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The Gábor Roma of Transylvania

Representations of wealth and spatial transformation processes in Nyárádkarácsonfalva

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The present-day economic and spatial potential of the Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva

1.

Along with the commune of Lukafalva (Gheorghe Doja in Romanian), Nyárádkarácsonfalva (Crăciunești in Romanian) is one of the municipalities situated on the bank of the Lower Nyárád (Niraj) River. The Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva is made up of Transylvanian Gábor Roma (recognised in both the local and Hungarian press and known as the “hatted” Gábor Roma). This community, relatively quickly in sociological terms, established its own religious, social, financial and sociocultural praxis that distinguishes it from the rest of the Roma community within the given Transylvanian Hungarian settlement structure. The development of this social space as an element of self-representation is a conscious process on the part of the Roma, and one that is by no means free of conflict. One conflictual trend to emerge in the course of self-representation is manifested in an outward movement in Roma–Hungarian and Hungarian–Roma relationships. The other type of conflict is directed inwards. It takes the form of self-definition within the group and in opposition to others and is manifested in the forced positioning of social relationships with those regarded as subordinates or superiors.

2.

Even in the context of internal and external sources of conflict, the Gábor Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva devotes a great deal of effort to self-representation. Other researchers have also pointed out how the community emphasises the “social significance and reputation” of its own settlement by using epithets such as “the Big Village” (*Baro gav*) or “Centre” (*Centro*; Berta 2005b:72). The present paper is intended above all as a comprehensive interpretation. Taking as my starting point the present-day economic and spatial positioning of the Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva, my aim is to condense (i.e., to organise according to a single perspective, if possible) the nature of coexistence and the points of intersection within the community (local society). In terms of my research methodology, I endeavour to apply the *holistic approach* typical of cultural anthropology. However, from a cultural perspective, the examined community is distinctive in a coherent economic and financial sense. Even as a former local, I consider it beyond the scope of the present paper to provide a comprehensive description of the patterns of cultural life in the community. I merely attempt to determine how present-day Roma–Hungarian, Hungarian–Roma, and Roma–Roma social relationships differ from the past.

3.

In the present paper, I identify three major periods with respect to Roma–Hungarian and Hungarian–Roma coexistence. These periods follow the changes in the social status of the Roma community, and my aim is to provide an insight into the spatial distribution practices deferred and altered as a result of them. The first

period runs from the mid-1970s (when the first Roma family moved into the village from the Roma colony) up until the regime change in 1989. The second period encompasses the first decade following the change of regime, while the third comprises the recent past and the present day.

4. In the case of the last two periods, my analysis necessarily includes the Gábor Roma communities of some of the neighbouring settlements that belong to the commune of Nyárádkarácsonfalva (the *comună* in the Romanian public administration system), since they belong to the same Roma (ethnic) group as the Nyárádkarácsonfalva community. In the neighbouring Gábor communities, the group that adheres to its traditional trades, or groups defined according to trades that have recently changed, include families with different financial circumstances and status, whose members have a strongly differentiated sense of “us”. This type of differentiation also permeates the community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva, generating features of distancing on a daily basis.
5. I do not include among the thematic issues addressed in the present study a detailed discussion of boundary construction processes or an examination of the influence exerted on the local community by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as I have recently published papers on both these issues (Simon 2004; 2006). Nevertheless, I do deal in detail with the social aspects of the community’s Adventist religious practices.
6. Lastly, it is important to consider the situation of the Hungarian community, as the former majority group within the settlement, which has itself become segmented and which has in the meantime been subject to border-related and psychological (majority–minority) social discrimination.

Life strategies and the transformation of spatial structures

7. Looked at in chronological order, it becomes clear from the documents detailing the numerical increase in the Nyárádkarácsonfalva Roma community that the local Roma indeed deserve attention not only because of their numerical superiority compared to the Hungarian community, but also because of the outward manifestation of the changes that have taken place at the level of lifestyle. The cleanliness, orderliness and affluence of their living environment is as much a part of the expression of identity in the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva as their distinctive attire.
8. In his 1997 article “A magyar kisebbség kialakulása Karácsonyfalvan. Cigány identitás és magyar-cigány egymásmellettség” [The emergence of the Hungarian minority in Nyárádkarácsonfalva. Roma identity and Hungarian–Roma coexistence], László Barabás not only talks about the separation of the Roma community on the basis of clan, and about the shift from the colony to the central part of the village (multiple property purchases and the related conditions); he also discusses the Hungarian community’s “evolution into a minority”. This process, however, concerns the second period in Hungarian–Roma and Roma–Hungarian relations defined in the present study. During the first period (from the 1970s to the change of regime), we can in fact talk only about Hungarian–Roma relations, since at the time the majority–minority principle had not yet been entirely reversed.

9. Up until the regime change, the two communities were separated in spatial terms by well-established and inviolable psychological and physical borders. Almost 90 percent of the Roma population was living in the Roma colony at that time. The families that did move into the village edged themselves into parts of the village densely populated by Hungarians. The Roma community (chiefly those members of the community who had moved into the village) and the Hungarian community enjoyed a reciprocal economic relationship. In this period, all the Roma families that had moved into the village without exception practised their traditional trade of cauldron making (being among the so-called Kalderash Roma, who are metal workers by tradition), along with various tin-smithing and tinkering work. Their traditional trades thus largely furthered the development of economic symbiosis. They would typically be given flour, bacon, bread or other foodstuffs in exchange for mending pots. However, cauldrons for making plum or other fruit brandy were sold for money, and money was also charged for refurbishing or replacing guttering.
10. Besides this economic symbiosis, coexistence during this first period was characterised by a lack of conflict and an openness to partial assimilation in a cultural sense. Up until the mid-1980s, the Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva belonged, almost without exception, to the Calvinist Church. It was never the case that the Roma community lived a genuinely religious lifestyle and regularly attended the Calvinist church, nor was there perhaps any opportunity for this. Their contact with the church was merely formal. However, in most cases the members of the Roma community had their newborn babies christened, even asking Hungarian families to be godparents, while they also requested the presence of the Calvinist pastor at their funerals. Looked at from the perspective of religious affiliation, it seems that a tendency and willingness to assimilate did exist, although in reality cultural differences always made cultural reciprocity, let alone full assimilation, impossible.
11. Economic differences within the Roma community began to emerge in this period – or rather the process became more intensive at around this time. Before the move into the village, this differentiation was spatially represented by the “Roma colony”, which essentially comprised three parts. There existed (and there partly still exists today, although the shift in the psychological and physical borders of the colony will be discussed in detail below in connection with the two last periods) a dichotomic marginal position, with the “centre” in the middle.
12. Social separation in the first period of coexistence was already based on the clan, although this separation was manifested more clearly in terms of trade-related differentiation. The sieve makers (leather workers) lived on the western margins of the colony. A substantial part of the leather-working clan still lives in this area today: members of this clan are less likely to move into the village than others. Even during this period, the eastern margins of the colony were already home to a mixture of Gábor Roma families with varying financial circumstances, who mostly made a living as tin-smiths. Those who lived in the “centre” were the members of the Burcsa family, along with those Gábor Roma families who, besides tin-smithing, were already involved in trading goods on the markets in Târgu Mureş or the agglomerations of bigger cities in Transylvania and Romania.

13. The expansion of their trade network demanded considerable mobility, but the conditions for this could not always be met. For many families, their trading area was limited to the markets of Târgu Mureş and the city's agglomeration. At that time, separation was not evidenced by obvious financial indicators.
14. The first decade following the regime change (i.e., the second period in the present study) was a period characterised by the conscious occupation of space organised at clan level within the Roma community, and by rapid house purchasing campaigns and movement into the village.
15. Following the regime change, over 90 percent of the Hungarian population, who had become settled in a commuting lifestyle, were forced to go back to making a precarious living in the agricultural sector following the privatisation of the large industrial centres. The Hungarian community was also differentiated financially and had to resort to new life strategies. The resulting economic difficulties in the Hungarian community were one of the reasons behind the house purchasing "campaign".
16. In the hope of what seemed almost unrealistic financial profits, members of the Hungarian community put their houses up for sale at competitive prices, offering them firstly to the Roma families that had already moved into the village, with whom, for the most part, they enjoyed a neighbourly relationship. Because of the property prices in Nyárádkarácsonfalva, a Hungarian family was able to purchase a house, or even two houses, in the neighbouring settlement from the money they made on the sale, and perhaps even a new piece of land and the necessary agricultural implements to go with it. In short, selling a house in Nyárádkarácsonfalva was a way of ensuring a livelihood.
17. Conditions were also created for the excess value purchase of property and immediate payment. In the majority of cases, the Roma family purchasing the house requested the Hungarian party not to inform the local residents, and especially not the members of the Roma community, about the purchase of the property and the actual amount paid for a certain length of time (even in the case of a deferred move). A Roma family that had already moved into the village might secretly pay an advance for their Hungarian neighbour's house (especially in the case of older neighbours or home owners who had no immediate relatives), subsequently taking possession of the property on the jointly agreed date or on the death of the members of the Hungarian family.
18. Initially, Roma families who moved into the village were clearly unable to establish their own borders, since at the time everything was still dependent on the willingness of their existing Hungarian neighbours to sell their family homes. Property purchases based on mutual trust between neighbours meant that individual Roma families were able to purchase Hungarian homes in certain parts of the village exclusively for their own relatives and dependents. This circle of relatives and dependents included not only those living in the Roma colony but also relatives who had long been living at a distance (even for several years) in the hope of finding a new livelihood that would enable them to be re-integrated among the Nyárádkarácsonfalva Roma. I have already written about the initial transformation of the spatial structure of the village drawing on theses put

forward in my dissertation (“Objektív vizsgálat a nyárádkarácsonfalvi cigánység gazdasági élethelyzetének függvényében, és az ebből adódó elhatárolódási aspektusok a cigány-magyar együttélésben” [An objective examination of the economic living conditions of the Roma of Nyárádkarácsonfalva and the resulting aspects of distancing in the context of Roma–Hungarian coexistence]).

19.

The separation of the present-day elite stratum of Roma in Nyárádkarácsonfalva is perceptible nowadays in terms of their self-definition. I refer here to the present-day Roma elite, since the local Roma elite has essentially been replaced in the course of the past 50 years or so. Many of the earliest settling Roma families and their descendants have remained in their traditional trades: making and mending cauldrons, and various kinds of tin-smithing.

20.

At the same time, the practising of traditional trades and the accompanying social prestige no longer apply among the Roma of Nyárádkarácsonfalva. In their place, social advancement generated by an increasingly broad range of profitable commercial activities has greater weight and is more widely accepted even within Roma society. The majority of Roma families engaged in such activities are not autochthonous: many of them settled in the village in the 1980s, or arrived in the settlement as a result of marriage or family relationships.

21.

However, the truly substantial change took place after the 1990s. The new Roma elite essentially evolved in the course of a decade, and in this context it is important to emphasise that this elite was already independent of the clan hierarchy recognised in the collective historical memory. This is not universally valid, of course, since two or three families – even within the present-day elite – are considered by local Hungarians and Roma alike as families with an important history.

22.

One of the most striking forms by which the Roma elite are distinguished is by means of verbal expressions. The term *csurár* (meaning pauper or beggar) is typically applied to poor people. It primarily indicates their social differentiation, while the difference in their lifestyle is only a secondary connotation. Roma families who make a more modest livelihood have a radically different lifestyle compared to the elite. Some of the less well off still live in the Roma colony today. Others are scattered within the village. The areas or streets they live in (e.g., Csurár Street) are today referred to by the Roma elite as the “symbolically devalued areas” of the village (the expression is borrowed from a similar study of Roma–Hungarian relations in the Székely Land: Oláh 1996:184).

23.

It is only nowadays that the epithet *csurár* is associated with a sense of social and economic devaluation, since in the local social memory, it was the *csurárs* (i.e., leather workers) who were the first to settle here, and there are many figures from the *csurár* clan (e.g., Máté Gazdag) who are highly respected by the Roma and Hungarians alike.

24.

In connection with social memory, one might ask why certain cultures are apparently more concerned with the recollection of their past than with their present-day social situation. Several types of remembrance exist simultaneously, side by side (family, local, national, ethnic), and while these evoke different attitudes, each one begins by identifying what it is that is worth remembering. The question

itself, however, entails broader and more profound social conflicts among attitudes to the past (Bürke 2001:14–15).

25. The earlier social prestige enjoyed by the *csurár* clan is unequivocally connected with the *prestige objects* (silver goblets, silver spoons) owned by the community, even today. The *csurár* clan has recently been forced to sell several such prestige objects to pay off debts. The loss of these prestige objects also means a loss of social status, and at the same time economic differentiation. Essentially, prestige objects play the following role: “The prestige object economy of the Gábor Roma is a reflection not only of the differences that can be observed in terms of the distribution of the resources that can be shaped into prestige goods — that is, it is not merely a direct indicator of economic success — it is at the same time a reflection of the independent social arena of constitutive political activity (meaning the status-related competitive economic and social aspects of that activity within the Roma community). This constitutive character is manifested above all in the various strategies and techniques aimed at the manipulation of the value of the prestige objects and the prestige of the owners of the objects.” (Berta 2005a:175)
26. In the case of those who are less well off, attempts are made to nullify the internal dividing lines symbolically created by the elite. The crossing of internal boundaries, and movement within them, refer to behavioural norms that are either regulated or impromptu but by no means learned or socialised. In practice, a less-well-off Roma family (or individual) may enter the living space of the elite only in well justified or exceptional circumstances. Younger members of the Roma elite often behave with hostility even towards older members among the ranks of the less well off who move within the symbolic borders referred to above, thereby violating one of the moral norms of the Gábor Roma: unconditional respect for one’s elders (*o mai puro*). Thus social distortions based on economics are capable of subverting even culturally established moral standards.
27. There is no real moral community between the elite and the poor. If any family among the ranks of the less well off suddenly begins to acquire wealth and perhaps plans to purchase a house in the central part of the village, the elite will vehemently resist any such movement, especially if it affects an area within their symbolically drawn borders. The elite will even be willing to pay double for the house in question, simply to avoid ending up as the neighbours of a poorer-ranking family.
28. The third phase in Roma–Roma and Roma–Hungarian coexistence is the present, or rather the present-day socio-economic projections of recent coexistence. In terms of Roma–Roma relations, the most striking example of present-day separation is separation based on profits from various branches of trade, and the directly proportional resulting accumulation of wealth. At the head of the local Roma society are those who deal in gold and those Roma families that have wider – international – business contacts. The stratum below this – besides those involved in the traditional trades mentioned above – comprises those involved in smaller-scale, internal trade, peddling, and market trading.
29. In an article on the Roma community of Hagymásbodon (Budiu Mic in Romanian), Sába Tesfay (n.d.) includes observations on the Roma of Nyárádkarácsonfalva, emphasising the dominance of the Nyárádkarácsonfalva community

within the hierarchy of the Gábor Roma clan: “...the Gábor Roma live there [i.e., in Nyárádkarácsonfalva], they form a kind of nobility [...], they live in the kind of mansions you don’t see anywhere else; they are wealthy...”

30.

József Gagyí, in an article published in 2002, expressly highlights the numerical superiority of the Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva: “Most of those living in Nyárádkarácsonfalva, or rather in the area of the old village, are Roma native speakers and have Roma ethnicity. It is also true that, in the second half of the twentieth century, the village merged with Fojfalva (Foi in Romanian) and Csiba-Káposztásszentmiklós (Nicolești), and in today’s single settlement, made up of the four earlier settlements, the Hungarians form the majority. Thus, looked at from one perspective, the Roma are the majority population; while from a different perspective they are the minority. But the process is unequivocal: the proportion of the Hungarian population is decreasing, while the proportion of the Roma population is growing.” (Gagyí 2002:49)

31.

We will return later to the network of social contacts between the Roma inhabitants of the settlements that have “fused” with Nyárádkarácsonfalva and the Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva. Staying for the moment with the article by József Gagyí – before I move on to the transformation of the settlement structure and its better prognostic investigation – I highlight another excerpt from the above article:

32.

“From the 1960s, Roma families were moving continuously into houses along the main road [1], although this only really became striking in the 1990s. In the years immediately after the regime change, Hungarians were able to ask as much for houses in this village as in the town.

33.

In 1992, Mihály Burcsa, the Roma *voivode* (the Hungarians at least referred to him as the *voivoide*, and treated him as such; I don’t know whether all the Roma families and clans recognised him as *voivoide* or not), purchased the large house belonging to a former landowner situated on a plot opposite the Calvinist church; today, there are two brand new two-storey houses standing next to the old one. A little further up, Gábor Demeter Kócsa recently purchased a fifth house, owing to the fact that he has five sons; these houses stand next to one another in a group. A little lower down, a new house is being built in the place of an old one that was recently purchased and demolished. Not so long ago, some Roma children were hanging around in the gateway and they asked a passing villager ‘What are they building here, Rupi?’ The answer, which quickly circulated around the village, was ‘a palace’! I asked several Roma families why they wanted to move next to the main road, away from the other Roma. Some of them claimed it was too cramped in the Roma district and impossible to build anything there. Since the Roma area lies on the edge of the village, with farmland stretching beyond it, this response was dubious. One person said it was better to move out because of the permanent noise and altercations in the district. This argument seems rather more plausible. No one mentioned what I thought was most obvious: that the Roma are escaping from their past and hoping to build a different future for themselves, among the Hungarians, as citizens with houses on the main street.” (Gagyí 2002:54)

34.

The settlement structure, or rather what were formerly the village’s central, sacred spaces, have lost their validity today. This does not mean that the Hungarian

community no longer recognises its own central, sacred spaces, or no longer needs them, but rather that there has been a fundamental change in the use of these spaces. The majority of the population living along the Lower Nyárád River are Calvinists. The churchyard in front of a Calvinist church is a unique (sacred) community space in which members of the community generally meet and chat following the Sunday service. The churchyard is a public space that has always been marked by physical boundaries, while the activity that takes place within it is socially regulated.

35.

As József Gagyi wrote, the former landowner's manor house opposite the Calvinist church in Nyárádkarácsonfalva came into the ownership of one of the Roma families that enjoyed the highest social status. The entrance to the churchyard and the entrance to the former landowner's manor house are opposite one another, separated in practice by the line of the main road. The churchyard has thus lost its physical boundaries as a sacred and public community space, and the location and timing of community conversation have shifted. This is not a conflict situation; rather the physical space surrounding the churchyard has simply been transformed into a mental space, where the timing and scope of entry and passage are more restricted. Spatial transformation has also been influenced by the denominational distinction between the Roma and Hungarian communities. In keeping with their Adventist customs, the Roma community observe Saturday as the last day of the week, while the Calvinist Hungarian community worships on Sunday. Thus, the time-related sacred significance of the space differs from the perspective of the communities' religious observance, although entry into each other's space is still characterised by mutual respect.

36.

The central space is, in fact, a secular space. Currently the most popular public space is the section of approximately 800 metres between the square that surrounds the former mayor's office and the former cooperative shop and pub (cafeteria) that extend into the central part of the square. This section includes both sides of the main road. This main road is very busy nowadays, as it forms part of the international E60 that bypasses Târgu Mureş, thus in terms of outward appearances it is very important to the Roma community, which is precisely why the elite try to purchase houses for themselves here.

37.

The presence of the Hungarian community in this space is nowadays limited to a couple of houses and plots. In order to move into this space, elite families have exploited their full economic potential – in the form of cash – to outbid, almost without exception, the many less-well-off families in the community. Many of the Roma families have forfeited the mutual trust that characterised existing Hungarian–Roma neighbourly relations in this space. In certain cases, sudden willingness to sell on the part of the Hungarian families (a willingness that is directly proportional to the highest sum offered for their property) has nullified the advantage previously enjoyed by neighbours, which had meant giving priority to many of the less-well-off Roma families in terms of house purchases.

38.

Nowadays, the elite have secured their own spaces to such an extent that moving into them is now independent of any willingness to sell on the part of the Hungarian families. In spaces that are now dominated by the elite, there are practically no houses for sale, or, should one come on the market, then the symbolic status of the elite family, assigned to it by the community according to an unwritten rule,

comes into play. Spaces that evolve in this way are referred to by the Roma and Hungarian communities alike using the name of the clan branch (e.g., Ruszki Street, the Zoltán Family's Street, etc.).

Social inferiority and superiority in the context of community coexistence

39.

In many cases, present-day coexistence is characterised by the Hungarian community's dependency on the Roma community. For this reason, in what follows I consider coexistence to be a primarily Roma–Hungarian relationship. The disruption of Hungarian–Roma relations and the partial inversion of the economically based symbiosis implies a deliberate inversion of certain social formulas on both sides.

40.

One indication of the Hungarian community's social dependency on the Roma community is the fact that certain Hungarian families undertake housekeeping work for Roma families. Typically, Hungarian women who are known to be good housekeepers are employed, even on a permanent basis, to do housework for Roma elite families, while the men help out in the garden.

41.

Working for the more middle-class Adventist Roma families, and especially for families with a good reputation, is by no means degrading for the Hungarian community. For many, occasional or permanent work for certain Roma families is an excellent way to supplement a pension, while such employment might even provide a livelihood. Financial need does not in itself necessarily explain economic dependency, which is partly generated by the transformation of the social and cultural features of the Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva and by the way that part of the Roma community expresses and underpins its self-image towards the Hungarian community. In this case, "part of" the Roma community means the circle of Adventist families that enjoy the highest reputation. The praxis implied by observance of the Adventist religion not only shapes the forms of religious life but also influences everyday life. The community informally determines the kind of person an Adventist Gábor should be: "Soap and water [...] We are only God's children if we are clean. Time was when we Roma didn't behave as we should. So [...] plenty of wicked things happened, but I recognised the truth, and everyone else must recognise it too, because the truth is the Seventh Day." [2]

42.

"For the Roma of Nyárádkarácsonfalva, Saturday is not simply the last day of the week; it is interpreted in a religious context, in which spatial and temporal structures break down. Saturday is the day of purification, the day on which any kind of interaction that involves a commercial relationship is forbidden: the period from sunset on Friday right up until sunset on Saturday integrates all aspects of the kind of psychological and social distancing by which the Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva wishes to define its own self-image." (For more on this, see Simon 2004:79.)

43.

This kind of new social self-image permeates the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva with new symbols of identity. The Gábor Roma's new identity symbols to some extent neutralise general prejudices (that the Roma are

criminals, uncivilised, “black market hyenas”, etc.), although without putting an end to them entirely. A more positive image of the Nyárádkarácsonfalva Gábor Roma community exists today at the micro-regional level (meaning in the eight settlements that belong administratively to Nyárádkarácsonfalva). In several cases, even Hungarian women from neighbouring settlements undertake house-keeping work for Gábor Roma families in Nyárádkarácsonfalva. But short-term or long-term employment as chauffeurs for Gábor Roma families, which provides a livelihood for many Hungarians, likewise occurs at a micro-regional level.

44.

The Gábor Roma community in Nyárádkarácsonfalva has now distanced itself entirely from the other Gábor Roma communities in the micro-region, despite the fact that it originally belonged to the same ethnic group as the Roma communities of the surrounding villages. Financial differentiation in favour of the Nyárádkarácsonfalva community is now so pronounced that any kind of egalitarian social relationship is precluded. In other words, besides the Hungarian community, some members of Roma communities also work for the Gábor Roma families of Nyárádkarácsonfalva nowadays. It tends to be impoverished members of the Roma community of Somosd (Cornești in Romanian) who regularly take on jobs in Nyárádkarácsonfalva. There is a clear distinction between the type of work undertaken by the Roma community and the work performed by Hungarians: less-demanding household tasks (e.g., carpet cleaning, yard sweeping, ditch clearing, rubbish disposal) are typically entrusted to the Roma from the neighbouring villages.

45.

The example of Folyfalva (Foi in Romanian) might be highlighted in terms of the strategies employed to maintain social relationships with the Roma communities of neighbouring villages. The settlement of Folyfalva is the most fully integrated with Nyárádkarácsonfalva – unsurprisingly, since Folyfalva has always formed a single parish with Nyárádkarácsonfalva and the two communities use one church. It is only the locals who take notice of the physical boundary between the two settlements.

46.

A moderately well-off stratum of the Nyárádkarácsonfalva Roma community now lives in an area populated by its own clan in the western part of the village. From the perspective of the elite, however, this part of the village is a symbolically devalued area. The area is directly adjacent to the locally recognised border with Folyfalva (Városi Street). Certain families from the symbolically devalued area of Nyárádkarácsonfalva (and from other devalued areas, too) have now purchased houses for themselves in the area considered as the “centre” of Folyfalva. The original Folyfalva community has responded to this incursion by continuously purchasing properties in an attempt to hold onto its own space. This process bears a shadow of resemblance to the spatial distribution practices typical of Roma–Roma relationships in Nyárádkarácsonfalva, although for the time being it is still in the early stages. Here too, however, the practices of spatial distribution bear the signs of the outward representation of financial and social status. In other words, in Folyfalva, too, it now matters which Gábor Roma family owns a house, how big that house is, and where it is located.

In place of a conclusion

47.

Further research on the financial and social status of the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva should comprise an analysis of the forms of social relationships that are, and can be, maintained with the Roma communities of the neighbouring villages. In all probability, the boundaries of the social interactions maintained by the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva with the (Gábor) Roma communities of the neighbouring villages will shift. The question arises as to whether the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva will be able to validate its social model in another community, or whether that model will merely serve as a reference. Another potential area of research is the extent to which the social primacy and centrality of the Nyárádkarácsonfalva community is maintained within the micro-region; how inferiority and superiority are stabilised; and how far conversion to the Adventist religion among the Gábor Roma communities of neighbouring villages deideologises the uniqueness of the identity practice of the Gábor Roma community of Nyárádkarácsonfalva.

NOTES

1 Importantly, during my research in the settlement, several of my interview subjects, Roma and Hungarian alike, confirmed that the family of Gábor Bánó (known by the epithet “Hátátá” among the local Roma community) were the first to move into the village, some time around the mid-1970s.

2 Gábor Bánó is a resident of Nyárádkarácsonfalva. Data collected by Zoltán Simon, 27th December 2004. (Manuscript.)

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