

## **Chapter 1.3 Perspectives on friction and collaboration in Tiszavasvári and Szímő (Zemné)**

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This section focuses on connections between spaces and places and those who inhabit and interact with them in the project sites Zemné (a village in Southern Slovakia) and Tiszavasvári (a town in Eastern Hungary). On the basis of teachers' and parents' accounts as well as on the researchers' and teacher trainees' observations, we discuss linguistic practices, interactions between Roma and non-Roma and the children's use and perceptions of the geographic locations and spaces surrounding them.

We introduce both project sites, but because of the greater diversity and number of local perspectives, Tiszavasvári is given more emphasis in the analysis. This sub-chapter shows how peripherality in geographical terms is linked to social marginalisation, and how the struggle against marginalisation and the hopelessness of poverty is linked to movements towards the city centre and, at the same time, towards higher social status. The chapter merges three viewpoints: i) that of non-local researchers having an external viewpoint, ii) that of Hungarian monolingual teachers working and living in Tiszavasvári, and iii) that of bilingual Roma parents living in Tiszavasvári. The chapter begins with a researcher's outsider perspective introducing both sites' social circumstances in broad terms (1.3.1). It continues with a teacher's perspective, giving voice also to responsible thoughts of a local non-Roma (1.3.2). This is followed by writings by local Roma participants (1.3.3), reflecting the relations of spaces, places and those who inhabit them from an insider's perspective.

In summer 2021, researchers, students and local Roma parents had the opportunity to organise a one-week workshop at the research site Tiszavasvári. During the week, locals, university students and researchers aimed to create texts for the present volume. Participants also watched some of the translanguaging classroom videos made as part of the present project and analysed in this volume. We reflected on them with local participants in discussions and in writing. Students and local participants always worked together, mainly according to the following pattern: local Roma participants formulated their ideas in detail, students wrote down their words with careful consideration to detail, and read them back to local participants. The two parties finalised the expository prose passages together but according to the wishes and ideologies of the local participants. In this way, project participants separated the formulation of the text from writing it down. This subchapter presents a selection of the prose passages thus attained.

### **1.3.1 Tiszavasvári and Szímő (Zemné) as research sites**

The Roma in both Hungary and Slovakia live among diverse social circumstances and are parts of different social strata. However, many of the people considered to be Roma live in poverty and exclusion (Virág and Váradi 2018; Rochovská and Rusnáková 2018), and Roma are often considered by non-Roma as people plagued by poverty and social handicaps. Roma at our research sites appear for local non-Roma at first glance as homogeneous communities. Members of these communities are often identified in local discourses of non-Roma in social and/or geographical terms as marginalised people. Roma people are highly vulnerable in both sites, suffering from persistent social depression leading to incapacities for social innovation (for Tiszavasvári, see Lengyel 2013). At the same time, they also face everyday

discrimination. Nevertheless, there are considerable differences in the financial situation and the social habits of the families, and there are also important differences between the two locations. The issue of boundary making between Roma and non-Roma, on the one hand, and, on the other, within Roma society, as well as the approaches to this topic in academic discourses are addressed in sub-chapter 1.2. In local discourses at our research sites, the judgements about being Roma or non-Roma are mostly drawn along certain social (low socio-economic status) and cultural (recognition and experience of belonging to Roma communities) characteristics of the place of residence and/or way of life, with people considering themselves to be non-Roma typically mentioning socio-economic characteristics, and people considering themselves to be Roma emphasizing rather cultural characteristics in discourses about the Roma. For example, low socio-economic status is associated with day-to-day subsistence, a lack of medium- and long-term financial planning, and occasional jobs (e.g. day labouring) and a pattern of consumption without accumulation. Distinctive cultural characteristics include a sense of belonging to a marginalised community, the retention of certain ways of dressing (long skirts, slippers), leisure activities, nutritional habits, and rituals (e.g. those connected to funerals and celebrations).

Zemné (in Hungarian Szímő), a village in Southwestern Slovakia, has c. 2150 inhabitants, of which, according to a national survey for local authorities in 2018/2019, 11 to 20% of the inhabitants belong to the Roma ethnicity (Atlas 2019). According to the 2011 census (Štatistický Úrad 2012), among the 2281 inhabitants, 445 declared Slovak ethnicity, 1605 Hungarian and 184 Roma. According to personal communication with municipality officials in January 2022, Szímő (Zemné) has 2098 inhabitants. The number of the Roma is estimated around 400. The number of inhabitants whose first language is Slovak is between 200 and 300. During the 1947-48 expulsions and resettlements (Hungarian-Czechoslovak population exchange, see Murashko 2000; Rieber 2000; Waters 2020), nearly 300 people were resettled in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Slovak families from Hungary were resettled in Szímő (Zemné), but most of them later moved to areas of northern Slovakia, with no ethnic Hungarian population, and the Czech Republic. About 50 to 60 Slovak ethnic families remained in Szímő (Zemné), most of whom also spoke or learned Hungarian. Today, Slovak first-language speakers move to the village mainly through marriage. At the same time, Szímő (Zemné) has many houses for sale with affordable prices, which attracts young Slovak ethnic families to the village in growing numbers. Such new families make little effort to learn Hungarian (personal communication with the mayor of Szímő (Zemné), January 2022).

There are two elementary schools in the village; there is a Slovak-medium school for the Slovak speakers. Ethnic Hungarians use Hungarian in the everyday at home and in the village in general; most of their children attend the Hungarian-medium primary school in Szímő and Hungarian-medium secondary schools in nearby towns. The reason for this is, on the one hand, that ethnic Hungarians often have only limited competence in Slovak and, on the other hand, that Hungarian-medium schools support ethnic Hungarians' maintenance of Hungarian as a mother tongue. The Roma speak at home mostly a Romani vernacular. Roma children in Szímő usually grow up as Romani-Hungarian bilinguals with limited Slovak competence (Roma children attend exclusively the Hungarian-medium school). However, as local Roma have several connections with Slovak-Romani bilingual Roma groups from Northern Slovakia and often trade across the country, Roma adults usually have some level of Slovak competence. Ethnic Slovaks or Hungarians rarely speak Romani.

The few hundred members of the local Roma community live in different streets scattered around the village. Despite this, they built a relatively closed local community with

their own social events and customs. For example, during our one-week fieldwork carried out in September 2021, Roma community members were kept in suspense by the aftermath of a family conflict, which the parties involved had presented to a community elder to resolve. This was discussed with all Roma families visited by the research team. In financial terms, local Roma are considered to be part of lower middle class blue-collar workers or to have unemployed status, representing lower social ranks than the non-Roma co-villagers, with whom the Roma maintain little contact. Roma without employment often trade all kinds of goods (from vegetables to plastic products) across Slovakia and Hungary.

Generally, the Roma in Szímő (Zemné) live on the margins of society both locally and in the national sense. Two examples illustrate this. First, during the yearly village festival, a local Roma association receives municipal funds to organise parallel events for the Roma. In this way, Roma do not attend the main village festival. When researchers asked a member of the association about this practice, he was more concerned about the Roma events being underfunded than the ethnic separation itself. Second, there is separation in pre-school education. In Slovakia attending one year of kindergarten is compulsory for all, but in Szímő (Zemné) Roma children do not always attend. In fact, the absence of the Roma from kindergarten has become more significant due to Covid-19 restrictions since 2020.

The village operates two separate schools located in the same building, one with Slovak and one with Hungarian as the language of instruction. The Slovak-medium school is attended by c. 60 pupils, the Hungarian medium school by c. 100 students. In the Hungarian school, which is attended by Roma children, too, approximately 70% of the pupils consist of Roma. Many Hungarian families choose the Slovak-medium school or take their children by car to other Hungarian-medium schools in nearby towns. 40 from the 70 Roma students have been diagnosed with a learning disability. However, only a few teachers are qualified to teach students with learning disabilities. The school operates with small classes.

At our other research site in Tiszavasvári, the non-Roma locals estimate the number of the Roma usually between 3.500 and 4.500 of the 13.459 inhabitants according to the last census data from 2011 (KSH 2011). The town was established in the 1950s by merging two villages. One of the villages was home to a group of people categorized in local discourses as monolingual Hungarian-speaking Roma, while the other was inhabited by Romani-Hungarian bilingual families. This has not changed ever since, currently there are, according to local perceptions, at least 1000 Hungarian-speaking Roma at one end of the town and 2500 bilingual Roma at the other end. Almost all of them belong to lower social strata, although the monolingual Hungarian-speaking Roma are in a more favourable situation regarding education, employment, and housing. Bilingual Roma live in a slum on the edge of the town. In this area, consisting basically of two main thoroughfares called *Keskeny utca* 'narrow way' and *Széles utca* 'broad way', most houses were built as state-run social policy initiatives in the 1980s and 2000s. In the 2000s in particular, houses with relatively large floor areas of 80 to 90 m<sup>2</sup> were built very close to each other without precise land-registry measurements of the plots. These buildings were of poor quality from the outset and are now, according to our ethnographic observations, mostly falling apart, often giving shelter to more than 15 people each.

Tiszavasvári has become the scene of socio-political battles. The most recent incident took place in 2015, when the far-right mayor in office invited paramilitary troops in the town under the slogan of maintaining order. In actual fact, the campaign was directed against the local Roma (Hain 2019: 14). The non-local paramilitary groups envisioned a permanent patrolling in the Roma slum. Following nationwide outcry and protests, this activity was soon halted, but it severely damaged local relationships between the Roma and Hungarians.

Social tensions in the town spark on an everyday basis, too, usually manifested in heated discussions about confrontations during everyday encounters. The local non-Roma complain about Roma misbehaviour in the supermarket or at the doctor's office (e.g. that the Roma jump the queues, they are not well-groomed, etc.). The local Roma in turn complain about everyday discrimination and humiliation in the same places. These mutual complaints are the result of the significant difference between the social situation of the Roma and the non-Roma, and of the fact that the non-Roma are unaware of the Roma's situation. A high proportion of Roma families live in deep poverty and social depression (see Lengyel 2003, 2004, 2013). For example, most of the Roma families' houses lack running water and the two thousand inhabitants of the slum have to fetch water from the public wells which are few in numbers. Among the Roma adults functional illiteracy rates are high and the completion rate of basic education is low. The Roma are, in a high percentage, employed through non-market-determined state-sponsored employment programmes, if at all. Some adults work as day labourers or in factories. Even if they have the qualifications, Roma are often unable to find jobs in the region. One reason for this is the discrimination they face everyday. Another reason is that they lack the social skills, the social networking ability, and the capacity for mobility, which is needed for non-casual employment. The few entrepreneurial Roma families run several businesses. Thanks to the recent economic upturn, state aid schemes and Roma integration policy (for a review see Hornyik 2020), some Roma families have seized the opportunity to buy a house outside the narrowly defined slum around Széles utca 'broad way'. They purchased properties in the streets surrounding the slum, which is separated from the rest of the city by a railway line. This area is called Külső-Majoros 'Outer Majoros'. However, this new trend has led to a rapid fall in real estate-prices in the streets concerned, as the new neighbours are afraid that the Roma would violate their behavioural norms with, for example, noisy festivities, unkept gardens, and so on.

With few exceptions, bilingual Roma children from the slum attend a kindergarten and an elementary school run by the Pentecostal church and avoided by the non-Roma. The school used to be an institution attended mostly by middle class students whose parents worked in the local pharmaceutical factory, which started to decay after the fall of Communism. At that time Roma children were schooled in a separate building. This blatant segregation was eliminated after a major scandal, which was covered by national media (see Kóczé 1997). At the same time, non-Roma students stopped attending the school, and it has thus become "spontaneously" segregated a few years ago. This is the school, attended by almost 500 Roma pupils, where our project activities are carried out. Non-Roma middle class families avoid both sharing neighbourhoods with the Roma and sending their children to schools with Roma pupils.

There is only another primary school in Tiszavasvári. Monolingual Hungarian-speaking Roma and a small proportion of the bilingual Roma (living mostly in a nearby settlement called Józsefháza, where they moved in the 1990s) attend this other, state-run school. This school is similar in size to the one run by the Pentecostal church, but the proportion of Roma students, as estimated by a teacher, is about 40%. (There are no official numbers regarding the ethnicity of the students. Unlike in Slovakia, public bodies generally do not produce statistics on Roma ethnicity). A few years ago, the third school, which was attended only by Hungarian-speaking monolingual Roma students, was merged into the state-run school. This was an initiative by a non-local pro-Roma NGO (see Kerülő 2018). Today, both Roma and non-Roma parents are dissatisfied with the situation, the former mostly because of the distance children have to travel to get to school, which involves bus transfer. Some non-Roma children attend schools in other cities; thus, among under-18s, a majority-



minority situation has arisen (Geldof 2018: 45), that is, the proportion of the “othered” minority is greater than that of ethnic Hungarians.

The next sections discuss local circumstances in Tiszavasvári from local, insider-perspectives. 3.1.2 is written by the head teacher of the school where our project is based, and 3.2.3 is written by the Roma participants of the week devoted to the writing workshop in summer 2021.

### 1.3.2 Living and teaching in Tiszavasvári

Tiszavasvári is located at a distance of 210km from Budapest. The present-day town was created with the unification of two villages in 1950. Inhabitants still use the terms *búdi* ‘of/from Búd’ and *szentmihályi* ‘of/from Szentmihály’, with reference to the two former villages. Tiszavasvári’s society is characterised by a threefold division. Those who live on the outskirts of Búd are called *magyar cigány* ‘Hungarian Gypsies, Romungros’ by locals. Those who live in the outer areas of Szentmihály (in the so-called *külső majorosi* ‘Outer Majoros’ neighbourhood) are *oláh cigány* ‘Vlach Gypsies’. In the inner city are the relatively wealthier inhabitants. At a new location, also on the outskirts, a third, closed community is being established, the so-called *Józsefháza* settlement. Its inhabitants belonged originally to the Vlach Roma but they are increasingly distancing themselves from this group.

However, in the 1990s, the factory started to decline and the educated professionals working for the factory moved out of the city. The issues of the Roma population, now living in three closed communities in town, have always been a major challenge for the non-Roma population of Tiszavasvári and the city administration.

What is more, the Hungarian Gypsies in the Búd area and the Vlach Gypsies in the Szentmihály area are unable to collaborate with each other. The Hungarian-speaking Roma in Búd consider themselves to be superior to the Vlach Roma in Szentmihály. The Roma in Búd have a broader social layer, which is relatively better educated and wealthier than those in Szentmihály (cf. Lengyel 2004). People in Búd, nonetheless, live in poverty, with low standards of living, but overall they are less marginalised than the population of Szentmihály, who live in the deepest poverty. Those in Búd are also better accepted by the non-Roma urban population. This explains why marriages between the two Roma communities are rare.

In terms of numbers and poverty indicators, it has always been the people living in the old Szentmihály, in the Outer Majoros settlement, who have been in a more difficult situation (cf. Lengyel 2004). Outer Majoros, where there was a historic manor house with farm buildings and servants’ dwellings which serviced it, is separated from the rest of the town by a railway line. There was first a street here called *Széles utca* ‘broad way’, which gave its name to the entire slum and its inhabitants, who are referred to as *Széles utcaiak* ‘[the people] of broad way’. Later another street (*Keskeny utca* ‘narrow way’) and several access roads have been added to this neighbourhood. Until the Second World War, the area was inhabited by the Calvinist servants of the Catholic aristocratic family occupying the manor house. In the 1950s, Roma families who had previously lived in other peripheral areas of the town were moved here. Subsequently, poor-quality, comfortless, one-room houses were built on the two streets. In the following years and decades, the houses in the surrounding streets were also bought by Roma families. The non-Roma population moved out of the neighbourhood, so the slum grew increasingly larger. There is no precise data about the population of Majoros, the former Szentmihály, today, but the number of inhabitants must be around 2000-2500. This number is more likely to be higher, but neither census data nor local calculations are accurate.

Roma families have also moved into the part of the city beyond the railway line, but their numbers there remain low. The purchase of houses in the formerly non-Roma

neighbourhood of Majoros, outside the Széles and Keskeny roads, but still beyond the railway, is generally perceived by locals, including the Roma community itself, as an improvement in living standards. The houses here have several bedrooms and bathrooms. Most of the houses have boilers, which make heating with gas possible, if the residents pay their bills. These families have already distinguished themselves from those living on the Széles and Keskeny roads, but have not left the community behind. The families that could afford to move up in this way were those where the father had been permanently employed in a factory or other workplace, and not in public works (public work is a state-funded, non-market based employment scheme in Hungary, designed to help individuals enter the labour market through temporary, usually municipal, employment). Thus, people who can buy a house outside Széles and Keskeny roads are those who earn relatively better than others, have a secure job, and can therefore receive the available state subsidies or borrow from a financial institution.

Purchasing houses outside the narrowly defined settlement indicates that many families would like to break out from the closed community in the slum area. The houses with a higher degree of comfort, purchased in the neighbouring streets around the slum is an important first step in this direction: only a first step, yet a significant one. The reasons why upwardly mobile families opt for these houses, close to the slum, are twofold. First, they are cheaper than property across the railway lines and nearer the city centre. Second, they do not want to break away from the slum community entirely: they lack confidence to untie their bonds with their family, relatives, and community. Part of the reason for this is that the wealthier urban middle class population looks down on them and fears them, and Roma families are reluctant to expose themselves to these prejudiced attitudes. They feel safer in their own community. Non-Roma urban populations are also afraid of the Roma moving into the centre of town because, according to local stereotypes, the Roma do not keep their properties clean and music blasts from their houses even at night. They do not respect their neighbours, and if they are asked to collaborate they respond aggressively. I have been personally following two families who have moved into town, and I cannot confirm this negative framing of the behaviour of the Roma based on that. Those who are ready for the challenge of moving into town are well aware of the stereotypes and are prepared to counter them with their own behaviour.

Most of the Vlach Roma still live in the Majoros slum, forming a separate micro-society within the town, preserving their own way of life and their beliefs. The core of this area are the two main streets, 'Narrow Way' and 'Broad Way', described above, but the neighbourhood today includes all surrounding streets on this side of the railway lines, which were previously inhabited by non-Roma but where most houses belong to Roma owners today. There are signs of the gradual desintegration of this closed community, similar to all other communities which undergo structural changes. Such changes might be only periodical, but the community usually reacts differently to economic downturns and booms. In the cyclical repetition of upward and downward economic trends, however, the community reacts differently in each cycle. Increasing national labour shortages in the 2010s have led to increased mobility among members of the community, especially among men. This is further exacerbated by state support schemes that encourage childbearing and support families with many children in case one parent is employed. As a result, men leave the slum to find employment in other cities, while women typically stay at home and take care of the family. Children react sensitively to the absence of fathers, particularly the boys. When another economic downturn comes, which is unavoidable because of the cyclical nature of economic growth, those who work in other cities and for wealthier middle-class families are likely to

experience the crisis differently from before, when such economic downturns hit them in the midst of several decades of unemployment. On the one hand, they have invested their higher wages into better housing, and, on the other, they might now view the economy differently on the whole. It is likely that they will look for ways to secure their families' living standards. This certainly implies a different way of thinking, based on forward planning, from earlier ways of dealing with crises. The fear is that those who are not flexible enough may sink back to their previous poverty levels.

At the same time, the gaps are growing greater in the society of the Outer Majoros settlement, too. The wealthier families, who are better off than member of their extended family, are reluctant to help their poorer relatives. In the Majoros community this is not a matter of bad moral or guilty conscious: as family ties are countless and complex, no individual family member can help everyone. Among members of extended families, too, there are patterns of who is richer and who is poorer. Members of the entire community (of about 2500 people) share only seven or eight surnames. When mentioning surnames associated with large extended families, people often add the financial status of the micro-family in question. In Outer Majoros, this uneven dynamic also involves the poorer people playing up to the richer ones. The acts of playing up (Hu. csicskázás) become a form of modern-day slavery and involve delivering substantial amount of work and favours to someone else without being paid for it. Such free work might be delivered in exchange for debt or to obtain shelter and food.

In terms of belonging in the cultural sense, however, the people living in Outer Majoros, whether rich or poor, still feel more at home here, within the community that keeps their traditions alive. Although external influences are increasingly penetrating the previously closed community, there are still traditions and customs which inherently characterise the people who live here. For example, to this day, girls and women do not cut their long hair because they believe it will bring them bad luck. The wake for the dead is also an important and bidding custom. Folk costumes are no longer worn, but most women wear only skirts, even if they wear leggings or tight trousers underneath. There are countless nuanced differences of this kind between the Roma and the non-Roma. These are minor differences, and those who are unfamiliar with the community may not even notice them. For locals, however, they are part of the close ties that unite them.

### 1.3.3 Centre and periphery

My father and my grandfather travelled from village to village because they were tin-workers, you know, this was how they earned their living. Sometimes my father took me with him. I enjoyed seeing how he put patches on leaky pots, pans, bowls, kettles, cookstoves – things you would throw out today. But these are still valuable things, and working with them was also beautiful. So, I would like my grandchildren and also others to know about such things.

In the old days, we had a better sense of togetherness, we understood each other better, even though we lived much poorer. We walked everywhere, we did everything by hand. For example, if one of us didn't have flour or something, and I did, I would divide my flour between us. My mother and I used to go to spend time with Hungarians and talk to them. We can't do that anymore. I miss that, because the old people used to tell us stories, and we listened so quietly, and I still hold this dear to me, this tradition. I am not going to let it be forgotten. I still behave sometimes as in the old days. I bake a little Gypsy bread or when I go shopping I put my bundle on: everything fits into it, things I have to carry. I tie it up, put it on

my back, tie it across my two shoulders, and it makes it easier for me to carry the bags home and everything. I also wear the long skirts and aprons, I am not ashamed of it. You shouldn't feel ashamed of the old traditions either.

With my parents we used to live further down. Here, in the Gypsy settlement, but not in the same area where I live today. We lived in an adobe house which was built by my parent. It was a nice one room and one bedroom house. Then, when I left my parents house, I first lived at my mother-in-law's, but theirs was also made of adobe, it was built by my father-in-law. They also had a room, a kitchen, and a nice little porch. My parents' house no longer stands. After I gave birth to my third child, we also made a house of adobe, my husband and I, with our own hands, yes. We made adobe, and we also built a room and a kitchen for ourselves. And that's where we lived. Not any longer, though, because state-supported constructions started. A builder accepted it, and they built a house, for me, too, in which there are four rooms, a bathroom a toilet, and that's where we live now.

Gypsies are very far away from Hungarians, separated, and it would be good if they could come closer to each other, for example in the workplaces or if they could be neighbours. If we could spend a week with Hungarian women next summer, that would be good. We would talk about our past, what kind of work we do at home, how we keep ourselves busy, where we work, what we all do, how many children we have and how many grandchildren, and about cooking. This would be a conversation in which we all take part. It could also include what's happening at the GP's surgery. Some people would say yes, they agree with me, because we are all Hungarian citizens; the fact that I am a Roma is another matter. But there may be some who would say that I am wrong. I would talk to them about what I have experienced. When one lady came to the doctor's waiting room and looked around to see how many Roma were there, she took her phone out and called the doctor as if to make an appointment. She came back to the waiting room and the door was immediately opened for her. I don't know if we could organise a whole afternoon to talk about this. We could do it on a first-come, first-served basis at the doctor's. Then there would be no conflict between the Hungarians and the Gypsies.

Now school is much different from what it used to be, because now teachers are appreciative of Gypsy ways of speaking, and even talk to the children in Gypsy. They have learned a lot from the children and from us. I worked here at the school for three years. I don't know if the teachers just picked up the language, but we had discussions with them. There were times when we sat in the director's office. And there they asked me, for example, how do we say *bowl* in Gypsy, and I said *čaro*. She said, "how do we call a *pot* in Gypsy?" – *piri*. Then she said "how do we say *bread* in Gypsy?" – *manro*. "How to eat?" When we say that we eat, I say to my little grandchildren and my child, "*Életem xas?*" [lit. *élet-em* 'life-1SG 'my life'; an endearing form of address common in Hungarian, too; *xa-s* 'eat'-2SG 'you eat']. Yes, we used to say things like that. Or the *skirt*, how do we say it in Gypsy? In Gypsy we say *coha*. For the *apron*, this one here, *ketrinca*. For the *blouse*: *zubunu*. We said things like this to them. The *hair* – *bal[a]*.

My children and grandchildren rarely talk to me about what happened at school. They do not like gossiping. They come home from school, eat, take a bath, go to their room, study, watch TV. The older ones read their phones. But now they can speak Gypsy in school. They say it is very well because they can speak Gypsy. They do talk about that. They also asked me, "Grandma, when you went to school, did you speak Gypsy?" I said "yes". And "what did the teachers say?" "Well, I was told off." "Not now! We can talk." I said, "well, you're lucky". Not all schools are like that. One of my son's children does not go here [to Magiszter], he goes to Kabay, and they cannot speak Gypsy there. Absolutely not. But they do not speak at home



either. They rarely speak Gypsy, and their behaviour is not like ours at home. They do not live in the settlement. They stand out with their manners, they are so proud, so elegant. They keep to themselves. Like, when I go down to their house, they don't call me *mama* 'grandma', they call me *nagyi* 'nona'. It was also difficult for them at first at school, because they did not speak Hungarian at home either, only Gypsy. But then their father took them under his wing and he always spoke Hungarian to them and interpreted the Hungarian words for them. He told them not to speak Gypsy at school, because there are no Gypsies there, only Hungarians, but to speak only Hungarian, and the children got it into their heads that they should speak only Hungarian.

My heart's dream is to move out of Keskeny road. There are too many Roma there. It has always been like that but I got very tired of it. I would like to have Hungarian neighbours, and I would like to be on good terms with them. Keskeny road has changed a lot, and so did the Roma. There are many more of them close together than there used to be. Before, there weren't this many people living in a single house, and we did not live this close together. The houses built with state support were put too close to each other. Between the adobe houses there was more space, we were further from each other, we were not tied together in this way, nor were the children. Children were able to play alone, on their own plot of land. Now the children are always mixed up with the neighbours' kids. Before, everyone was on their own plot, further away from each other. Today, the children start fighting with each other more easily.

Tiszavasvári is a small town. For the most part, Gypsies live separately from Hungarians. The central area is very nice and cheerful. The Roma settlement is neglected, unkept, unsuitable. I like living here, I was born here, but I would like to move out with my children and my companion. Some people live among the Hungarians. Some are good neighbours, but most Hungarians are anti-Gypsy. They look down on Gypsies very much. They ostracize us in most places. There are Hungarians who welcome us. But they are very few. So, they don't even let us adapt to them. The small children all go to Gypsy kindergartens, and there are only Gypsy children in school. At work, in the public works, there are only Gypsies. There are places where they don't even let us in. In the shop we can't shop normally because they follow us behind our backs. Then we feel ashamed in front of others. In the doctor's office, we are often treated less favourably than Hungarians. They even refused to examine our children on several occasions. We can't take our children to the playground because we are chased away.

It is rare for Gypsies to go to the water park [a much-loved attraction in Tiszavasvári]. Roma women do not have the habit of bathing in public. In shops there are people who welcome Roma customers, but there are also those who treat Roma in a patronising way. In general, when there are Gypsies in the doctor's office, they behave reservedly, they are withdrawn. In several shops, we can speak only Hungarian because the shopkeeper is averse to even Gypsy talk. There are Roma who live next to Hungarians and are loved by Hungarians. Here in Tiszavasvári only Gypsies work in public works; Hungarians, if they are hired, do only office work. There are pubs and bars where Gypsies are not allowed to enter, it is forbidden.

I usually like making friends among Hungarians. There are Hungarians who are very likable, but there are also Hungarians who look down on Gypsies, because they lump all Gypsies together. But there are Hungarians with whom we are friends. It would be good to have relationships between Hungarians and Gypsies in order to overcome the hostilities. There are people who like being friends with us. But there are those who do not receive us well. I would like them to speak to us nicely, because we speak to them nicely. We expect

them to respect Gypsy culture. For example, if we go somewhere, to the market, for instance, and we use both languages, they look down on us. I don't understand why. Because we were born Gypsy.

#### 1.3.4 Being in between

In Tiszavasvári, there are places associated with the Roma. These are geographic locations on the peripheries of the town, filled with meaning and special value (Gieryn 2000) for both the Roma and non-Roma. One of such places (Külső-Majoros, 'Outer Majoros', and the core of the neighbourhood, Széles road) is where bilingual Roma live. Discourses among local bilingual Roma construct a close link between spaciality and being (Horner and Dailey-O' Cain 2019: 4, with reference to Soja 1989: 80). They evaluate Külső-Majoros as a place of suffering; there is a positive attitude towards the city of Tiszavasvári as a whole, but there are negative connotations related to Külső-Majoros. Külső-Majoros is often described as a crowded and dirty place, where too many Roma live too tight together. Most non-Roma inhabitants of Tiszavasvári have never been near Külső-Majoros or Széles road, let alone walking through it. For the non-Roma, it is not only an unknown place, but also a space constructed in local discussions (Lefebvre 1991) as dangerous and chaotic, that is, an area better to be avoided.

Spaces where encounters between Roma and non-Roma take place are dotted all across the town; they can be places at any location, such as shops and the doctor's office. The Roma usually do not feel safe or comfortable in such places. They are ashamed of speaking the way they speak at home or they feel being treated with suspicion. What is more, there are also spaces of unambiguous segregation: there are pubs and restaurants in town where the Roma are unwelcome to enter. Streets and squares of the city become spaces of such suspicion and unfair encounters or outright segregation.

Local festivals and programmes are organised mostly in the town centre or at a recreational area at the opposite end of town, far away from Külső-Majoros. In the summer of 2021, we observed an open-air film screening in the town center. The programme was free of charge and the city had placed chairs for the audience in front of the screen on the main square. People sat in rows or stood around the buffet tables. Some Roma men, held in high esteem, some of them with families, and a few curious teenagers were present from the settlement on the event. They were not sitting on the chairs, nor were they enjoying snacks at the buffet – they were standing and chatting on the roadside around the square. In the second half of the programme, some families and independent men came into the middle of the square but did not sit on the chairs. Our observation underlines our earlier case in point: the Roma enter spaces of encounter with the non-Roma with uncertainty and fear; these spaces are associated for them with bad experience and humiliation.

Similar processes and phenomena are described on other levels, for instance, on that of housing issues and residence. There are spaces of encounters and confrontations (e.g. streets with lower real estate prices on the Külső-Majoros side of the railway), to which the Roma have access only if they embark on a path of social mobilisation. There are also spaces (practically all other parts of the town) linked to middle class status, to which Roma have access only in exceptional circumstances. Spaces which the Roma enter, both through everyday encounters or social mobility at large, are comparable to concentric circles. Leaving the geographic location of Külső-Majoros the Roma come across new opportunities. But they also encounter challenges when trying to navigate these spaces as fully fledged citizens. During an economic boom, opportunities are expanding for all. Some can take advantage of such moments, others less so. New economic and cultural opportunities exist also in hard

times, but only the more fortunate and stronger are able to access them. All this leaves its mark on the cultural heritage and everyday life of the local bilingual Roma, whose society is undergoing transformation. They have to come to terms with the fact that social mobility means detachment from their own cultural background, which entails not only poverty and social depression but also security and belonging. Moving into new spaces also means changing their relationship with the old ones.

Language plays an important role in all this. The Magiszter School is an exceptional place: it has been transformed by the translanguaging project. This is an important transformational space in the lives of bilingual Roma: children encounter non-Roma society and its values and norms here for the first time. This institution of the majority society is a safe place for Roma students. It is also the first place where Romani-linked ways of speaking have gained a positive connotation also outside the Külső-Majoros settlement. This safe place is provided by non-Roma teachers, supporting, or at least recognising, the customs and limited opportunities of Roma families. Nonetheless, Roma students do not meet either non-Roma students or majority parents in the school environment.

Elsewhere in town the situation is different. Spaces of encounters constitute a constant challenge for the Roma. The ways of speaking of the bilingual Roma are just as stigmatized as the speakers themselves. Recognising that attitudes towards Romani are intertwined with the appreciation of the person, the Roma feel uncomfortable and insecure in places where Romani ways of speaking are unwelcome. An important source of social conflict and segregation lies in the practice of silencing certain speakers in socially constructed spaces of encounters.

In-betweenness, abandoning traditional cultural, social and economic patterns as well as facing challenges of economic and cultural transformation is familiar not only to the Roma in Tiszavasvári or to Roma across Europe, but also to members of minority communities, which are not necessarily, or not exclusively, organised according to the requirements of modern nation states or post-industrial societies. People living in-between, wherever they are geographically, are forced to break new paths, and find their voices through new ways of speaking (in often new languages) to construct resources for their daily life formed by the frameworks of nation states and global capitalism.

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