institutional support⁶.

Balogh et al (2011) identify the target areas of Roma women's gender equality struggle based on a definition of multiple discrimination in the following: domestic violence, arranged marriage, forced marriage and child marriage, trafficking and enforced prostitution, Romani women and children threatened by right wing politicians and extreme right groups, multiple disadvantages in education, lack of employment, lack of access to social benefits, intersection discrimination in reproductive health, and lack of access to financial services⁷.

As argued by intersectional analysis⁸ multiple marginalities are not additive, rather they surface in the amalgamation of vulnerabilities of different origins. A great many women endure domestic violence within intimate relationships⁹. Nonetheless, Romani women are multiply victimized as victims of domestic violence since they expect stigmatization rather than help from institutions. Poverty and lacking social institutions cut opportunities for finding viable alternative accommodation or subsistence making exit from disruptive relations harder¹⁰. Thus, working for gender equality for Romani

³ J. Ladányi and I. Szelényi, *A kirekesztettségváltozóformái*. [Exclusions varying forms], Budapest: Napvilág, 2004;

⁴ J. Szalai, A jólétifogda [The welfare prison]. In *Kisebbségekkisebbsége. A magyarországi cigányok emberi és politikai jogai* [Minority of minorities. Human and political rights of the Hungarian Roma], MáriaNeményi and JúliaSzalai, 43-93. Budapest: ÚjMandátumKönyvkiadó, 2005;

⁵ EP (European Parliament and Èva Fodor) *The Policy of Gender Equality in Hungary, Update 2013*, Brussels: European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre), *Trafficking in Romani Communities, Breaking the Silence: A report by the ERRC on people in need*, Budapest: ERRC, 2011, p.72;

⁶ L. Balogh, A. Kóczé, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség, 2011; I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁷ L. Balogh, A. Kóczé, Angéla, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség, 2011;

⁸ N. Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (3) (2006): 193-209;

⁹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011 p. 84;

¹⁰ L. Balogh, Lídia and A. Kóczé, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar NőiÉrdekérvényesítőSzövetség, 2011, p. 4-5;

women assumes a struggle on multiple fronts, which assumes an intersectional framework.

In diverse arenas of politics only limited aspects of Roma women's intersecting marginalities become subject to politicization. On the one hand Roma women are targeted by dominant state and media discourses¹¹. On the other hand, in the ongoing recognition struggles Roma women's civil organizations lift selective aspects of their situation and concerns into the forefront¹² (Asztalos Morell 2015). Whereas public institutions perceive Roma women as clients of the welfare state or of charity, Roma women's civil organizations have the potential to offer Roma women subjectivity to define their concerns within their own communities and in relation to majority society¹³. However, even these organizations act within the context of dominant discursive frames addressing their situation.

Hungarian women's organisations are described to represent a mixture of hybrid feminism and anti-feminism¹⁴. Roma women's organisations are not exempt from this description. Meanwhile, they find themselves in the intersection of diverse marginalities based on ethnicity, class and gender. Being located within the context of dominant racialized discourses, poses challenges for Roma women's organisations on their formulation of these intersectional concerns and to which degree they adapt critical gender equality discourse to identify their concerns. Dombos, Krizsán and Zentai¹⁵ utilise the concept of framing¹⁶ to explore how gender equality discourses problematize key gender equality concerns, which they group into three main categories: GBV (Gender-Based-Violence), which includes issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and trafficking; IC (Intimate Citizenship) incorporating concerns in divorce, marriage, separation, sexual orientation and reproduction rights; and NE (Non-Employment) which focuses on issues regarding employment, tax and benefit policies, care-work, reconciliation of family and work, gender pay gap and equal treatment. From an intersectional perspective gender equality struggles based in diverse constituency of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class might bring different issues into the forefront. Framing the intersectional complexity of relationships makes visible certain systems' domination over others¹⁷.

This paper explores through the study of a Roma Women's civil organization, Roma Women Public Advocates, the way how this organization manages to bring forward the complexity of Roma women's situation and give voice for their identity struggle in the context of the dominant discourses of majority society and discourses within male

¹¹ J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

¹² I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

¹³E. Vincze, "Roma Women's Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes." Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics. 2014;

¹⁴K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009;

¹⁵ T. Dombos, A. Krizsan, M. Verloo, V. Zentai, Critical Frame Analysis: A Comparative Methodology for the Quality in Gender + Equality Policies, (QUING) project. 2012. Accessed September 30, 2016: <http://hro.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/publications/cps-working-paper-critical-frame-analysis-quiring-2012.pdf>;

¹⁶E. Lombardo, A. Rolandsen, "Framing Gender Intersections in the European Union: What Implications for the Quality of Intersectionality in Policies" *Social Policy* 19 (4) (2012): 482-512;

¹⁷ E. Lombardo, A. Rolandsen, "Framing Gender Intersections in the European Union: What Implications for the Quality of Intersectionality in Policies" *Social Policy* 19 (4) (2012): 482-512;

dominated Roma organisations. It is to explore how vulnerabilities of different origins, such as ones related to NE, GBV and IC, become framed in relation to their own community or/and to majority society.

Furthermore, the paper explores sources of ideation and economic support for the NGO. What are the economic dynamisms and dependencies behind NGO-isation and how do dependencies influence the processes of ideation of gender equality? Most importantly, the paper explores whether the ideation processes are empowering, participatory, bottom-up processes growing out of the culturally and socially specific conditions of the NGOs' constituencies as well as it explores the interplay between bottom-up and donor driven ideation processes.

Theoretical Concerns

Racial/ethnic minority women emerge commonly as targets of "othering" practices in dominant discourses where IC and GBV issues are not uncommonly an element of othering¹⁸. The issue of early marriages is one topical concern through which Romani women's status is problematized, constructing it as an expression of Romani culture¹⁹. Oprea (2005) does not question the oppression of young Romani women within their communities, but challenges "the mono-focal conceptualization of 'Romani culture' as being the sole factor affecting their experiences"²⁰. Similarly, Durst²¹ argues for a social sensitive approach highlighting that Roma girls in marginalised rural areas, lacking other alternatives, find giving birth as the only way of gaining recognition in their communities. Giving birth at an early age in turn cuts their chances of further education. Social deprivation, rather than Roma cultural difference, thus generates young Roma mothers' gender- and ethnic-specific marginalities. Furthermore, it needs to be pinpointed, that mono-focally cultural explanations of early pregnancies among Roma girls are often inattentive of the health and social consequences of early marriage for young mothers.

Another topical area for framing Roma women's "otherness" has been related to their higher fertility rate and allegations as to the motivation for this being the over-utilisation of generous parental benefit systems. Like a number of other post-socialist countries, and also France and Finland, Hungary remained a maternalistic gender regime characterised as a public matriarchy²². Hungary has a continuing high degree of state support for maternity (paid childcare subsidy until the child's third year), which does not encourage mothers to return to the labour market. Gender policies are recurrently reconfigured in Hungary along dominant political block politics²³. As

¹⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, H. Carlback, S. Rastback Sara and M. Hurd, eds, *Gender Transitions in Russia and Eastern Europe* Eslöv: Gondolin, 2005;

¹⁹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011;

²⁰ A. Oprea, "Child Marriage a Cultural Problem, Educational Access a Race Issue? Deconstructing Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Romani Oppression." *Roma Rights Journal*, 21 July 2005, ERRC, Accessed March 28, 2015 <http://www.errc.org/article/child-marriage-a-cultural-problem-educational-access-a-race-issue-deconstructing-uni-dimensional-understanding-of-romani-oppression/2295>, p. 133 - 148.

²¹ J. Durst, ""Bárók", patrónusok versus "komák" - eltérőfejlődésiutakazaprófalvakban." In *Kisteleplüléseklépésényszerben*. Edited by MónikaVáradi. Budapest: ÚjmandátumKiadó, 2008;

²² Glass, Christy and Fodor, Éva. "From Public to Private Maternalism? Gender and Welfare in Poland and Hungary after 1989." *Social Politics* 14 (3) (2007): 323-350;

²³ Krizsán, Andrea and Zentai, Violetta, "Gender equality policy or gender mainstreaming?" *Policy Studies*, 27 (2) (2006): 135-151, p. 141;

Szikra²⁴ highlights, socialist governments argued for cutbacks in reproductive benefits and emphasized the social aspects of reproductive rights and the maintenance of flat rate transfers to benefit the poor. By contrast, conservative governments motivated the high level of transfers of reproductive benefits with prenatal sentiments and a focus on working mothers and work-related benefits²⁵. Demographic growth, along right political sentiments was to be stimulated by protecting the family with a strong focus on middle class families²⁶. Roma women's high fertility was identified in public debates as misuse of childcare benefits and as the use of benefits as a livelihood strategy²⁷.

Thus, on the one hand stigmatising and culturifying framing of Roma women in right wing political and media discourse made Roma movements, including Roma women's movements, reluctant to address central IC (early pregnancies, women's reproductive health) and GBV (domestic violence) issues in their communities²⁸. On the other hand lacking attention of these issues denies visibility and advocacy for Roma women victims of family violence²⁹. Intersectional analysis, utilized in this paper, offers the possibility to address cross-cutting vulnerabilities without reinforcing the stigmatisation of multiply disadvantaged groups.

The Neo-liberal and Conservative Welfare State and the Role of NGOs in the Welfare Mix

Former state socialist societies were commonly characterised by a low degree of institutionalisation of civil society. Following the transition period, western economic and ideation support played an allegedly important role in CEE (Central and East European) "NGO-isation"³⁰. NGOs fill black spots left unaddressed by the retrenching post-socialist neoliberal/conservative welfare state³¹ and address needs defined according to claimed identities and communities³². Gender- and ethnicity-based identity struggles have been common mobilizing factors during the post-socialist transition. Roma minority organizations that have emerged from the late eighties onwards focus on identity politics primarily and problematize the conditions of Roma within majority

²⁴ K. Szikra, "Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24 (5) (2014) 486-500;

²⁵ K. Szikra, "Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24 (5) (2014) 486-500, p. 494;

²⁶ A. Duman, A. Horváth, "Reconciliation of Work and Family Life in Hungary, Reconciling Work and Welfare in Europe." *REC-WP 05/2010 Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe*. 2010. Accessed March 19 2015 http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1634837.

²⁷ J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

²⁸ A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011;

²⁹ I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradska and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

³⁰ Y. Gradska, S. Sanders, *Institutionalizing Gender Equality, Historical and Global Perspectives*. New York: Lexington Books. 2015; K. Jacobsson, S. Saxonberg, Steven. *Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Burlington: Ashgate. 2013;

³¹ V. Vesterberg, "Learning to be Swedish: governing migrants in labour-market projects," *Studies in Continuing Education*. 37 (3) (2015): 302-316;

³² I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradska and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

society and typically do not address gender concerns. Meanwhile, a plethora of women's organizations that emerged during the transition period did not, to begin with, address issues of Roma women specifically³³.

Among the growing number of women's organizations feminist ideation was at first embraced by only a minority of CEE women, who primarily mobilized around a series of welfare issues³⁴, for example reproductive rights, raising women's pension age and the restructuring of maternity benefits. Most women's organizations choose a less confrontational approach due to anti-socialist sentiments that contest state interference in matters of the state³⁵. As Fábíán argues, civil organizations that make up the women's movement in Hungary manifest a mixture of "antifeminism and hybrid feminisms" with only a few adhering openheartedly to a feminist agenda, defined as having "a political agenda to end the oppression of women"³⁶. Women's NGOs often reformulate rather than openly challenge traditional perceptions that "view the welfare of children being women's main public concern"³⁷. A good example is how conservative grass-roots based women's NGOs were successful in mobilizing against the restrictions on childcare benefits that the socialist/liberal government had introduced³⁸.

However, even Western feminist movements often critical of the achievements of state socialist emancipatory projects were instrumental in spreading previously not attended feminist ideas of GBV and IC related gender inequality. We find nonetheless, women's organizations with explicit gender equality agenda, such as MONA (MagyarországiNőiAlapítvány: Women's Foundation of Hungary) or NANE (Nők a NőkértEgyüttazErőszak Ellen: Women for Women Together Against Violence), that are at the forefront when it comes to voicing issues of violence against women. The role of these feminist oriented women's organisations in the advocacy on and collaboration concerning Roma women's issues needs to be further explored³⁹.

Considering the rise of Roma civil activism following the transition critics⁴⁰ (Arató, 1992, Fowler, 1997, Trehan, 2001) highlight that "the majority of projects are necessarily donor-driven and the consequent dependency seriously affects and undermines the independence of local NGOs"⁴¹. Most significantly, there are "global forces that inevitably impinge on the current trajectory of the transnational movement

³³A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011; Fábíán, Katalin. *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009;

³⁴ K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 200;

³⁵J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

³⁶ K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 77;

³⁷K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 78-79;

³⁸S. Saxonberg, "The Influence of "Conservative" Women's and Family Organizations in Hungary and the Czech Republic" In *Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg, 97-115. Steven Burlington: Ashgate, 2013;

³⁹ Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, 2015, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46;

⁴⁰ Arató, Andrew, 1992, "Social Theory, Civil Society and the Transformation of Authoritarian Socialism" In *Citizenship in Europe*, edited by V. Gathy and J. Jensen, 116-146. Szombathely 1992; Trehan, Nidhi 2001, 'In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs'. In: Guy, W. ed *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press;

⁴¹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 40;

for ‘Roma rights’⁴². This dependency was convergent with the acceptance of a neo-liberal agenda focusing on human rights in the context of a neo-liberal paradigm, implying a pro-free market and procedural democratisation paradigm⁴³. This human rights discourse focuses on discrimination perpetrated by the state. This civil rights approach thus does not engage in the structural roots of increasing social differentiation. The neo-liberal imperative relegated “issues of egalitarianism and social justice within civil society to the periphery”.

The theory of donor-dependency of CEE NGOs has become criticised recently, arguing that such dependency characterised the NGO-sation in the early post-socialist period. As Jacobsson and Saxonberg argue, NGO development in the CEE has entered a new phase after the 2000s, where the donor dependency of the early post-socialist period is overcome by a more participatory, grass-roots-based development⁴⁴. Research on Roma civil organisations in Hungary indicates, that, in addition to western economic support, state and municipal funding originating from a changing institutional background and size, has been an important source of economic support for Roma civil organisations as well as CKÖs (Roma Municipal Self-governments)⁴⁵. However, further research is needed to indicate how donor-dependency and ideation are interrelated in case of Roma women’s NGOs? Some, as Trehan argue, that there has been a growing institutionalisation, marketization and entrepreneurship in human rights work and as an outcome this top-down model shun grass-roots agency and even resistance⁴⁶. There is a pecking order of NGOs and white supremacy prevails, prohibiting “Romani participation in the achievement of their own emancipation”⁴⁷. Nonetheless, despite of the relevance of this critical stance, there has been an upsurge of civil organisations pivoting Roma and Roma women’s identity struggles⁴⁸. A less revolutionary perception of civil movements is suggested to provide an alternative reading of the status of Roma civil organisations. As van Baar suggests, this “less dramatic notion of politics” would incorporate Romani asylum seekers as “as ambivalent yet vital attempts to repoliticize inequality and poverty”⁴⁹. Incorporating a broader less formalised conception of civil society along van Baar opens for reading Roma civil movements as contributing to transformative, participatory reconfiguration of citizenship independent of the mainstream Roma and PRO-Roma NGOs, which were seen by some⁵⁰ supporting the

⁴² A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 41;

⁴³ A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 42;

⁴⁴ K. Jacobsson, S. Saxonberg, Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe, Burlington: Ashgate, 2013;

⁴⁵ B. Majtényi, G. Majtényi, *Cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1945-2010*. Budapest: Libri, 2012; Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 Secretariat Foundation. “CSMR (Civil Society Monitoring Report Hungary in 2012).” 2013, Accessed March 28, 2015 http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file8_hu_civil-society-monitoring-report_en.pdf; I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, “Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary” *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

⁴⁶ N. Trehan, ‘In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs’. In: Guy, W. ed Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001;

⁴⁷ A. Kóczé, Angéla, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 45;

⁴⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, “Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women’s NGOs in Hungary”. In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) “Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective,” Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁴⁹ H. van Baar, “Toward a politics of representation beyond hegemonic neoliberalism: the European Romani movement revisited”, *Citizenship Studies*, 16:2, 287-296, 2012, p. 295;

⁵⁰ P. Veermesch, Peter. *The Romani Movement Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006; N. Trehan, Nidhi, ‘In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private

“neo-imperial and neoliberal” order. Others are instrumental in arguing that Roma women’s organisations are the potential vehicles for voicing subjugated voices. The construction of the message voiced receives its importance from the central importance of the *act of voicing*⁵¹. Roma women’s NGOs open the possibility to thematise their agenda *with* rather than *for* Roma women. The paper therefore explores whether the RKNSZ (Roma Közéleti Nőkés Szószólók) (Roma Public Women Advocates) perceives its constituents, Roma women, as *agents* rather than *clients* and in what ways this agency is invoked.

Research Design

This paper explores the perceptions of those agents representing civil organizations, who are engaged with issues that have relevance for the conditions of Roma women. This paper is based on my interviews conducted with Blanka Kozma, founder and leader of RKNSZ in 2012 and 2014. Furthermore, it includes reflections on the event where RONAH (National Roma women’s Association in Hungary) was founded and where Blanka Kozma participated in 2014.

The voices upon which this study is based are selected from a broader research conducted on the topic how Roma women’s concerns are constructed in Hungarian NGOs. Results of these studies concerning the proliferation of Roma women’s concerns were published in earlier studies⁵² and do therefore not constitute part of this study.

Roma Közéleti Nőkés Szószólók (Roma Public Women Spokesmen)

The creation of RKNSZ: a Roma women’s NGO

RNE (Roma Nők Egyesület: Roma Women Association), which was the predecessor organization of Roma Public Women Spokesmen, was founded by Blanka Kozma in 1995. Kozma was educated as teacher, and had been active as social worker and welfare activist in Ferencváros municipality for 5 years at the time. She was invited by Géza Gosztanyi, leader of the Teréz Municipal Family Assistance Service and employee of Autonomia Foundation to participate in a project financed by the Soros Foundation (later OSI: Open Society Institute) to study and establish contact with US women’s organizations, such as the Female Voters League. The leader of Autonomia, where Gosztanyi was also active, at this time was, András Bíró, who according to Kozma, emphasized the importance to “work with Roma not only for Roma”. Kozma argues that many of “the large civil organisations work for the Roma but not at all with the Roma”. This remark corroborates with the critique of Trehan (2001) and Kóczé (2011) referring

Foundations and NGOs’. In: Guy, W. ed *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001;

⁵¹ E. Vincze, “Roma Women’s Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes.” Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics. 2014;

⁵² I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, “Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary” *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, “Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women’s NGOs in Hungary”. In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) “Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective,” Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

to the white primacy within Pro-Roma NGOs. Nonetheless, the fact that Kozma was engaged with the project indicates, in opposite to Trehan and Kóczé, that there was a sensitivity to include Roma activists. Thus, Gosztonyi “he knew me, and he saw values in me and informed me about the opportunity”. Twenty women activists were invited for a 6 week study trip, where one of the criteria was to choose activists who are considered capable of utilizing the knowhow in Hungary. One of the chosen was Kozma, who found that “the study of the [US] civil organisations was a big push... I was motivated all the way to see how I could utilize this.”

Soros Foundation at that time had a women’s section, which was led by ÈvaFöldvári, which organized a conference “The democracy-woman” (A demokrácia-nő), where all Hungarian women civil organisations were present. Kozma come in contact with NANE and this Feminist network conference organized following this study visit: “they took me under their wings”. Our Roma women’s organization became independent under their midwifing (bábáskodás)”. They helped to write the foundation (alapszabályzat) document, helped with the first project applications, with contacts. One of the key activists of the time was Antonia Burrows, who was an English citizen teaching English at ELTE. She had many students on her feminist sensitizing seminars. They were also developing the Lesbian Movement. The organization started to develop with their initial help. Kozma’s account is supporting the reflection by Kóczé (2011) and Trehán (2001) even in reference to the instrumentality, both in terms of finances and ideation, of global actors, such as the Soros foundation, in initiating NGOs advocated concerns of both critical gender issues and ethnic identity struggles.

To start with the initiated projects concerned preparatory training for Roma women in different subjects, such as personality development, enterprise initiation and management, networking. Some of the projects were common projects with other NGOs. An enterprise management training was led by SZID. However, Roma Women’s Association provided the clients for the training. The Economic University received US support for a project MECCS, which had a minority aspect that they could not realize. They found a partner in Kozma for holding the seminars directed towards Roma women. “The association developed a name, due to the media coverage.”

As Kozma’s reflection indicates, much of the ideation and economic support of the NGO has evolved as a result of close collaboration with internationally supported NGOs at this initial phase. The success of the NGO to attract support has created reactions within some segments of the national Roma movement, which operated with support from governmental foundations. Specific state financed support became ear-marked through the grounding of public foundations such as MACIKA (Magyarországi Cigányokért Közalapítvány: Hungarian Foundation for Roma) emerged at that period. MACIKA, a state foundation to enhance the position of Roma minority in society, was founded in 1995 under the socialist liberal coalition government with Gyula Horn as prime minister and was dismissed in 2011 under the FIDESZ-KDNP coalition government with Viktor Orbán as prime minister. This foundation had as a task to support Roma participation in public life, to contribute to the training of Roma political agents and activists. However, the success of Roma Women Association to attract external financial support for the projects raised even jealousy: “After the first 5 years, a jealousy emerged against the association. ... To provide financial support [to improve Roma’s] political role taking became also the part of distribution of resources to Roma. ... By the end everyone received financial support with the exception of us.”Kozma indicates as the source of jealousy, the connections and support by international donors. Nonetheless, it is important to remark, that the gender critical issues forwarded by the

organizations which supported RNE were not shared by the interests of MACIKA, an observation that corroborates with Kóczé's (2011) remark on the lack of gender sensitivity in Roma minority organizations.

Roots in social issues of the constituency

Kozma found that these projects, initiated by international donor supported NGOs working in Hungary, were focusing a lot on organizational, networking issues and seemed superficial compared to the down to earth results of working directly with the social problems of clients:

"My work had a concrete result. Once the clients enter, I open for them the doors of the social network. When they enter, we fill in the social assistance application forms, pension applications, early pension agreements, disability statements, started child custody suits all kinds of things. When was a social worker. ... I could not see these values in the movement at that time."

This reflection by Kozma indicates her deep engagement with grass-root issues and social sensitivity, which contradicts with the perception of the concerns of NGOs emerging with international economic and ideation support, as understood by Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011). Thus, Kozma, despite of her international connectivity, has maintained "down to earth" connectivity to the issues of her constituency.

Her thematic interest had its roots in her engagement as social worker with charge for Roma issues in the Ferencváros Municipality Office. This experience raised her interest for Roma women. Kozma argued that many Roma families are fallen apart: "many are not married, there are many divorces, many separations, many like, neither with you or with you cases". Furthermore, where families are split, it is the women who became awarded custody for the children. They become the focal point of the families, while "men far away, they are in prison, they are fallen apart, they spent the money, and if they do not spend it, they spend it on such things that women do not agree with." Due to women's focal point in the families, they are the ones who keep in touch with the authorities, they are the ones who the authorities call and recognize. They are the ones who seek help at civil organisations. "Poverty has a female and a child face. This is the truest for Roma."

Kozma contrasts this experience as having the municipal office to rely on in meeting her clients, with her experience in civil service. She misses the security of the official background, meanwhile praises the freedom to choose orientation and the independence it provides. What was common in the two cases was the presence of the clients and their issues to support and solve. The importance of civil service background and engagement with social concerns of the constituency has been highlighted in relation to other Roma women's NGOs also, such as Szinesgyöngyök⁵³.

Kozma's own position and ability to keep the NGO running, was secured by her political career. She was elected as member of council in the municipality. After the end of her period she could continue as Liberal party (SZDSZ) remunerated representative in the Employment Committee. This gave her both forum to influence development and a steady income.

⁵³ I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: YuliaGradskova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality - a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

The organization started a new profile in 2000 (during the first FIDESZ government).with opening a legal aid office: RJI (Roma Jogvédő Iroda: Roma Legal Rights Protection Bureau) with focus on help to concrete client cases. “Not the very visible civil discrimination cases”, rather helping with everyday issues, filling formulas, applying for aid and similar issues. At first the organization was supported by specific Roma state support and Soros Foundation support. RJI continued its operation through the socialist-liberal coalition period between 2002 and 2010, when it was laid down during the second the FIDESZ (national conservative) government, due to cut of support for legal aid, even if they tried to keep up the organization an additional two years. Since the second FIDESZ government period financing is achieved from diverse project applications. Another project initiated created labor market information point financed by the National Employment Foundation (Országos Foglalkoztatási Közalapítvány).

At the moment of the interview, the district where the RKNSZ office is operating is led by FIDESZ, which prompted, after the dissolution of SZDSZ as a party after the loss in the 2010 elections, Kozma lost her party political ground of representation. This prompted a pragmatic turn in political orientation in order to be able to work for her constituency, which she motivates by: “the Roma always has the orientation of the leading party in the municipalities”. This corroborates with the analysis of political scientists pinpointing the difficulties for Roma politicians to unite around Roma identity issues and the apparent felt need to associate with dominant majority society political party politics⁵⁴.

Framing gender inequalities

As argued above, RKNSZ emerged in the intersection of two sources of ideation. On the one hand its origins are interwoven with the network of NGOs that grew out of the engagement and support by global agents, among these radical feminist organisations. Kozma has been also inspired directly by contacts with radical feminist international organisations. On the other hand, as representant for a Roma women’s organization and as an agent originating from the social welfare sector, Kozma maintained close association with her constituency, i.e. with marginalized Roma communities and with the concerns of women originating from these communities.

The orientation of RKNSZ towards Western feminist movements can be understood from the backdrop of the original support, both in terms of access to economic support and ideation, which the organization enjoyed at its upstart. In this sense RKNSZ was well integrated with mainstream Hungarian outright feminist civil organisations. Among these Kozma identifies the most important ones in the following.

Feminist Network (Feminista Hálózat) was an important source for women’s movements. This network was among the exceptional ones addressing critical gender perspectives among women’s organisations, as Fábrián’s (2009) research also indicates. It had even a journal *Nőszemély* and drove women’s issues on a broader scale including GBV and IC issues beyond NE issues. However, it dispersed. NANE had connections to it, but it works for a narrower focus on violence against women. One of the aims of Feminist Network was to create a women’s shelter: *Nőkháza* (Women’s House). During

⁵⁴B. Vizi, Ba(ed), *A romapolitikákértékelésimódszereiés a magyarkormányzatokromapolitikáiTanulmánykötet. Budapest: NemzetköziIntézet.* Accessed March 28, 2015 http://real.mtak.hu/16483/1/tanulmanykotet_roma.pdf. Yuval-Davis, Nira. “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13 (3) (2006): 193-209;

the Socialist Meggyesy government Katalin Lévy has worked for its establishment. However, by this, this issue was taken away from the feminist movement: “the civil movement has moved out of it”. Soros, OSI, Friedrich started to engage around this time and distribute support. But the network faded away in this process, as Vera Bozzi’s book “Elsikkasztott feminizmus” describes.

Kozma argued that the national feminist movements were open and supportive of Roma women’s organization. As one of the first organisations after 1989 was Roma Mothers (Cigányanyák) founded, a short-lived Roma women’s organization with focus on Roma mothers. They could survive since they were discovered by the feminist organisations and were helped (hónukalávétték)”. Blanka Kozma’s organization came by in 1995 and was situated on the left. Another organization, Roma Női Közhasznú Szervezet (Roma Women’s Public utility Organisation) led by Istvánné Makai in the seventh district of Budapest. They were very much propagated for as a right wing oriented organization.

Compared to the American experiences with women’s civil movements, which relied heavily on the volunteer work of middle class women, Kozma found that the Roma civil movement cannot draw on volunteers. Those working for the association are in need of income. This has to do with the social base of the movement. Firstly, the potential civil workers often come from poor background with long-term unemployment: “there was a girl here. She was working here for three days. I saw that she did not have money to get here teeth repaired. When people have such difficulties, how can we talk about volunteer work?” There are long-term unemployed even among well-educated: “Here is a man with university degree and English exam. He has no job. He is here and works for 60000 Forints (approx. 200 euros) in the Roma civil organization. He cannot afford to work as volunteer.” On the other hand, the younger generation of well-educated Roma Women, they would like to have jobs and wages according to their training. This observation corroborates with Fábíán’s (2009) observation of the difficulty of Hungarian civil organisations to rely on voluntary work.

The larger Hungarian women’s organizations, in Kozma’s view, rely on well-educated upper-middle class women, who can rely on better paid main-stream employment as university teachers or “they have established themselves within their special field to such a high degree that they can apply for such large projects, as EU, or Norwegian, and from these they can pay honorable wages (tiszteletdíj)”. Thus Kozma finds that “we have difficulties to get connected with each-other [i.e. middle class women’s organizations with Roma women’s organizations], since we are not as educated on the one hand and that our starting point is what do Roma women want”.

Another difference from the US women’s organizations is that while these focus on the issue of violence against women (GBV issues), women’s political representation, Roma women’s organizations are engaged with employment and social representation, classical NE issues. In this sense, Kozma’s experience deviates from the way Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011) highlight the lack of social sensitivity of internationally connected Roma NGOs. RKNSZ agenda is growing out of the concerns of the organisations constituency and is empowering its members by providing assistance with the issues that the members find most important.

However, despite her engagement with national and international feminist networks, Kozma emphasizes the importance to take a starting point in what the issues are for Roma women themselves. And they do turn to the organization first of all with their social problems: “they want employment, they want to start an enterprise, adult education, good schools for their children, schooling support, and they have housing

problems. They seek us for these economic problems. Not because their husband is beating them.”

Nonetheless, a special strength of Kozma, and by this of her NGO, is that, while allowing concerns grow bottom up in the organization, she succeeded also in amalgamating influences from international women’s movement and Hungarian mainstream feminist movement with the grass-root issues of Roma women. Recently, she has been active in raising the issues of family violence and of trafficking and creating consciousness raising projects around these issues. However, Kozma emphasizes the welfare connections of both of these areas pinpointing that prostitution is a consequence of poverty and lack of alternative ways to survive. Concerning family violence, she sheds light on specific context within which her organization confronts the issue of family violence:

“Women seek us with their financial problems. Not with violence within the family, that her husband has beaten her. Violence within the family is present. But she does not come here to ask help for getting her husband punished. She comes to us for the consequences of it. That she wants to move away from home, she wants another flat, that the husband has kicked her out of their flat. *She comes for the flat, to get help to move somewhere* because he is beating them. But if she could get a work, since she had not worked so far, she would go and take a work.”

Making connections between social marginalization and domestic violence leads associations to feminist interpretations of connecting the shortcomings of women’s economic citizenship to hinders they face in accessing civil citizenship rights, i.e. economic dependency is a major hinder to leave destructive relationships⁵⁵.

As another aspect of her multifaceted advocacy and international acknowledgement is exemplified by her being invited by the European Council to discuss the issues of human rights and legislation on family violence. Kozma argues that for her clients the social welfare issues and opportunities are the primary and the lack of support and options. Her organization is occupied with assisting her clients and do not have the resources to think on the level of legislation. This is more the larger women’s organizations, such as NANE, who have the resources to deal on that level with women’s battering.

Meanwhile, she distances herself both from mainstream feminist organisations and from mainstream Roma organisations. On the one hand, in relation to mainstream civil society organisations, Kozma criticizes these for lacking bottom up engagement of Roma: “they should work with Roma not only for Roma”. She finds that many civil organizations do not incorporate Roma people in their agitation for Roma. On the other hand, she feels herself being challenged by Roma organisations critical towards the connections of her organization with larger feminist organisations, such as MONA and NANE. Her critics perceived these national organisations as having apart interests to that of Roma women: “wait until you have to meet the real bossy Roma women, in long skirts and with long hair, not those (urban feminist women) under the influence of American lesbians.” Thus, Kozma’s own experience concerning interaction with so well mainstream feminist as with other Roma women’s organisations partially corroborates the critique forwarded by Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011) concerning two points: the lack of critical engagement with Roma women’s concerns in a bottom up fashion.

⁵⁵B. Hobson, “No Exit, No Voice: Women’s Economic Dependency and the Welfare State” *Acta Sociologica*, 33 (3) (1990): 235-250;

Nonetheless Kozma's own engagement exemplifies the opposite of the trends criticized above.

By the time of my second interview and following visit at the foundation of RONAH (Roma Női Aktivisták Hálózata: Roma Women Activist Network) initiatives were made to overcome the above indicated gap between mainstream feminist organisations and Roma women's organisations by first of all the initiative of NANE (Asztalos Morell 2015a).

Conclusions

Recent publication by Jacobsson and Saxonberg challenges the view of low civil engagement in former East block countries as well as the thesis that such activities would be the outcome of global agencies referred also to as NGO-isation. They argue that current trends indicate autonomous movements, even if the patterns of civil organizing might differ to that common in the developed world. The latter is also supported by Fábíán finding alternate patterns prevail within the women's movement in Hungary compared to the anglo-saxon feminist movements.

Asztalos Morell⁵⁶ indicated similar trends within Roma women's organisations in Hungary. Roma women's organisations in her studies had dual roots. On the one hand they were facilitated in their initiation by global actors, such as Soros foundation funded main-stream national agencies. On the other hand, they have roots in local autonomous civil organizing, not uncommonly having roots and connections to local municipal social welfare institutions. There is also a permeability between positions held in local minority self-organisations and participation in civil organisations. Asztalos Morell⁵⁷ showed also how an intersectional analysis can contribute to better understanding of the dilemmas civil organisations face in formulating their agenda concerning Roma women. Roma women, just as black women, find themselves in the intersection of multiple systems of domination. Majority society had the voice to define Roma women's concerns, a monopoly that contributed to the problematisation of Roma women (similar to what Matras criticized in majority policies problematizing Roma). Issues highlighting Roma women's vulnerable situation in the family, with early pregnancies and domestic violence and trafficking, have been constructed in culturifying images stigmatizing Roma communities. Opposing to such stigmatizing imaginary, Roma women as well as radical feminist movements have been skeptical to take these IC and GBV issues on board of their policies. Asztalos Morell highlighted merging points between radical feminist organisations, such as NANE and Roma women's organisations, such as Szinesgyöngyök, where interplay between radical feminist organisations and Roma women's organisations created a fruitful ground to enlarge the concerns of Roma women organisations and make taking GBV issues on board, despite of initial opposition from Roma organisations as well as their own constituency.

⁵⁶ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: YuliaGradskova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁵⁷ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: YuliaGradskova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

This paper provides an additional support to the intersectional interpretation of the emerging Roma women's movement. RKNSZ is an organization which fits into the pattern described by Asztalos Morell⁵⁸ of multiple initiation. RKNSZ has been an organization where, thanks much to the charismatic leadership of Blanka Kozma, top down influences through connections to and integration with mainstream civil society organisations on the liberal playground, with bottom up concerns. These bottom up concerns have partly developed through previous engagement with social welfare issues of marginalised Roma communities partly can be considered as a general political and ethical standpoint. This standpoint is rooted in a class and ethnicity specific positioning of the concerns of Roma women. While taking on board even GBV and IC issues, Kozma makes it clear how these need to be anchored in the specific social circumstances of Roma. In doing so Kozma acted against mainstream opinion among both Roma community leaders and leaders of Roma women's NGOs, which opposed to raise private issues in the organisations.

Vincze (2014) emphasized the historic importance of Roma women's civil society mobilization to offer an opportunity to voice their concerns as subjects. This connects to Crenshaw's and Spivak's image of the silenced sub-altern's possibility to speak. I find in Kozma's positioning herself and her organization as the key facilitator of such development in Hungary. She positions herself in the merging point between middle-class white feminist Western and Hungarian mainstream feminist movements and Roma civil right movement with focus on underprivileged Roma women's situation. She positions herself also in the merging point between Roma mainstream organisations, including the most of Roma women's organisations and a radical feminist standpoint. Thus, taking the cause of the most underprivileged captured by both vulnerabilities related to GBV and IC issues. Nonetheless, maintaining a constant contextualizing of issues of trafficking or family violence in the underprivileged Roma community. By this, she is departing from both middle class white women's earlier focus on GBV issues as detached of class and ethnicity and Roma civil organisations lacking engagement with GBV issues.

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⁵⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

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 New Series. Issue No. 7 (21)/ 2016