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**Conflicting Struggles for Recognition:
Clashing Interests of Gender and Ethnicity in Contemporary Hungary**

Introduction

As the fast-growing literature on the subject richly demonstrated it, the ongoing struggles of diverse disadvantaged (and/or deprived) social groups for gaining due recognition in their immediate and broader social milieu had an important contribution to the substantive reshaping of the established welfare states over the past decades (Mishra 1984, Taylor 1994, Habermas 1994, Honneth 1995, Fraser 1997). In most of the cases, the struggles in question were waged for giving voice to harms made to individual and group-identities, or, they aimed at pointing to systematic shortcomings in the socio-political interpretation of rights and entitlements (thereby challenging the dominant arrangements of redistribution), or, yet in other cases, they strove for changing the orientation of the mainstream political discourse (thereby questioning the legitimacy of the prevailing power-relations). Though usually originating from issues of identity and social justice, these struggles for recognition have not remained within the framework of identity-politics per se. As the history of the past decades has proven, they have greatly affected the entire working of the social and political order. They left their imprint on the social structure, affected (and shifted) the public-private divide, and, last but not least, brought forth utterly new institutions that became constituents of the enlarged political arena in most Western welfare states.

Among the highly diverse group-formations, it was women and different ethnic minorities that have played the key-roles in these struggles. As analysts have pointed out several times, their fights have not been restricted to the values and daily formation of inter-group relations, but greatly ingrained also the spheres of power, redistribution, labour market participation, and further, bore upon the working of the social and welfare institutions, and

the contents of private life. Thus, one is inclined to say that, with their far-reaching impact, struggles for recognition have had a major contribution in correcting certain inequalities and malfunctions of the classical welfare state, and succeeded in injecting some fresh blood into the daily running of democratic politics in the West.

Acknowledging the outstanding importance of identity-politics and the struggles for recognition in recent Western history, it is logical to ask the same set of questions also with regard to the new democracies of the East: amid the surprisingly quick establishment of democratic administration after the long decades of totalitarian rule, can one record a simultaneous swift rise of various groups claiming some alteration of the prevailing distribution of power, social esteem and income? Which are the groups engaging in such struggles, and what is at stake in their fights? Is there a similar importance of these conflicts in shaping the profile of the societies in Eastern and Central Europe to those in the West? How do the struggles in question relate to the ongoing massive restructuring of the once state-controlled labour market, and welfare redistribution, and how does the communist legacy influence their outcome amid the arising peculiar conditions? When making an overall balance-sheet, are there signs of a gradual merging, mutual support and intensified solidarity among the distinct groups struggling for recognition, or, on the contrary, their fights end up in turning against each other, thereby ultimately strengthening the power of those who had been in ruling positions anyway?

It is perhaps needless to say that an all-round and exhaustive answer to these questions goes beyond the scope of one single paper. However, the limits are not set only by space and my personal capacity, but also by the social reality itself: the great bulk of the new political arrangements of the East and Central European region are still too much in an in-flux state to allow any firm conclusions. Further, as the history of the 1990s demonstrated it, societies of the former Soviet bloc have started to follow very diverse paths after the collapse

of the old rule. Some made a take-off with rapid modernisation amid authoritarian conditions, others put a strong emphasis on the creation and fortification of democratic institutions, and rated economic adjustment to a lower rank on their agenda, yet others attempted radical economic reforms first, and came up with the restructuring of the institutional order later, etc. Hence, any overarching description would end up in false generalisations, and would either over- or undervalue the role of group-struggles in shaping the political landscape within the region.

With these considerations in mind, I will limit the analysis below to only one among the post-communist societies: the Hungarian. However, the restriction in extent hopefully will render some gains in content. Hungary belongs to the small group of the most advantaged countries within the post-communist world, being at present in the doorway of EU-accession. Further, due to the aftermath of the 1956-revolution, Hungarian society had a long prehistory of underground fights for recognition much before the apparent collapse of the Communist regime. In historical retrospect, this earlier experience can be seen as a concealed school of democratisation: the decade-long learning of the 'politics of resistance' within the rather well-organised informal communities clearly had a major share in speeding up the process of democratic institution-building in the 1990s. Most of the societies of the region lacked, however, similar opportunities for preparatory education, and had to start to construct the new political order practically from nothing. Thus, the current controversial state of identity-politics amid the evolving - though still rather weak - democratic conditions in Hungary might be conclusive for all those societies of the region where democratic practices have even less to build on.

In what follows below, I will attempt to show the peculiar features of post-communist struggles for recognition through the analysis of two distinct types of it. First, I will discuss Hungarian women's strives at gaining acknowledgement to certain forms of work that had

been forcibly locked into informality under the old regime. In analysing women's silent mass-movement for improving their economic and social positions, I will make an attempt to point to the obscure 'trade-off' that has emerged between decreasing gender-inequalities and increasing class-inequalities in contemporary Hungary. The latter issue will lead me to the presentation of an utterly different example of recognition struggles: that of the dramatically impoverished and deprived Romany minority. Concerning their struggles, the paper will present the continuous reinterpretation of Romany identity amid the ongoing process of massive marginalisation on ethnic grounds, and will explore the causes of a marked rejection of the policy of social integration on the part of the majority. I will also consider some of the major consequences of this mass-refusal, and will attempt to point out the dangers that follow from the recent trends to the falling apart of the newly established democratic order of the country.

The choice of the two cases is not arbitrary. As I will try to demonstrate, much of the success of any of the two movements depends on the state of the other. Given the weak institutionalisation of legally guaranteed social protection, it is women's flow into the expanding local social services that functions as a 'substitution' for the decline of universal provisions. The immediate consequences appear in women's improving chances for upward occupational mobility and the betterment of their economic and social positions. However, the very same processes induce clearly negative changes for the Romanies: it is the intensified reproduction of chronic poverty and the accompanying social and political deprivation of them which also follow from the recent sharp curbing of the state's roles and responsibilities in matters of social protection. In short: while the state's rapid withdrawal from the field of welfare has opened new channels for the advancement of women, it has closed down earlier ones for the Romany community. And vice versa: amid the constrained recognition and diminution of guarantees for subsistence, the ever-stronger articulation of

distinct claims of the Romanies on the basis of minority-rights has shifted issues of social protection into the backyard of the political discourse on welfare, whereby it has unwillingly contributed to the frequent closure of local social services -- together with women's recently established jobs in them.

Of course, it is not 'them' - neither women flowing into the social services, nor the Romanies struggling for the acknowledgement of minority rights - who create these traps. Rather, both of them seem to be captivated by their own circumstances, which neither of them can control, even less can change. As I will argue, it is, instead, the dubious way of managing the otherwise necessary decomposition of the once omnipotent state which creates the socio-political space for their conflicts. The continuous clashes of interests between women entering the enlarged job-market of social services and the Romanies fighting back their social deprivation in the arena of minority-politics follow from the same - decisive - process of post-communist transformation: the ruining of the institutional pillars of the earlier all-embracing power, presence, and influence of the central authority. It is this complex process of the withdrawal of the state and the simultaneous detachment of it, which creates room for marketisation from below for large groups of women, but which leads also to the sharp reinterpretation of societal policy, thereby throwing universal social and political rights into the dustbin, and leaving their 'redefinition' to the often cruel internal fights of local communities. Though the daily conflicts arising from this situation appear on the local level, the deeper analysis will hopefully demonstrate that it is the control over power and redistribution that matter, and in the light of this, women and the Romanies are equally on the powerless side. Thus, one can argue that the turning against each other of the two decisive strands of recognition struggles ends up in mutual losses and the simultaneous gain of all those interested in the unbroken reproduction of highly unequal access to power and redistribution in contemporary Hungary.

I will start the discussion below with the presentation of two concurrent histories of the near past: that of Hungarian women's success in gaining strengthened positions on the post-1989 labour market, and that of the Romanians who, due much to the same processes, have suffered dramatic losses during the past decade. The brief historical excursion will be followed by outlining one of the gravest - though logical - consequences: the dangerous commingling of the 'social' and 'minority' aspects of poverty, with all its damages on the running of daily minority-politics. The final section of the paper will discuss the evolving - structurally determined - contrasts between women's interests and those of the Romany minority, concluding in some general comments on the state of democratic politics amid post-communist transformation.

Women's struggle for recognition in work

Much to the surprise of sociologists, political scientists and economist studying the features of post-communist transition, Hungarian women have not faced a general deterioration of their social and economic positions during the 1990s. Rather, an opposite tendency has been in progress: on various scenes of daily life, the subsequent labour market surveys and sociological studies unanimously registered an incremental increase of relative female gains in comparison to men's situation, and also to women's pre-1989 conditions.

Let me call a few examples.

First, the annual national educational reports clearly indicate women's rapidly rising participation in higher education. The yearly rate of enrolled female students has regularly exceeded those of the males' during the past decade. As a consequence, women effectively took over the lead in the gender-composition among full-time students by the late 1990s (their proportion rose to 56 per cent by 1999 /CSO 2000/). Second, the statistics signal women's relative gains also on the labour market. As the regular surveys on employment

show, women have been less hit by the negative side-effects of economic restructuring than men. At least, they have been less faced with the threat of losing access to gainful work; in addition, if it still happened, then women's return to employment usually has been quicker than that of men¹. Third, one can record some modest female advantages also in matters of daily livelihood. As it turns out from the data of the regular household-budget surveys, today - despite the still prevailing earnings-differentials working to their detriment -, women are less hit by poverty, and prove to have better access to high income in their households than men.² Finally, in contrast to the prevailing practice in most European countries, access to the various benefits and welfare provisions does not show any differentiation by sex in contemporary Hungary, or if it does, these differences point to women's advantages³.

When searching for an explanation for these undeniably 'women-friendly' developments, it is important to underline that, for sure, they cannot be attributed to any deliberate policies aiming at the closure of the gender-gap, or, at posing women's socio-economic advancement high on the political agenda. Such policies simply have not been outlined by any of the political parties or other influential political actors during the past decade. In fact, the subsequent post-communist governments were at best insensitive to the issues of gender, or - worse - represented a clear conservative stand with announced expectations for women's return to the classical roles of motherhood and housewifery.

However, such conservative attempts proved to be seriously mistaken in practice: instead of massive withdrawal to the household, women took exactly the opposite route. They

¹ By 1999, the respective unemployment rates were 7.5 p.c. for men, and only 6.3 p. c. for women; the proportions of those being on the dole for more than a year were 47 per cent for men, and only 43 per cent for women (Laky 1999, CSO 2000).

² As the regular household-budget surveys show, in 1998, the proportion of female active earners in the lowest quintile of the per capita income-distribution was 10.8 per cent (with a respective 15.5 per cent figure for male earners); at the same time, 31.1 per cent of the female employees could be found in the highest (fifth) quintile, while the respective figure for male earners was only 27.4 per cent. (Janky 1999)

³ Given that women live some 10 years longer than men, they receive pensions, assistance for the elderly, health-care and other age-specific provisions for longer periods. These demographic differences are in the background of women giving 75.4 per cent of those enjoying regular local welfare assistance, 64.3 per cent of

responded to the experience of earlier forced ‘emancipation’ through *compulsory* employment in the command-economy with the *intensification* of *freely chosen* entrance to and visible presence in the now *marketised* world of organised labour. In this sense one can say that the clear improvement of women’s conditions over the past decade has occurred *despite* some loudly propagated political wills from above, but still in harmony with the major base of the nation-wide political consensus: Hungarian society’s strong determination to rapidly establish a well-functioning and modernised market-regulated economy. Taking this broad social-political consensus as their point of departure, women have engaged in a remarkably extensive and effective struggle for recognition on the battlefields of labour and employment.

The issue at stake in this struggle has been the due acknowledgement of women’s earlier accumulated knowledge and home-based work. However, the campaign has not taken the form of organised movement with a clear ideology and identifiable leaders. Instead, it has been a silent, though powerful acting-together of hundreds of thousands of individual women in their homes, workplaces and local communities, who have achieved collective goals without making explicit the collective character of their claims, and who have done all this without dressing their movement into the classical garments of political mobilisation. As I will attempt to show, they reached the betterment of their social and economic situation in a rather unnoticed and non-politicised manner by calling upon a peculiar variant of struggles for recognition, which had well-grounded traditions in Hungarian history, and which meant an organic continuation also of the process of modernisation from below.

The ‘tactics’ of this rather strange recognition movement originate from and clearly build on the decade-long practices of massive social opposition to the forcefully reconstructed and successfully maintained totalitarian rule after the defeat of the 1956-

those receiving meals-on-wheels and home-care, 65.5 per cent of those taking up services in the network of

revolution. Though the Revolution failed, its lessons could not be forgotten for thirty years on either part. Tacit opposition to the totalitarian rule and continuous efforts to broaden the scope of independence from the party-state which embodied it, remained the major drives of people's daily activities for decades. On the part of those in power, the deep and lasting fear of a repetition of the nation-wide uprising guided manoeuvring to arrive at a delicate balance between two contrasting ends. One of them was to further exercise the totalitarian forms of ruling without limitations, while the other was to simultaneously acquire popular support by the cautious enlargement of the scope of people's self-driven private actions.

The search for an equilibrium between the two sets of antagonistic goals concluded in a strange and fragile compromise between the ruling Communist Party and the society, which then remained in force until the actual collapse of the regime. The essence of this compromise was a tacit acceptance, even a gradual expansion of the space for individual autonomy, based on the ideological-practical 'rehabilitation' of the one and only institution which was legitimately independent of direct political control, namely the family.

Nobody could foresee the extent of change that the apparently 'minor' political concessions to restricted private autonomy induced in the daily life of the country. The regained 'freedom' for privacy, in an exchange of unreserved fulfilment of one's duties in the socialist domain, activated tremendous capacity. It turned out that, given the deeply rooted motivations of the material, cultural and symbolic pursuits of 'Europeanism' in broad layers of Hungarian society, significant numbers of families were able to combine their participation in formal socialist institutions with a working out of alternative cultural patterns, values, skills and routes for social mobility. The spreading of these new norms and patterns was based on and inspired by people's restricted independence to follow self-set rules in the *informal economy*.

Participation in informal productive activities to realise individually chosen ends slowly developed to a vast social movement. Families started to organise their internal division of roles, the choice of qualification for their children, the concrete decisions about jobs which could or could not be accepted by their different members, priorities in spending money and time, etc. according to a rationale, which was clearly driven by their personal concept of modernity, but often did not follow the 'officially declared' expectations of the authorities. These diverging aspirations and expectations became the grounds for daily bargaining on all the stages of social and political life.

Given their traditional key-functions in the family, women played an outstanding role here. They not only shared the massive workload of combining gainful activities in the two spheres of the economy, but also became the organisers and managers of the complex and difficult tasks, which families had to face in the schizophrenic combination of diverse and contradictory rules, principles, goals and duties. The otherwise patriarchal gender-division of roles turned to a source of relative freedom: women gained somewhat more space and acceptable 'excuse' to withdraw from time to time from the formal segments of production. Slowly, these 'excuses' for temporary exit from compulsory employment became semi-legalised through a series of new employment-regulations. At the same time, the performances of the family-enterprise run under the administration of these 'liberated' family-members became the source of self-esteem and prestige. Thus, besides its face value in demonstrating material progress, the increase of private consumption had further significance. It expressed also alternative notions about modernisation, it induced and realised alternative taste (opposing the cultural patterns dictated by the authorities in control over the public realm), it created a scope for alternative socialisation of children, and helped to acquire alternative knowledge which one could never get in institutions of the officially-run system of formal education.

The post-1989 years have brought sharp and complex changes in the place of such informal work within the economy as a whole. Among the several concurrent factors of full-fledged social, political and economic transformation, the abolition of rules on compulsory full employment has to be mentioned in the first place in this regard. By overruling the state's former responsibility in guaranteeing employment, and, at the same time, by making labour force participation a matter of free choice, much of women's earlier forcefully 'captivated' informal work rapidly became liberated, publicly acknowledged and regularly paid for. This development follows from a quick re-ordering of the different segments of work, and people's attempts to unite all their activities under the regulatory power of the market.

As it is known, during the decades of socialism, compulsory participation in the formal economy was the exclusive path to social membership. Thus, women - as well as men - had no other option than to take up employment in the socialist domain, and whenever they could, they complemented it with extra work in the informal economy. However, priority always had to be given to what one's first (formal) job required; needs of the informal world could come after. At the same time, the growing demand for a wide range of goods and services had to be satisfied in this latter sphere. The rigid, industry-oriented policy of investment and employment that failed to follow the transformation of the needs of society, channelled the expansion of the necessary provisions produced mainly by women towards the family-run informal economy, thereby 'freezing' them into the households and the intra-community exchange of unpaid live labour.

The most important change of the post-1989 economic development in this respect has been the 'thawing' of the former constraints: the frozen live and dead capital of the informal family-businesses is now flowing out of the households (Vajda 1997). It can be said with good reasons that this process of thawing is providing probably the major basis for privatisation through the rapid mobilisation of the once dead capital. The expeditious twist in

the use of the stock produced earlier exclusively for meeting 'personal' needs of the families is truly impressive. Private properties become productive capital for providing a wide range of services on sale in great demand. The apartments once built strictly for 'private' purposes are being used for a variety of consumer and personal services, holiday homes are becoming pensions and resort centres, the telephones are now tools for agents and salesmen, the personal computers provide the equipment for gainful activities in administration and accounting, washing and cleaning machines are the capital for small cleaning businesses, and the well equipped kitchens are being used as workshops for catering services (Farkas-Vajda 1990, Vajda 1997, Szalai 2000). And just as skills and labour were once frozen, they too are now being released together with the means: expertise and routine are becoming marketable.

As a result of this vast process, Hungarian economy proved to be promptest in the region to convert, within a decade, its industry-dominated pre-1989 production structure to one evidently headed by the tertiary sector. This is clearly justified by statistics on the remarkable shift in the sectoral composition of the labour market. Taking industry, construction and agriculture together, their share in employment dropped from its 60 per cent level in 1980 to 40 per cent by 1999. At the same time, the broadly understood service sector has been expanding dynamically. The latest manpower surveys indicate the speed of these changes. While the total number of those employed in industry, construction, and agriculture dropped from 2 million to 1.5 million within the short period of six years (between 1993 and 1999), the number of those in services grew from 1.6 to 2.5 million in the meantime (CSO 1992a-c, 1993b-c, and Laky 1995a, Laky 1999). The breakdown of these data shows that the growth was due to the rapid expansion of those types of service-work which - during the socialist period - had been either non-existent or seriously underdeveloped and understaffed within the formal segment of the economy: banking, public administration, social security, personal social services, preventive medicine, welfare assistance, adult education have

provided employment to a steadily increasing number of people in recent years (Laky 1995b, 1996, 1999, Tímár 1994, Ványai-Viszt 1995).

Beside the above-described flow of women's earlier informally rendered services to the world of organised market, this vast restructuring has been due also to their concurrent move from old-fashioned industries to the modern segments of the labour market. Building on their previously accumulated experiences in the production and exchange of a wide range of personal and social services within the informal economy, tens of thousands of now redundant female workers in former 'socialist' construction, chemical and textile industry, agriculture, administration, etc. can rather easily switch these days, and make a start as acknowledged service-provider in the newly expanding fields of the economy.

All this has been happening, however, in a strange form. As I discussed it elsewhere at length, the new service-jobs are not distributed among a growing number of employees, but are mainly done through the multiplication of duties of those already in employment (Szalai 2000 - Gail-Sue). All kinds of formerly unknown combinations of 'first' and 'secondary' occupations appear on the scene, and considerations on 'status' seemingly do not matter. More precisely: they matter in choosing and cautiously preserving one's 'main' job, but not in those which women take up in addition, simply for the sake of increasing income and countervailing unforeseeable insecurities in employment. The different notions attached to the different kinds of work explain, why women are keen to acquire a 'first' job with acceptable prestige, even if they suffer a continuous decrease in the value of earnings for it. However, this loss is well compensated in the second and third jobs, where security and money are the primary concern, but one does not have to have a headache for the implied 'social meaning' of the chosen activity. Hence, a great variation of life- and work-styles has appeared: nurses, schoolteachers, librarians or public servants of the local administration are ready to do cleaning, catering or home-visiting in the evenings; well-trained woman-

economists do not refuse to aid management for house-maintenance on the recently privatised run-down state housing blocks, if the owners' community pays for it; accountants or university-lecturers go on and work as part-time saleswomen or taxi-drivers in their second shift; one finds journalists and lawyers as casual business-consultants in a broker's firm; and, above all, women with all kinds of 'main' occupations provide for sale a wide range of personal social services in child-care, welfare and care for the elderly and the sick (Horváth 1997).

At this stage of the discussion, it is probably useful to stop for a second, and ask ourselves about the adequacy of the chosen framework. In the light of what has been said so far, is it still justifiable to call the above-outlined massive move of Hungarian women on the labour market a 'recognition struggle' in the established sense of the term? Or, would it be more appropriate to simply perceive the process in the classical terms of 'economic adjustment', pointing to those aspects of it, which, in this exceptional case, work to women's advantage? My answer to the dilemma is certainly affirmative. When arguing for the relevance of the 'recognition struggle'- approach instead of the - more limited - 'economic' one, I would like to underline exactly those aspects of women's silent movement which point to a broadened self-perception of their roles, and the redefinition of their identity -- in other words, to those which touch upon the core of 'recognition'.

It has to be seen that women's current move on the labour market transcends the passive, adaptive attitude of the 'classical' worker amid the conditions of a market-economy, and contributes to the alteration also of fundamental social relations. By mobilising their knowledge, diverse expertise, and readiness to accept a wide range of job-arrangements, women cross an important borderline: that between the *private and public spheres of social life*. As mentioned above, during the late decades of socialism, it was more and more their achievements in the private, informal domain that gave self-esteem, pride and respect to those

masses of women who otherwise were confined to fulfil the dimmest, least paid, and least acknowledged positions of production. Still, their recognition remained locked into the informal networks of family, kinship, neighbours and friends, and rarely was expressed in regular payments. With the 1989-90 turn, the irons of forced 'private-ness' have been moved, and the very same sources of self-esteem, pride and respect have become grounds for publicly acknowledged *social* positions, together with the accompanying material rewards. However, such an important reinterpretation did not come automatically. While the conditions were provided by the nation-wide commitment to marketisation, women had to act as active agents to achieve the necessary institutional and legal guarantees. True, these latter aspects of their recognition struggle have not taken the form of classical political mobilisation, instead, remained within the framework of the trade union movement, local lobbying and alike. And it is equally true that, in lack of the strong backing of an organised women's movement with clearly articulated claims that become part of the prevailing political discourse, the new institutional arrangements frequently prove fragile, poorly protected and uncertain on the individual level. Despite all these weaknesses, the break-up of the strict border between women's public and private economic contributions is still an irreversible fact of history, which has utterly changed women's opportunities on a mass scale, and which has created the base of future claims for attaining the yet missing firmer legal and institutional guarantees. In this sense, women's massive move on the labour market has not only brought about better economic rewards and improved social positions, but it has concluded also in the recognition of their rightful participation in matters that - by their very nature - are discussed and settled in the public arena.

The irreversible shift between the public/private divide is perhaps the most remarkable outcome of the processes discussed so far. This unquestionable achievement of women's 'silent recognition struggle' has been paired, however, with a serious conflict: the

simultaneous *individualisation* of poverty. The two processes were not and are not independent from each other. First, the recent rapid growth of inequalities of income and wealth between women in the higher and lower ranks of the social hierarchy provides a prosperous soil to the blossoming of all those ideologies which derive advancement from personal efforts. In lack of an organised women's movement with clear worldview, established social critique and articulated political claims, there is no other - alternative - discourse for discussing these inequalities than the old one of 'discipline' and 'merit'. It seems that success depends only on individual exertions, and so does falling-behind on the lack of the necessary internal drive. Obviously, this ideology is not restricted to explaining and justifying only the relations between richer and poorer women, but imbues the entire political domain. At any rate, it works against solidarity, and hinders also the creation of organisations aimed at the representation of collective interests. In deficiency of such institutions and forms of interest-representation, women are left alone in their individual struggle for advancement. Amid the conditions of such lonely struggles, the 'individualisation' of social differences assists the acceptance of harsh forms of subordination: this is signalled by the spreading of unprotected and poorly paid labour that thousands and thousands of women in low-paid 'first' employment fulfil in the households of the better-off. However, practices of subordination have a self-sustaining tendency. Thus, it is especially in the less developed agricultural areas of the country that an effective revitalisation of the pre-war forms of domestic serfdom can be recorded, together with the re-appearance of cast-like differences in consumption and the way of life.

In addition to the rationale to justify the emerging and sharpening class-differences between women, the bare interests of daily living also push a large - and rapidly expanding - group of them toward taking an active share in the individualisation of poverty. These are those tens of thousands of female employees who have been flowing from the lower

positions of the social division of labour to the new personal and welfare services. The maintenance of many of the jobs in these services is a direct function of the personified perception of poverty which makes the clients' case an issue for individual care. The booming of personal guardianship as the sole response to poverty is an immediate consequence, and also a 'precondition' of women's employment here. As long as personal provisions are rendered according to the current exclusive principle of individually investigated 'neediness', there will be jobs to run the necessary investigations, to manage means-testing, to do welfare administration, controlling, social work, home-visits, counselling, to provide emergency care, etc. And these are the jobs where it is mainly former working class women who find now employment. Thus, they would risk mere sustenance by coming up with a critique of the personalised explanations of poverty, which then necessarily would conclude in the questioning of their own functions and roles in the welfare system. Further, large groups of these care-providing women have a prompt base for comparison: since most of them also came from poverty, their personal history and way out of destitution is a justification of the 'individualised' argument -- if they succeeded, then escaping should be merely a matter of discipline, diligence and adaptation for their clients, too. Thus, women whose current rise and success rests on their earlier experience in the informal economy have good reasons to remain blind to this fact, and stick with the individualised explanations. It is against their naked interest to question the prevailing personified views, and seeking the deeper structural factors behind access to and exclusion from the marketised relations of the economy. Instead - whether known to them or not -, women in welfare provisions have a great deal of vested interest in the maintenance of poverty strictly *separated* from the market, strictly driven and regulated by other rules, and strictly remaining under their 'own' control. In short, they are as long protected against falling back to destitution, as their clients fail to get out of it.

True, the drama of the clashing interests between women in welfare and women (and men) on welfare rarely appears in such a sharp form. Partly, because the colourful causes and manifestations of poverty mostly hide these inter-group relations, and partly, because the forms of welfare assistance transform the conflicts into those between the poor and the majority-groups in their local communities.

It is not the task of the present paper to explore all the varied causes and appearances of the phenomenon in detail. Nevertheless, there is an outstanding group among the present-day poor, in whose case the above-discussed individualisation of poverty has led to dramatic conflicts on ethnic grounds: the Gypsies. Their recognition struggle for getting due acknowledgement to minority-rights distinct from their social rights have got into serious and face-to-face clashes with women's claims for due recognition of their work in providing welfare for them. Before turning to the discussion of these conflicts, let me outline their immediate base: the intermingling of the 'social' and 'minority' aspects of poverty in the case of Hungary's Gypsy minority, and the built-in traps of the struggles that they have waged for clearing up the arising confusions.

The Minority Reshaping of the Social Question

In recent years, widely reported clashes around the 'Romany-question' have exploded in Hungary. In the overwhelming majority of the cases, the issue at stake was the enforced segregation - not infrequently the outright 'ghettoisation' - of the Gypsies within a given local community. These apparently local conflicts, which nevertheless seem to have nationwide ramifications, were in every case centred around the majority group - sometimes 'pulling strings', sometimes relying on local organs of authority or coercion - physically forcing the Romanies into clearly separated places of residence, institutions, and different kinds of 'closed systems'. In the face of the compulsion applied by the majority the Romanies

themselves have resorted to radical means of self-defence, sometimes in the form of protest campaigns, sometimes through calling for the statutory intervention of the ombudsman whose task it is to defend and interpret the constitutional rights of minorities, and sometimes through physical attacks with a touch of 'Robin Hood'-ianism in them⁴. Not only has the territorial extent of these forms of extreme conflict widened, but their occurrence is becoming more frequent. This is signalled by the facts that: decisions on the part of the authorities to put Gypsy children in separate school classes are becoming ever more 'customary';⁵ that Gypsy families are now being excluded from means-tested local welfare assistance schemes on the basis of a clearly worked-out 'ideology' and formalised official procedure;⁶ and that, among other things, employment on the basis of skin colour has become 'accepted' personnel policy and a daily routine.⁷

Taking into account that the great majority of these attempts at segregation were imposed upon Gypsies not primarily because of their material or cultural status, but rather because of their *ethnic difference*, one would be inclined to state that not only has the Hungarian-Romany conflict become more intense and more profound throughout the 1990s, but also, in comparison with former times, its *dimension* has changed: tensions now are not social - as used to be before -, but rather take the form of earlier unknown open majority-minority struggles. Of course, this is not to say that in recent years the economic and social situation of the Gypsies has significantly improved, and that the social dimension has thereby been driven into the background. In fact, the available research data rather show the

⁴ In recent months, the majority-minority conflicts and the Romanies' attempts at finding some protection against the ever more frequent experiences of discrimination and segregation have transcended the national borders. A small group of harshly persecuted Romanies from a village in western Hungary (Zámoly) managed to submit an appeal to the Strasbourg Court of Human Rights, claiming international protection against the anti-racist endeavours of the current Hungarian government. At the time of finishing this manuscript, their case is under consideration, together with their appeal to the French authorities to grant them refugee-status' on the ground of political persecution.

⁵ For details see Loss (Loss 2000).

⁶ See Kurdi, Tóth, and Vági (Kurdi, Tóth, and Vági 1998).

⁷ Interviews with Gypsy workers on 'workfair'-type schemes and unemployed Gypsies; for more details, see Vági (Vági 2000).

opposite:⁸ whether their employment opportunities, schooling, incomes, or housing conditions are considered, the gap between the majority and the Romany communities has grown visibly in the course of the last decade. One might better say that the social conflicts accompanying the falling-behind of the majority of Gypsies are somehow imbuing and, in a way, reshaping the prevailing ethnic relations of Hungarian society. However, the fact that this 'reshaping' is taking place is not self-explanatory. The closer examination of its deeper-lying determinants is important not only for the understanding of the recognition struggles that the Romanies are currently engaged in for giving new contents to their minority-rights, but also because of more immediate practical consequences. The dissolution of the 'social' element in the 'minority' dimension has a considerable influence on the physiognomy and everyday utilisation of the minority institutions now beginning to take shape; furthermore, it is of decisive importance also for the delivery of different social services, this way affecting the entire welfare system of contemporary Hungary, together with women's recently established positions in it.

The social-historical antecedents of the intermingling of the 'social' and the 'minority' dimensions of poverty are to be sought in the attempts by the once ruling party-state to forcibly assimilate the Romany community during the late decades of state-socialism -- more precisely, in the striking (though more or less foreseeable) failure of these endeavours. It is worth recalling briefly the main features of this process.

It was by no means accidental that the programme of forced assimilation was connected to two developments of late socialism: on the one hand, the level of employment of Gypsies in industry, which was growing by leaps and bounds, and on the other hand, the changes in their traditional settlement and living conditions accomplished within the framework of a national campaign. The first development was closely connected to socialist

⁸ For the discussion of distinct aspects of the problem see the edited volumes of Glatz -Kemény (Glatz -

large-scale industry's unlimited appetite for cheap labour, of which Gypsies represented the last available source. The second development was partly a consequence of the first, and partly the result of further political considerations. The latter were equally pressing. For it would have been foolish on the part of those in power to remain blind to the fact that the living conditions common in the Gypsies' wretched settlements constituted a 'political time bomb' for the system. In their very existence, they represented a refutation of both the post-Stalinist consolidation policy of the 1960s and the programme of 'improving living standards for all' which formed its foundation. Hence, it was in the basic interests of the then prevailing Kádár regime - which was doing its best to restore an international reputation that had taken a beating as a result of the suppression of the 1956-revolution - that it adopt measures to ameliorate the scandalous misery of the Romany community. But it had also further reasons for doing so. It was also unacceptable to the regime that the Gypsies should live in separate communities because, paradoxically, that kept them outside the various domains of totalitarian control, among which, under the above-outlined post-1956 'soft dictatorship', it was no longer the police station and the prison, but more the schools and the workplace which were the most important. However, by getting 'inside' the socialist workplace in the space of a decade - the 1970s - forthwith the Gypsies became socialist employees just like any other and so party to all their concerns and entitlements. They became subject not only to the comprehensive control exercised through the workplace but to the same kind of remuneration to which any other socialist worker was entitled -- in other words, they attained that kind of 'social membership' which the system unequivocally bound in with compulsory employment. As socialist employees, central policy had to take the same kind of measures in relation to the Gypsies as it did in relation to other groups; socialist 'Gypsy-policy' therefore

became just like - and for the same reason - socialist 'women's policy', 'youth policy', or 'workers policy'.

This was a real change, and signified the mass transformation - as will be discussed soon, more some shifting than a genuine alteration - of the former patriarchal relations characterising coexistence. Until that point, relations between the Romany and non-Romany communities had been governed by rules and traditions which had been in place for decades, if not centuries. In this sense, every village, every town, every district had its own 'Gypsy policy'. Nevertheless, one element was common to all: *the fact that the Gypsies were outside society*. All of this, however, suddenly changed. On entering the same building company, mine, furnace, or textile factory, all at once space became common: the canteen became common, the street became common, the washroom became common, and so did the doctor's waiting room and the council anteroom, further, the foreman, the party secretary, and, similarly, work discipline, and working time became also common. The 'supreme will' (that is, of the 'omnipotent' Party) and the system's totalitarian logic created this commonality -- and what is more, it did so in, historically speaking, a very short time, in the course of one or two decades.

Now that the Romany community was all of a sudden *inside* the system, the same expectations and rules came to apply to them. In order that these rules could be implemented, it was necessary to reshape the situation: in this way, *race-based social exclusion* became, without any particular warning, classified as a *disadvantageous social situation*, and *Gypsy-policy* became *social policy*. Bearing in mind that socialism did not recognise communal rights - and particularly the most important ones, namely, minority rights -, this could not have happened otherwise. The system's own logic necessitated a procedure for moulding socialist citizenship which rested on political subjugation, and the only possible route to this was the *forced assimilation* of the Romany community, framed *in terms of social policy*. In

the course of the diligent surmounting of their 'disadvantages' it was necessary to integrate them in those institutions in which everyone else was integrated: that is to say, in compulsory education, council-estate living, the socialist health care system, and the state-run administration of child protection. Naturally, the services intended for 'them' were a little 'different', lower in quality, but still: they were elements of the same institutional system -- and this is what mattered in the first place. The principle behind the provision of these services was the same as in the case of the socialist transformation of other groups before: the forced assimilation of the Romany community, in its intermittency and impatience, gave no more place to gradualness or to free choice than the earlier processes of nationalisation and co-operativisation had. It was scarcely possible to find legal and law-abiding ways to avoid the pressure applied - sometimes well-intentioned - to this end by the authorities. Only compliance was possible.

Naturally, the acceptance of subordination and 'obedience' - in the same way as earlier on for Hungary's other social groups - bore real fruit as time went on. The living conditions of the Romany community improved, a certain material security was created by stable incomes and by the social security payments which they now also received as 'socialist' workers. However, this compliance was different in two important facets from that which had been required from all the other groups before.

First, the Gypsies were demanded to renounce not only a particular social situation, a community characterised by extended family and neighbourly relations, customs, and norms, but also their *ethnic affiliation*. Under socialism, the mere existence of communities which had come into being regardless of the central authorities, indeed any kind of collective expression of mutual belonging, counted as organising against the system and so as a 'crime'. The classifying as 'social' of the ethnic situation was intended to forestall this very process of

community formation, and in this connection brought the direst and for the most part irreversible consequences.

Second, compliance of the Romanies to the socialist rules markedly differed also in its 'reward'. As discussed above, the tacit acceptance of the prevailing rule on the part of the majority 'paid' in an equally tacit acknowledgement of people's restricted autonomy on the part of the authorities. Thus, compliance was gradually transformed to a working *compromise* in actual social reality, which opened the doors to participate in the informal economy and to share all the material, cultural and social rewards that this participation brought about. However, this turning of compliance into a liveable compromise held exclusively for the non-Romany workers, the Gypsy employees were sharply excluded from it.

There were manifold interests in maintaining such a demarcation line between the two groups. It was the 'disciplining' principle guiding the 'education' of the freshly socialised Gypsy workers with extreme rigor; it was the paramount task of breaking up the old ties of the Romany community that were considered - as mentioned above - anti-socialist; and it was, above all, the drive to extend popular support of the regime by giving some flow to officially forbidden racial discrimination where it least seemed to cause harms: in the informal relations regulating access to/exclusion from the social networks around the informal economy.

On top of all, the Romanies themselves lacked a number of conditions necessary to successful participation. Due to their earlier outcast position, they neither had the land, nor the know-how, nor any other resources to enter the greatest segment of the informal economy: agricultural production. Similarly, they lacked the cultural capital, the necessary infrastructure and the skills to come up with the provision of modern, household-based

services. Further, they were outside those webs of the communities which gave ground to the complex exchange-relations between families of the majority in the informal economy.

In sum, the serious deficiency of all kinds of capital hindered, while the pressures of the majority effectively obstructed the integration of the Romanies to the informal world, thus, they remained totally excluded from what later turned out to provide the fundamentals of successful participation in the market-regulated arrangements of production. In concrete terms, by their sharp exclusion, they were not only remarkably left behind in material advancement, but, simultaneously, were confined to stay outside the earlier discussed nationwide learning process; further, they were deprived of the alternative paths of self-protection, and also incapacitated to build up that two-pillar way of existence which became the most important source for the majority to master the crisis of the post-1989 transition.

On consideration, it is clear from the above that, as far as substantive membership of society is concerned, the Gypsies never stood up to the non-Romany majority. Not only because of the generally recognised difficulties with which groups endeavouring to 'dissolve' themselves in the majority have to struggle always and everywhere: it is well known that successful assimilation requires many generations, and that chosen paths must remain open for decades, identities kneaded together from the old and the new must be strengthened, and the majority and the minority have to learn from one another over a long period. As a consequence of the logic of the party-state, however, neither forms nor fora were available before the change of system which would have facilitated learning of this kind, not to mention the transformation of modes of co-existence and the working out of agreements concerning its regulation. Co-existence, instead of being constructed from inside, was held together by the external 'hoops' of the system, while the co-existing partners' mutual relations were fundamentally determined by the built-in inequality of their respective distances from power.

In this situation, for many upwardly-striving Gypsies the sole path of assimilation seemed to lead through various employment routes based on the acquisition of a trade, and further education. Concerning the structure of production of the time, it is perhaps needless to say that the path through employment headed primarily to heavy industry and construction, that is, to those branches and careers which went to the wall first as a result of rapid privatisation and marketisation at the beginning of the 1990s. Given that Gypsy assimilation in terms of employment was rarely accompanied by their integration into other kinds of community - educational, residential, neighbourly, sports, or cultural -, job losses triggered an avalanche of negative processes, and soon brought to light the dubious success of these attempts at integration. Similarly uncertain were the assimilation paths via the intelligentsia: with one or two rare exceptions, educated male and female Gypsies remained on the margins of the intelligentsia, while practically cut off the ties with their communities of origin.

The traditional mobility channels therefore proved to be insufficient from the standpoint of successful and lasting assimilation: they did not lead to mass progress in the social sense either, ultimately turning out ineffective with regard to obtaining full membership in the majority community. If such active attempts failed, then the passive reactions by accepting without complaint the semantic identity of being a Gypsy and being poor could even less be counted as successful paths of assimilation. On the one hand, poverty in itself preserved second-class-citizen status, so the Gypsies who accepted this could at most have reckoned on admission to communities of poor people deprived of civil rights, and so already standing outside the more fortunate, 'first class' society of the majority. On the other hand, after the change of system, poverty which had existed under socialism did not remain unchanged: a narrow stratum of the former poor managed to break out and sooner or later to integrate into the market society under transformation (even if still mostly on the

margins), but for the majority their former poverty was effectively transformed into an increasing falling-behind. Wide strata (in fact, the overwhelming part) of Gypsies belong to this latter group of the poor. With this falling-behind, however, any purpose which the tacit acceptance of poverty might have had was lost. Once out of the former patriarchal employment, residential, official, and socio-cultural relations, there is no reason to 'conform'. What is at stake is not becoming an equal member of the majority-ruled society, but the preservation or - usually - the winning back of at least the minima of social membership. Rebellions, clashes, and conflicts have perhaps become sharper for this reason: the struggle of the majority of Gypsies is today not against their relative deprivation, but against their status as total outcasts. The experience and recognition of this exclusion leads many of them to take radical measures. Outrage, the calling into doubt of the legitimacy of the legal system, the heatedness of passions directed against 'Hungarians', even the spreading offences against property, greater or smaller breaches of regulations, or, sometimes, express lawbreaking and crime are nourished less by the hopelessness of poverty than by the impotent hatred elicited by the falling-behind resulting from social exclusion.

Briefly summarising the attempts at attaining social membership, it can be said that ultimately the cause of mass failure can clearly be identified in the 'socialist' way of carrying out assimilation of the Romanies. Given that the programme was built on the full denial of ethnicity, the failure of 'socialist assimilation' was there from the outset: it promised social progress, but only to those who 'forgot' their Gypsy-ness. Since, however, the majority of Gypsies did not do this - whether because they chose to do so or not - the system directed their ethnic difference onto other paths, dealing with it as a disadvantageous social situation or a 'defect', and often by resort to penal sanctions. The transformation of ethnic otherness into a matter of social policy prevented, however, the 'Gypsy question' from being referred to by name, and forced majority-minority conflicts into the enclosed spaces of the workplace,

local councils, residential communities, schools, orphanages, and doctor's surgeries. Naturally, differentiation 'lived on' within these enclosed spaces, in terms of prejudices, a willingness to exclude, and discriminatory practices. But since there were no individual or communal minority rights, their bringing to the surface was possible at best in terms of redistribution policy -- that is, if those taking a stand against deprivation of civil rights made reference to the welfare aspects of living. In this regard, the situation of the Gypsies and the poor 'overlapped', and it appeared that the path to a solution of the 'Romany question' led basically through social policy reform in a broad sense.

The transmutation of the ethnic question into a social policy matter boomeranged, however, after the collapse of Communism. This took place on the one hand as a consequence of putting the decomposition of the old state into the focus of post-1989 socio-political transformation, though doing it without the simultaneous creation of a protective, democratic, modern welfare state. The rapid falling apart of the old 'hoops' of softened totalitarianism suddenly liberated all the earlier suppressed and successfully decentralised ethnic conflicts. In such an atmosphere, it was the Romany workers first who were fired out *en masse*, and the sharply dropped demand for unqualified labour helped to rationalise the process. However, massive and terminal unemployment soon became heaped with experiencing also a number of other negative effects of marketisation. Former council-estates quickly became privatised, and, in the lack of legal tenant-protection, the new owners felt free to expel the non-solvent Gypsy families *en masse*. With the quick withering away of earlier price-subsidies on child-care, Gypsy children found themselves *en masse* out of all the earlier schemes aimed at assisting education and child-welfare. With the closing down of former workers' hostels run earlier for commuting workers, Gypsy employees forthwith ended up *en masse* on the poorly equipped, humiliating shelters for the homeless, that have been set up in a hurry by the mushrooming charity organisations. -- And the examples can be

listed endlessly. Their message is, however, identical: as soon, as the former Communist state with its dictations disappeared, it quickly came to the surface that forced assimilation utterly failed to provide the Romanies the munition to maintain their ties with the first economy and the accompanying institutions amid the changing conditions. The losses in the first segment of production could not be countervailed, however, by intensified participation in the second, informal one either. As it has been pointed out above, the Romanies had been sharply excluded from this latter segment under socialism, thus stayed ‘automatically’ outside afterwards. Now that the merging of the two economies was put on the agenda of nation-wide marketisation, there remained no open gates for them to enter. In short, while the withdrawal of the state helped the majority of Hungarian society to unite the earlier formal and informal pillars of existence, the same process deprived the Romanies from possessing *any* of these pillars. As a consequence, the Gypsies fell into extreme poverty *en masse*. In fact, they are the *only* social grouping in contemporary Hungary whose poverty visibly can be bound to membership in a pre-existing *community*. In the eyes of the public, the mass-occurrence of poverty in the Romany community makes it nearly natural to come to the conclusion: being Gypsy is identical with being poor, in sharper words, Gypsies are *born* to be poor. Though in this way, the old equation between social deprivation and ethnicity still prevails, but the reasoning behind has changed its orientation. While it was earlier the ‘ethnic’ dimension which was dissolved in the ‘social’ issue, nowadays, it is the matter of ‘social status’ which is tied to ‘ethnicity’. And, in sum, it is largely the peculiar way of state desertion⁹ from the sphere of social protection which created such a twist in the logic, while the phenomenon remained disturbingly the same.

On the other hand, however, the boomerang-effect was also a consequence of the fact that, while a range of policy-documents of the transition referred to the Romany community

⁹ The term was coined by Guy Standing (Standing 1997).

time after time as an important 'target group', they left the basis of their 'special' status and the rights to which that gave rise shrouded in darkness. That is, the declaration of rhetorical commitment to the advancement of the Romany community was never accompanied by the unambiguous separation and institutional guaranteeing of the minority rights pertaining to their *ethnic* nature and the redistribution-policy entitlements related to their *poverty*. As a consequence of the commingling of these issues which has continued unreflectively, the nature of the social and of the minority elements in the 'Romany question' remained a subject of dispute till date.

Naturally, the situation has, as a result, not remained entirely unchanged. Although the difficulties have not been cleared up, there has been a significant change of emphasis: in contrast to the former state of affairs, the 'social' element has now been merged into the 'minority' one also in the political discourse, and the poverty of those who have been left behind has officially become an *ethnic* question. However, this is not simply a matter of wording, but a very dangerous point of departure in respect of social status. The latest version of 'commingling' socially ghettoises the minority question while it ethnicises, to an extreme degree, the social question, and raises their confused 'equation' to the level of policy-making. The case of the poor who have been left behind is defined rather as a 'racial' issue, and building upon this reverse 'merging', political discourse represents a whole minority group as the 'social burden' of the majority. However, a number of potentially dangerous responses await in relation to this social problem if it is rendered in minority terms: the harshest among them is the recurrent inclination for the practical interpretation of basic human and social rights in terms of ethnic affiliation. With the frequent occurrence of such practices, it is a 'logical' outcome that the Gypsies' right to freedom of movement, free choice of schools, the formation of healthy living conditions, and the acquisition of property are made different from those of the majority and narrower in content. The clearly delineated social

consequences of this process are discernible in the spreading local wars between minority and majority, and in the countless incidents which promote social disintegration.

In these circumstances, it is probably needless to argue at length that the sorting out of the hopelessly intermingled 'social' and 'minority' aspects of poverty is a key to any further development of democratic conditions in Hungary. Moreover, the purposeful separation and due clarification of the legal and practical contents of the two facets are the pledge of preserving the integration of society, which, in turn, is the precondition of the success of the transformation. Yet, surprisingly little has been done in these directions so far. The recent construction of a new institution - the minority self-governments - to exercise minority rights can perhaps be considered, however, as the first promising step to start the lengthy and - most probably - contradictory crystallizing process. True, the new measures on minority rights were urged by a number of external factors in the first place. As the discussion below will show, compared to the weight of foreign policy pressures in the decision-making, it was least the recognition of the Romanies' needs which brought the new minority-institutions into being. Still, the new framework opened some possibilities to better articulate these needs and also to come up with concrete demands for their due recognition.

Let me turn now to the discussion of these latest developments, together with all those new - better to say, altered - conflicts that the establishment of the Gypsy minority self-governments has induced in the politics of redistribution, thereby leading to frequent clashes between the Romany claimants and the female providers on the local battle-fields of welfare.

Attempts at Practicing Minority-Rights: The Built-in Dilemmas of Romany Local Self-Governance

After several years of heated debates behind the doors of government-offices, in the Constitutional Court and in other national decision-making bodies, it was in late 1993 that the

Parliament enacted the much awaited decree on the rights of “national and ethnic minorities”¹⁰. The Act made the first attempt in Hungary’s post-war history at defining minority-rights as distinct from all other rights and entitlements, and specified the institutional framework for practicing these rights in the newly installed minority self-governments. The legal regulations also prescribed the methods of setting up the new institutions on the local level¹¹, and circumscribed their authority. Following the year-long negotiations with the representative cultural bodies and influential associations of the respective communities, the 1993-Act formally acknowledged the existence of 13 ‘national and ethnic’ minorities¹², and - together with their registration - granted them the right to select nominees for the upcoming minority-elections. As a result of the first held minority-elections in 1994, 679 minority governments came into being, out of which 416 were Gypsy self-governments. Despite all the controversial experiences of the start, the popularity of the institution has been on an increase. Thus, four years later, in 1998, the new elections brought into being twice as many institutions as before: their number suddenly jumped to altogether 1363, with 771 Gypsy-governments among them¹³.

¹⁰ Act LXXVII/1993 on ‘The Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities of Hungary’.

¹¹ Members of the minority governments are elected. However, it is the entire electorate which elects them, while the candidates have to give some assertion about their belonging to the community of the minority. The deep political controversies built into these regulations are self-revealing. Below, I will return to the detailed discussion of some of them.

¹² As discussed above, minority-rights were not acknowledged under socialism. However, limited practicing of such rights was made possible for Hungary’s ‘historical’ minorities within certain cultural and educational arrangements which were strictly controlled from above. After 1989-90, these institutions became the negotiating partners in identifying the still existing and recognisable minorities of the country. The only source tentatively providing some clue to the size of the acknowledged minorities were the data of the 1990 Census on self-reported minority-belonging. On the ground of these data, the proportion of the 12 national minorities together is around 1 per cent. Due to the related prejudices and fears, the size of the Romany community cannot be estimated, however, from these self-reported sources. Hence, the officially used numbers for the size of the Gypsy population are driven from representative surveys. According to them, the ratio of the Romanies makes up some 5 per cent of Hungary’s population. (It has to be noted that - due to deeply ingrained historical experiences and concerns - the organisations of Hungary’s Jewish population refused the status of ‘ethnic minority’ for the Jewry.)

¹³ These figures are rather meaningless without knowing the population-size of the respective minority-groups. However, due to the political novelty of the phenomenon, statistical information is rather poor in this regard. The only source which provides a clue to a more or less valid estimation is the data of the 1990 Census on self-reported minority-belonging. On the ground of these data, the proportion of the 12 national minorities together is around 1 per cent. The case with the Gypsy population is somewhat different, and even more difficult from a statistical point of view. Due to the prejudices and fears around the ‘Romany issue’, self-reported sources hardly

In light of these spectacular figures on institutionalisation and also, after recalling the above-outlined serious historical confusions around the intermingling of otherwise distinct facets of one's rights, it is certainly surprising to assert: at the time of the codification into law of minority-based self-governance a great deal was taken into account, but the case of the Hungarian minorities took rather a backseat. Instead, two important foreign-policy elements dominated behind the instigation of enactment: (i) Hungary's relatively recent accession to the European Council, and, most importantly, (ii) the problem of ethnic Hungarians living beyond the borders. These strange conditions of the birth of the law determine till date the limitations of the institution that it assisted to establish. As I try to show below, it is especially the country's largest minority - the Gypsies - whose needs were least taken into account by the Act. However, also the 12 small national minorities did not get too much by the loudly celebrated enactment of their being. Of course it was not a matter of the entitlements which they had obtained through the new constitutional-law institution being somehow against the communities' will. What is at issue here is the fact that the law was not made primarily for them. Let me briefly outline, why and how did it happen this way, and what are the consequences till today.

As far as the first motive behind the hurried enactment - Hungary's rating in the European Council - is concerned, the political aim of this legal gesture was the expression of an intention to satisfy Western norms. With gaining membership in one of Europe's most important political consistency, Hungarian legislation incurred the obligation to put modern European minority-policy principles into legal form: as a civilised and orderly member-state, Hungary was required to put in place, besides its constitutional provisions establishing the freedom to choose one's identity and the maintenance of respect for those identities, statutory

can be used for any calculations. Hence, the now officially applied numbers for the size of the Romany community are driven from representative sociological surveys which originally aimed at studying their living conditions, educational patterns and labour market participation. According to these investigations, the ratio of the Romanies makes up some 5 per cent of Hungary's population. For more details see Glatz-Kemény (Glatz-

legal guarantees for the everyday protection of the exercise of minority rights. Although these guarantees were very sketchy and were to be refined considerably later on, with the promulgation of Act LXXVII of 1993 Hungary indisputably gave Europe's western part important evidence of the seriousness of its commitment to democracy, thereby justifiably claimed a certain degree of reciprocity.

However important it was to create a Western 'image' for Hungary, an even more powerful motive for the promulgation of the Minority Law was its second foreign-policy element, the endeavours of ethnic Hungarians beyond the borders to increase their political influence. The political calculation of the then ruling conservative-right-wing coalition was, from its own viewpoint, quite rational: since the national-minority population in Hungary was rather small and their communities were very well assimilated, while the sole minority of significant size - the Gypsies - had a quite low level of organisation, the domestic policy risk would not be 'excessively large' if the legislation proceeded relatively generously in the determination of minority entitlements. However, the 'external' effects of such a step would be considerable. In the wake of the introduction of such a law in the mother country, the close to 5 million ethnic Hungarians living beyond the borders would have something to 'bring to the table' in their endeavours to have rights of similar breadth enacted into law in the countries of which they were citizens. And what is even more important: good arguments and political deals would be useful tools enabling them to put up a realistic struggle for parliamentary representation in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and - perhaps one day - Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Hungarian influence which it was hoped would grow abroad could later on help nationalist forces in Hungary, too. That is, taking everything into account, the declared generous recognition of the Hungarian ethnic minorities' rights, even if

somewhat 'above their heads', favoured Hungary's standing in the West, profited those in power, and certainly could not have 'harmed' the affected minorities, or at least so it seemed.

Despite several modifications of lesser or greater importance during the past six years, the Act still bears the imprint both of these political determinants of its 'creation', and of the fact that those affected by it - Hungary's national and ethnic minorities - as yet have not gained any powerful say in its (re)formulation. As a consequence, the Minority Law - especially its regulations concerning self-governments - define the institutions much according the initial aims of the Act. Thus, it is a great deal of 'outer' and 'alien' considerations which determine the framework and direction of political activity in search of collective identity also for the Romany community. As a result, it is no wonder that - as will be shortly demonstrated - the entitlements contained in the law hardly fit in with the needs of the Romany minority, while often block their earlier started involvement in public matters of the local community at large.

The lack of accommodation in respect of actual needs is quite evident in the - most comprehensive - introductory chapter of the Minority Law, entitled 'Basic Provisions'. It was certainly not the Gypsies' needs which stood before the legislators' eyes when they drafted the following:

1.§ (2) Within the meaning of the act a national or ethnic minority (hereafter: minority) shall be any ethnic group whose members are citizens of Hungary which, domiciled on the territory of the Republic of Hungary for at least one century, constitutes a numerical minority in the population of the state, is distinguished from the rest of the population by its own language, culture, and traditions, and at the same time exhibits a consciousness of homogeneity, such that all of these things tend towards the preservation of their historically formed communities, and the expression and protection of their interests . . .

3.§ (4) Every minority community and every person belonging to a minority shall have the right to live in his homeland, and to maintain contacts with his homeland undisturbed. The right to a homeland shall mean the freedom and safeguarding of contact not only with a person's place of birth, but also with the place of birth or residence of their parents, foster-parents, or forebears, as well as with the old country and its culture and traditions.

Among the many questions which the second passage begs is *where* the 'old country' might be whose culture and traditions - by way of strengthening their sense of belonging and identity - the Gypsies were supposed to cultivate? Likewise: is not the Romany community's equality with the other minorities questionable also in principle, if the law builds its definition of 'minority' *from the outset* on a historically settled consciousness of homogeneity, and does not even gesture in the direction of wanting to help in a positive way those historically deprived of a minority group-consciousness and in the process of working one out?

Similarly, one could dissect all those phrases in the law which - otherwise properly - generously provide education in their native language, preservation of architectural (sic!) and cultural heritage, observation of traditional celebrations, and establishment of their own network of academic institutions to tens of thousands of people, but at the same time render the content of minority rights empty and incomprehensible from the standpoint of half-a-million others. From the latter - the Romany - viewpoint, the entitlements listed above are of little use. In fact, the provision of 'separate' minority education - whether or not, in the hope of other advantages, some Gypsies here and there take the initiative - can abundantly strengthen and justify precisely that from which the law should offer protection: the spontaneous clamour for out-and-out segregation.

While it is true that the entitlements enumerated in the law are, by and large, those actually needed by the well assimilated small-size Hungarian minorities who wish to safeguard their identity in a cultural sense, the phrase '*and ethnic*' attached to the word 'national' does not in itself offer a solution as to how the law might also guarantee the rights of the Romany minority. From the latter standpoint, what is most evident is what the law lacks. It is sufficient to consider that the law does not say a single word about what is perhaps the most important - collective and individual - need of the Romany community as a minority

today, statutory protection of their human dignity and self-esteem. True, the aforementioned 'Basic Provisions' prohibit discrimination to the detriment of minorities. From the description of the different forms of discrimination, however, it is clear that in the eyes of the legislators the national minorities' historical injuries were of primary importance, and above all they wanted to bring the force of the law to bear against possible repetitions of such harms. A logical consequence of this was, however, that the Minority Law provided a single sphere of action for the prohibition of discrimination: *international law*. That there might be any discriminatory political actions *within* the borders of Hungary was simply *not* acknowledged. It is therefore logical that it did not consider as its task the establishment of domestic institutions responsible for guarding against such actions¹⁴.

Even if not against discrimination, at least in the area of the actions that they are permitted to take, minority local governments are provided some further guarantees. The law, however, considers the question of guarantees to be settled by means of its empowering of minority local self-governments: in respect of any question concerning the community they can turn with a *request* to the responsible state body. In this request the self-government may

- a) seek information;
- b) make a recommendation;
- c) initiate measures;
- d) raise objections to practices and individual decisions related to the functioning of institutions which contravene minority rights, and initiate the modification or repeal of a decision.

¹⁴ The following passages of the Minority Law leave little room for doubt in this connection:

3. § (5) Discrimination of any kind to the detriment of minorities shall be prohibited.

4. § (1) The Republic of Hungary prohibits all political activities and conduct which:

- aim at the assimilation of the minority to the majority nation or which bring it about;
- are directed towards alterations of national or ethnic relations in territories populated by minorities which are detrimental from the standpoint of the minorities themselves;
- persecute national or ethnic minorities, or members of such minorities, as a consequence of their affiliation; degrade their living conditions; or obstruct the exercise of their rights;
- are directed towards the forced resettlement of national or ethnic minorities.

(2) The Republic of Hungary shall, in its international relations, take action against any political activities which lead to the consequences listed under paragraph (1). The Republic of Hungary shall endeavour to provide protection against political activities of this kind with the instruments of international law and by way of international agreements.

The person in charge of the responsible and authoritative body . . . shall be obliged to *give a detailed reply* to the request within 30 days.

[26. § (1-2) (My emphasis—J. Sz.)]

Translated into naked words, this is to say that, regardless of the principle laid down with lofty words in the preamble of the law concerning self-governance as the foundation of the democratic system, ‘externally’ - that is, in respect of the representation of interests, injuries, and their own needs - the minorities’ new constitutional-law institutions have no more authority than *any ordinary Hungarian citizen* who turns to the authorities with a request. Their proposals and requests are at most worthy of an ‘answer on the merits’, although the competent authorities have no obligation in respect of either enforcement or reporting.

None of this constitutes a problem from the viewpoint of the legislature because it always imagined the self-governments - as institutions tasked with promoting collective belonging, and the community’s own preservation - as ‘internally’ operating constitutional-law organisations, and arranged their spheres of authority accordingly. In the meaning of the law, a self-government can shape its *own* operational regime; form its accounting procedures and accounts of assets and liabilities from its *own* resources; decide on the utilisation of the property provided for it by the local authority; and choose its *own* name, emblem, and awards, as well as the terms on which these awards are bestowed; it can also take care of the conservation of its *own* local monuments -- if any. Within this fairly constrained sphere of authority naturally ‘the path is clear’ -- although only to the extent of the available resources and under the management conditions laid down and, of course, strictly on condition that the money for it has already been obtained. That, however - as the law states in detail - must for the most part somehow be scraped together by the self-government itself: that is, *every* possibility lies open to the minority self-governments for deal-making, craftiness, and good PR, but *no* material resources are guaranteed for them from regularly collected, state-distributed budgetary sources. True, in one place mention is made of the ‘*state*’ as a possible

sponsor. From the detailed regulations, however, it turns out that there is only one direct link between the central budget and the minorities' constitutional-law institutions: the annual support given to the minorities' *national* representative bodies through the state's public foundation for the purpose. How even a single penny might find its way to the lower levels - and, if it did, in accordance with what principles - is considered to be the minority's 'internal affair', in which the law, in the name of 'neutrality' and 'autonomy', does not wish to interfere.

One does not need to go into further details to deduce that the regulations concerning spheres of authority and material resources can only amount to a very limited exhibition of minority-rights: taken from the regulations, the minorities' local self-governments are not really more than *tradition-maintaining associations*. The question naturally arises: what was the point of all the legislative fuss -- because quite a number of associations of this kind were already in existence?

One clearly finds the answer to this question not in the domain of functions, but in that of *symbolic contents* -- in harmony with what the (foreign) political circumstances discussed earlier dictated to the legislators. These circumstances demanded that, with reference to developments in the mother country, ethnic Hungarians living beyond the borders should have some ground for participating in the politics of their homeland; furthermore, that there be a right and ways to maintain in an organised fashion native-language education, publishing, and culture. But closely looked at them, it is *these*- and only these - two areas in which the Minority Law has created something new. The minority self-governments which it brought into being may therefore be distinguished from the tradition-maintaining and cultural associations in these two respects: (i) the proclaimed *constitutional-law status* of the new formation (which is important even if its actual content has so far been extremely modest), and (ii) the statutory possibility of *institution-founding*.

At first sight all of this seems in order, also from the viewpoint of those living within the borders. Through the bestowal of constitutional-law status there can no longer be any doubt that in Hungary “the minorities are state-forming factors”¹⁵. As far as rights to the establishment of institutions are concerned, the more well-to-do minorities can already feel themselves ‘recognised’: through the newly declared right the educational bodies which they have created forthwith count as ‘proper’ state institutions, and so ‘proper’ state support is due to them. Naturally, if a local minority is to found its ‘own’ kindergarten, school, theatre, or museum it must be extremely rich. If not, such an institution will simply *not* be established. True, in this way the minority’s right to recognition is to some extent linked to the possession of assets: that is, in practice only those who have the necessary assets can exercise this right. This is at best deceptive, however, because the law *in principle* gives this right to everyone.

That the Gypsies cannot do much with these new in-principle possibilities is not only because their communities are not ‘rich’, and not only because the associations which may be regarded as the self-governments’ predecessors - if there were any - were occupied rather with obtaining educational, employment, and material support than with the preservation of traditions. From the Romany standpoint, the listed entitlements are empty mainly because they postulate as clarified precisely that which they need to clarify: the scope of self-governments, with all their constitutional-law status, in respect of local affairs which ‘affect minorities’. In other words, the law leaves in the dark whether - beyond the listed architectural, monument protection, educational, and tradition-preserving tasks - representatives of the minorities have the right to a say in the culture of *community coexistence*? More concretely: can they become involved in affairs which affect *their lives* in terms of ‘self-defence’ and ‘the preservation of identity’? For example, can they ensure organised legal protection to mistreated members of the community; can they have a say in

¹⁵ 68. § of the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary.

the shaping of local welfare regulations and in weeding out their hidden discriminatory contents; can they have a say in the local redistribution regime and its prejudicial practices; do they have the right to demand training programmes for unemployed members of their community; do they have the right to revise the kindergarten admissions system or the composition of school classes; do they have the right to a say in the appointment of school principals or the directors of local health-care institutions, and so on? From a legal aspect, obviously, no one can answer to these and similar questions with a definite 'yes' or 'no' today -- and the cause of murkiness is the Minority Law itself.

Naturally, all the aforementioned ill-defined matters can lead to disarrays also in case of the least powerful and disadvantaged groups within the majority. Still, if their complaints and claims enter the official realm, the disputed issues must be put on the paths of 'ordinary citizenry', and have to be handled in the administrative and legal channels built up on the grounds of citizen's rights. The situation is, however, different with the Romanians: now that they have their 'own' minority-institution, it is a matter of struggles to sort out, whether their claims should be channelled into the - still painfully imperfect - legal procedures of protecting *minority-rights*, or have to be accepted as *citizens' issues*, without any further differentiation. And, as it can be expected, attempts at shifting matters from one 'box' to the other are made on a wide range of matters of daily life. Thus, as it seems, the conflicts arising from the earlier intermingling of the 'social' and 'minority' aspects of one's rights hardly have been settled by the new law -- at best, it has changed the appearance of the controversies, but certainly not the substance of them.

Although the 'elastic' phrasing of entitlements, procedures and practices in the Minority Law has thus continued to contribute to the maintenance of disorders and uncertainties, still, it would be unjust to emphasise only the negative aspects of the law-making. For the creation of officially acknowledged, elected institutions has been of

significance for the Romany community *on its own merit*. After all, it was the 1993 Minority Law which, for the first time in history, granted the Gypsies a yet rather empty, though existing *framework* to articulate collective needs in an organised form. In fact, many of the local communities ‘read’ the message of the new law in this manner, and reacted accordingly. This is the primary explanation of the otherwise mysterious fact, why - despite all its dubious entitlements - the popularity of the minority self-governments has grown so remarkably among the Romanies?

Taken as a framework, the new institutions could be used for a number of experiments in the past years. First, they provided a path for political education at rather limited risks. Given the fact that the Minority Law entrusts the elected representatives with no more (but, also, with no less) than opinion-forming and lobbying functions, the new institutions help to select the actual opinion-leaders of the community, and delegate them with the role of formal representation to all those fora, where the local administration cannot make decisions without the consent of the minority. Though the influence of the minority-representatives remains limited in the greater bulk of the cases, their participation in the political discourse assists in an unnoticed way to coalesce the majority and minority ‘languages’, and helps to put together the first building blocks of a meaningful local policy on majority-minority cohabitation.

Second, the new institutions could be used also for promoting social mobility within the Romany community. Representation of the community has become an ‘occupation’, a ‘profession’, concluding in material rewards in most of the cases, and in increased respect in all of them. Further, the simple fact of electing several thousand representatives has not remained without responses on the part of the civil organisations of the majority: a great number of courses, training programmes and professional activities have been set up to assist

the minority's local activities¹⁶. As a result of these developments, the mere existence of local minority-governments has inspired individual investments into upward mobility, and has assisted to make thicker the yet tiny layer of a capable, informed, talented elite of the Romany community.

In sum, the calling into being of the local minority-governments has not generated a fundamental turn in the administration of the 'Romany question' in contemporary Hungary. By creating a weak institution in defence of the rights to exercise individual and collective identity, the Minority Law has opened the door for 'lawful' attempts at turning citizen's issues to distinct 'minority-cases', thus, it has contributed to segregation and the impoverishment of the content of undifferentiated citizenship. On the other hand, the very same legal act created instruments also for efficient struggles for recognition, and has generated the evolving of a militant, knowledgeable leadership of the Romany community.

It is still a matter of time to see, which of the two trends arrive at a victory in the future. However, much of the outcome depends on the public acknowledgement of the fact that the local struggles of the Romanies do not take place in a social vacuum, but are embedded into a whole lot of other conflicts of the ongoing transformation. A self-revealing case among these conflicts is the fight between women and the Gypsies around matters of redistribution.

Clashing Claims for Recognition: Women and Gypsies on the Battlefield of Welfare Assistance

As mentioned above, despite the advantages that followed from its framework-making character, the Minority Law failed to resolve the key-problem of the 'Romany-question': it still did not bring an end to the dangerous commingling of the 'social' and

¹⁶ Apart from solidarity, these deeds have been self-affirmative also for the NGOs in question: this way many

‘minority’ aspects of the rights of the community. This failure should not be owed to any ‘forgetfulness’ on the part of the legislature. Instead, it was a consequence of the interplay of the earlier discussed motives to draft a law that was primarily targeted at the well-assimilated, well-to-do minorities which were small in size. For them, the content of the now legally recognised minority-belonging is merely a cultural and emotional matter, an additional entitlement to all other human and citizen’s rights that they had practiced for long within the ‘ordinary’ institutions of Hungarian society. However, the case is - as we have seen - utterly different with the largest minority actually using the law in its day-to-day struggles: the Romany community is neither well-assimilated, nor well-to-do, and, at the same time, it is substantial in numbers. In addition, the post-1989 economic and political processes - discussed above at length - have led to the actual *impoverishment* of the Romanies’ human and citizen’s rights, and have done so on the ground of ethnicity.

In these circumstances, the granting of minority self-governance forced the local Romany communities to face a devilish dilemma that could not be resolved without further complications and conflicts. They either take the new organisations as their points of departure for struggling against social deprivation, or stick with the wording of the Minority Law, and confine themselves to vacuous misdeeds, while forget about the burning issues called forth by the wretched living conditions of those whom they represent. It is easy to see that both paths lead to a dead-end. When opting for the first choice, the minority governors clearly go beyond the law-given entitlements and ‘misuse’ them in legal terms. With these actions of enlarging the scope of manoeuvring, they risk to undermine the newly gained minority-driven legitimacy of the institution. In addition, they get into deepened conflicts with all those institutions of the local majority which regard these attempts at extended minority-protection an offense and a hostile border-crossing activity.

of them has gained acknowledged and stable status on the exceptionally competitive market of adult education.

The other route as well leads to an impasse. If the new Romany minority self-governments take strictly the written ordinances of the law as their point of departure, and - amid the conditions of the all-round lack of resources - define their role as 'smoothing' agents between the majority-institutions and the local minority, it is the quick emptying of the institution that they risk. In the eyes of the deprived minority community, they jeopardise not only the legitimacy and usefulness of the minority self-governments, but those of *all* right-protecting institutions. In addition, by refraining from the necessary interventions, they give 'official' consent and tacit approval to the unbroken continuation of the tightening up of the social and citizen's rights of those whom they should protect.

In the course of the past six years, the Romany local self-governments have experimented with both of these troubled role-definitions, and also with various fine-tuned combinations of them. Although the second, 'conformist' path seemed less hazardous for many of them at the outset, the quickly withering local support led to the dying out of these organisations. As a consequence, the termination of the representation of minority-interests has intensified the defencelessness of the local minority, thus, its members made all attempts on the occasion of the next elections to find proper replacement. Since it was not only them, but also the entire electorate of the locality to decide, the selection of local Romany candidates became a conflictuous issue. As a result, the preparation of the second round of the minority-elections (1998) was accompanied by corruption, blackmailing and attempts at breaking down the unity of the Romany community.

In those cases when the first path was followed from the beginning, the conflicts took different forms. Though the militancy of the elected representatives assisted to strengthen the cohesion of the local minority community and somewhat protected it from the external manipulations, these committed local politicians hardly could win either. After all, it was their striving at extending the framework of minority-governance also to the spheres of

welfare, health and education which concluded in heated local conflicts with the competing clientele of the majority who then made all sorts of attempts to mobilise authority against the 'unlawful' actions of the minority. Ultimately, these intensified conflicts led to similar conclusions on the part of the majority to those described before: they made all efforts to get rid of the trouble-making minority-leaders when the second round of the minority-elections offered an 'orderly' way to do so. Nevertheless, the lessons from these first endeavours of local recognition-struggles have been preserved by the Romany communities, and orient their tactics even today.

A closer look at these lessons is all the more needed, because it is exactly these struggles for gaining recognition to the minority-governments in their capacity as interest-protecting agents which regularly lead to fights with the local service-providers. Thus, they require some attention also as cases of collision between the distinctly justified struggles of women and the Gypsies.

In the local attempts at extending the social aspects of the rights of the Gypsies, the harshest conflicts arise around the distribution of welfare assistance. Following from the earlier outlined economic and social processes, it is now some 50-70 per cent of the Romanies who can be regarded poor even according to the most rigorous assessment. However, agreed and legally prescribed, officially processed measures of poverty simply do not exist in current Hungarian welfare policy. Apart from a few loose central orientations, the acknowledged criteria are matters of local bargains, depending on the capacity, political structure and sensitivity of the community (Horváth 1995). On this background, the local regulations further determine the list of concrete entitlements for assistance, and - as mentioned above - leave the actual distribution to extremely personalised means-tested schemes, run by the local service-providers. Amid these conditions, the available resources are in short *by definition*, and the tough competition between various groups in need is an in-

built constituent and also a major self-regulatory instrument of the system. It is justified to say that, instead of welfare, this arrangement is a multisided *warfare* of the poor against each other, of the providers against the poor, and of the poor against them.

In these local wars, the Romanies easily and often get blamed to ‘overuse’ the resources. Being heavily over-represented among the needy, such an appearance promptly emerges when looking at the composition of the queue in the anteroom of the welfare office. And it is easy to conclude: it is the task of those running the scheme to tight up the conditions and not to provide assistance to ‘everybody’. Thus, welfare officers, social workers, teachers, health-visitors, etc. all are called for uniting against ‘unjust’ exploitation of the scarce resources, in other words, to find ways to reduce the Gypsy take-up of public provisions. Given the feminised nature of these professions, ultimately, it is mostly women who are addressed by the call. Looking at the practical consequences, what is required from them is simply the turning of their newly acquired protective job into a *policing* one, and with it, changing the built-in supportive content to an authoritative one.

It is not a matter of ‘liking’ or ‘disliking’ the Gypsies that women are usually reluctant to make such a turn. ‘Policing’ is alien to them as a ‘masculine’ activity with the necessary use of power and force -- thus, it is too close to ‘politics’ that they have learned to avoid during all their lives, and for good reasons. They chose the caring profession exactly because of its ‘safe’ distance from authority, and clearly for its protective content. As testified by a number of interviews with newly minted social workers, a frequent motive behind opting for employment in the welfare services had been the wish to ‘guard’, to ‘help’ and to ‘provide caring’ for those in great need of such gracious deeds. As the interviews revealed it, these strong motivations for exercising goodwill usually followed directly from women’s earlier experiences of defencelessness and abuse. Now that they should turn against their

clients in the name of 'higher principles' means the betrayal of their entire career for most of them.

In these circumstances, the minority self-governments seem to come as 'saviours' for the troubled women of the welfare agencies. Instead of second-best ways out of the traps of the 'protective - policing' trade-off, the new institutions with their drives to extend the Romanies' social rights are at hand to take over the task. This is, why in an increasing number of local communities, the elected leaders of the minority 'unexpectedly' have been invited to 'make just decisions' among 'their' people. These invitations seemed at first sight the acknowledgement of certain Romany claims: after all, the struggle around social rights implied increased autonomy in decision-making, and it strove for the recognition of the community-specific features of poverty and for the application of purposeful methods to combat it, etc. Hence, the shifting of certain responsibilities in welfare assistance appeared to meet some of the claims on both sides.

However, these actions at passing over the burden rapidly led to dangerous consequences. On the one hand, they have worked as boomerangs against the aforementioned female service-workers. Left 'only' with the task to assist the non-Gypsy poor, many of them soon became redundant, and, beside getting on the dole, their institutions (local family centres, services for children, the elderly, the sick, etc.) shortly became 'superfluous' in the eyes of the local decision-makers. On the other hand, the creation of a 'distinct' scheme for the Gypsy poor speeded up and pushed to the extreme the ongoing spontaneous processes of segregation. After all, the call to assist in creating a 'distinct' system of welfare distribution with 'specific' regulations outside the framework of the general law further weakened the otherwise loose system of welfare protection by doubling it. In addition, control over the resources still remained with the majority, thus, the shifting hardly assisted the decision-making autonomy of the minority, while gave up its protection

by 'ghettoising' it. Thus, instead of enlarging social rights, the take-over of welfare assistance ultimately led to further reductions, together with the radical marginalisation of the entire Romany community.

In light of these outcomes, it is no surprise that the practice of mutual blaming has been visibly on the increase between women in welfare and the Romanies claiming welfare. Since their fights are strictly kept within the local framework, it seems that things could have happened otherwise with some 'goodwill' on either side. However, the actual causes of the conflicts lay outside, and hardly can be controlled by the conflicting, though powerless parties. As discussed above, it is the extremist decentralisation of redistribution which originally aimed at serving the state's quick desertion from matters of welfare, but which, simultaneously, left behind a vacuum in settling the disputes around the differing interpretation of rights and entitlements. In lack of regulations, protection, and ample publicity, the 'natural' consequence is the reciprocal weakening of power of the various local groups in struggle for recognition, and their turning against each other for accusation.

Conclusions

In identifying the causes of the half-sided success of women's and the Gypsies' local struggles for recognition, we are once again back to the most controversial issue of post-communist transformation: the desertion of the state from matters of redistribution and welfare policy. As discussed earlier, the decomposition of the institutional pillars of the old state has been an unquestionable precondition of the transition from a command-economy to a market-regulated one, and it was also a prerequisite to the establishment of new, democratic political institutions. Although the first years of the transformation brought about serious difficulties and uncertainties for a great number of social groups, the troubles have been overcome rather quickly, and adaptation to the new conditions proved to be beneficent for the

decisive majority of Hungarian society. Even the less protected social groups turned out to be advantaged by the changes: this is evidently demonstrated by the success of women's silent mass movement to gain recognition to their work which formerly had been 'shut' into the household-units of the informal economy.

While on a balance, the majority has enjoyed advancement, serious price has been paid for the way how the withdrawal of the state was managed by the poor, and especially, by the Romanies among them. Most of the difficulties follow from the fact that the legal, regulatory, and practical changes implemented in the name of curtailing the state's influence in matters of welfare policy have rather hindered than helped the separation of the 'social' and the 'minority' elements of the 'Romany question', and have also contributed to an increase in majority-minority tensions. Welfare redistribution, with its sharp bifurcation into systems for 'citizens' and 'the poor' respectively, and also with the strong decentralisation of the latter subsystem, has weakened the foundations on the basis of which the poor may assert their rights. At the same time, individual competition among the poor has sharpened for the acquisition of local resources, which have in any case been diminishing year by year. To a great extent, this multi-step series of developments in welfare have resulted in the fact that, while ethnic clashes have become more frequent and more intense over the last few years, they have not escalated into a nation-wide 'civil war'. The conflicts mostly take place as quarrels of the local poor, and their 'organisation' is also confined within local limits.

Ultimately, society's (more) successful strata can thank the welfare reform for this: in the course of the transformation of the system both the issues of poverty and that of the defenceless ethnic minority were pushed into the background within the administrative borders of villages and towns far from 'big politics', and in this way the blame can be apportioned to individual local abuses if the groups concerned come into conflict. For sure, such occurrences are not the responsibility of the 'rest' - those who live outside the settlement

- nor is it up to them to interfere in the internal affairs of local communities. The commingling, both in principle and in practice, of the 'social' and 'minority' elements of the 'Romany question' is for this reason still - just as it was before the transition - the principal pledge of the daily maintenance of social peace. It is true that there is a price to pay for maintaining this social peace on such a narrow basis: above all in connection with general legal security. Because everyone knows from their own daily experience - even if one is not aware of it on a daily basis - that if the (in its principles) democratic legal system interprets the law for minorities only imperfectly and even illegally, it cannot guarantee the rights of the majority either.

It is women in welfare who seem to learn these lessons among the firsts. Though their massive move to the welfare services was experienced and seen as a clear and well-deserved acknowledgement of earlier acquired knowledge and expertise, these grounds of success and enhanced self-esteem have started to wither away amid the sharpening local wars around welfare distribution. The frequent short-sighted attempts at shifting the burdens of the missing legal regulations on the service providers' shoulders conclude in motivations for 'escaping': the proportions of leaving behind one's job are hardly as high in any other professions as in contemporary welfare occupations. If not leaving on their own decision, women might be forced to do so: the local wars of the poor speed up the ghettoisation of distinct services for the Romany part of the community, which in turn, concludes in the closing down of the 'superfluous' provisions with women's jobs in them.

The message of the necessary decline of recognition by kicking out each other should be heard beyond the borders of the distinct localities. After all, the turning against each other of the weak and even weaker groups concludes in common losses: while neither of them gain, both of them get farther from having a say in matters of power -- locally or otherwise. However, the consequences do not remain neutral for the more powerful groups either. The

yet segmented local wars undermine the legitimacy of politics as such, thus, they certainly increase distrust, and denigrate the support of the democratic institutions. These tendencies favour illegal and arbitrary actions at 'making justice' outside the law, and thus threaten general security. Further, the recurrent attempts at ghettoisation lead to sharp disintegration with the spontaneous evolving of two societies within the same national borders. However, the peaceful cohabitation of partners at odds cannot be maintained on the long run, and not only because of the foreseeable war of the deprived against the privileged. Even if such a 'war' does not break out in the physical sense, the lack of rights on one side keeps questioning the pertaining rights on the other. And after all, 'necessities' to withdraw them can always occur -- as the case of women in welfare has tellingly shown it.

It is easy to conclude that, ultimately, it is the rule of law which can be the sole safeguard against such developments. Still, the rule of law cannot be established with differing rights for parts of the citizenry. Therefore, it is of pressing need to return to where this paper departed from: the guaranteeing of fundamental social rights. The necessary public discourse about the content of these rights has to start, however, with a due sorting out of the 'social' and 'minority' elements of poverty, and with the state's taking responsibility for properly protecting these rights. All this requires strong governance and a high degree of legitimacy for democratic authority -- in short, a state with high potency.

Such a potent state still awaits for future installation in contemporary Hungary.

Now that the decomposition of the pillars of the old totalitarian regime has been more or less completed, it is probably realistic to hope for its creation.

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