HOW UPBRINGING IN ROMA FAMILIES HAS CHANGED OVER THE CENTURIES

Michal Kozubík,¹ Barbora Odrášková²

Abstract: This study compares family upbringing in Slovak Roma during the 18th century with that of current times. It attempts to identify parallels between the Samuel Augustini's 18th-century masterpiece: *Gypsy in Hungary*, and more recent data from a long-term study of Roma people in the eastern Slovakia–Poprad District. Open and axial coding inspired by the Strauss and Corbin Grounded Theory method is used to analyze the data. The primary results reveal that the common feature in all social classes of the settlement is a strong relationship between children and family. The poorest parents fail to provide adequate living conditions. Their children are brought up on the 'street' and come home only when hungry, thirsty, or want to sleep. Parents do not support further education of their children for several reasons: fear of an unknown environment, distrust of most educational institutions, or financial benefit of the family.

UDC Classification: 304; **DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v5.1006>

Keywords: Gypsy, Roma Community, Upbringing, Comparative Study, Slovak Republic

Introduction

Despite the Romological literature containing many scientific works and quality final research reports, there exists a gap in knowledge regarding the field of Roma education, with centuries of literature focused on inhabitants of Eastern Slovakia segregated settlements. The traditional Romany culture of Wallachia Romany is recorded in more detail. First, the work by Horváthová (1964): *Gypsies in Slovakia*, to date, is unbeaten in its complexity of detail. Socio-cultural regulations are described in detail in, Amáro Trájo [Our Life], by Wallachian Roma authors, Stojka and Pivoň (2003). However, this study focuses on the almost forgotten work of Samuel Augustini ab Hortis: *Gypsy in Hungary* (1775–76). In fact, this is the very first ethnographic work dealing with Roma life in the territory of Slovakia. This work contains information about the origins of Roma based on the work of several European period scholars. One motive for writing the Augustini monographs was the radicalization of opinions of a part of the Hungarian public for solving the 'Gypsy' issue. The situation, after more than two hundred and fifty years, may be similar. The aim of this study is to analyze the work of Augustini, to identify parallels between the past and present in the context of cultural change affecting the Roma living in the Podtatranský Region. Theoretical sensitivity and ethics of scientific research were considered in writing this article. The study of the traditional elements of Roma culture cannot be done "at the table" (Kozubík, 2015, p. 8). The history of famous anthropological works that record the study of culture from a distance includes the notable work of Benedict (1946). This present study explores the Roma culture through fieldwork, centered on the environment of Eastern Slovakia settlements. The aim was not to explore in a manner type regarded by Roma as "a 'gadjo' [white man, non-Roma] explores the Romany in the tube" (Kužel, 2004, p. 9). The examination of classes of cultural phenomena in a given environment requires considerable knowledge from social science disciplines. Some time was spent directly in the settlement, shaking hands, eating, and drinking with the residents. Such an approach is thought to bring new dimensions of knowledge (Kozubík 2013; 2015).

Data and Methodology

The study involved ethnographical field research. Ethnography combines various techniques and methods of data collection and evaluation (Brewer, 2000). It can be defined as the study of people in their natural environment using methods that describe their social perception and everyday experiences. It requires the direct and active involvement of the researcher.

¹ Michal Kozubík, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, Slovakia, mkozubik@ukf.sk

² Barbora Odrášková, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, Slovakia, barbora.odraskova@ukf.sk

Samples

Methods of data collection involved observation, individual and group interviews, and collation of artifacts, and historical and current documents and videos.

Study Location

There were several reasons for selecting Popradský region in Podtatranský district. One was the parallel in origins of Augustini ab Hortis Samuel and an author of this article. Both authors were born under the Tatra Mountains; Augustini in Veľká Lomnica (b. 1729) and Kozubík in Poprad (b. 1981), and thus, both can relate to the life of the Roma under the Tatras. Moreover, an important consideration was that Augustini described the culture of Roma in a geographic area familiar to the author.

Analyses and Reporting

The work was analyzed and interpreted using ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) and ‘grounded theory’ (Strauss and Corbin 1997). The Geertz’s method treats the social science data in a way that recognizes cultural context and examines the sense of the observed phenomena. Geertz stressed that explaining social science is not necessarily simple, but rather involves the replacement of complicated images with simpler ones with the impressive clarity often associated with plainer illustrations (Geertz 1973, p. 33). Geertz further stated:

In finished anthropological writing ... this fact that what we call our data are really our own constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to – is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. (1973, p. 9)

This original citation illustrates Geertz’s work most appropriately.

Results and Discussion

Roma Upbringing in 18th Century

The most critical passages of Augustini’s work can be found in the description of education for Roma children: “Their lack of morals and exuberance cannot be attributed to other causes, but the lack of education.” When closely monitoring the text of Gypsy for any changes in Roma education, which extends from birth to adulthood, one realizes that not only Augustini’s physical but also his mental balance is being devastated, degraded, and disgraced (Augustini, 1775). The next part of the text is similarly critical. One of the most important views applicable to this day is his opinion that: “...their marriage and household is then in the same mess they have seen and learned from their parents” (Augustini, 1775, p. 26). He also states that Roma “people are extremely fertile” and from early childhood, they teach their own children to steal. He even writes that Roma mothers defend themselves against attacks and strikes to their small child, who they usually carry wrapped in a sheet. Finally, he notes that there is a small group of families that are “similar to other useful people.”

Roma Upbringing in 21st Century

Being present among Roma families and children is one of the most important focuses of social work with these families. Field social work that involves staying within the natural environment of socially deprived families is essential for determining the family history and for other professional and consulting practices. Where the education of preschool-aged children is severely neglected, it is the duty of social workers to intervene. The most commonly applied and effective tool is the establishment of a special beneficiary. The introduction of such a role is regulated by §23 of Act no. 417 of 2013 on material needs. In the environment of segregated settlements, most frequently the village acquires this position. The Office of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family designates the special beneficiary, especially when the existing provision of benefits in material needs does not fulfill its purpose. In such cases, the financial support intended to cover basic needs for the children is misused for various reasons. In particular, this misuse includes incompetent spending, “everything is spent in three days,” usury, and expenditure on alcohol and other social-pathological phenomena. Where a village has a field social worker, the responsibility for this agenda becomes theirs primarily. Considerable power accumulates in the hands

of these professionals. They have the right to work with the family and divide and use the allowance to satisfy basic needs of the children and the family. The fact that raising children is gradually changing for the majority of the population is evident in the testimony of H.R. (25–30 years old, female):

We had an education of a 'strict hand.' This we could not do what our children can now. Mama just looked at me, and I had to go into the bedroom and had to stay there for half a day. We were hungry, thirsty until she did not come to ask: kids do you want something to eat? But now I do not command my children, but they command me. But it is not only our children but also white; it is about all. We have respect for our parents. I have my own kids, but I do not light a cigarette in front of them. I have respect, you know.

The statement: "We do not command our children, but they command us" was a surprising finding in this study. The Roma themselves realize what it is like for the majority. But they cannot explain the resulting situation and what has changed between the education of their parents and themselves, as realized by a Roma man, P. A. (26 years old):

I think we fail in many cases. The emphasis is given to irrelevant rather than to the essential. You have more important things and less important things. I would say that there is something a little reversed. I noticed that the mistake in education among us, the Romany, is that we do not keep our word, and then the children are rebellious, that I have a problem with my mother, with my father. I, for instance, now that my kid is on the earth, I ignore it. It is screaming, nope! I do not care! But some else yes. And listen, then when the child grows up, it boldly yells on father and mother! It can boldly gain what it wants. So it is no longer the word of a father and mother, but the word of a child. I see it as very bad and distorted, but in many, many families it is like this. Even I was raised like this.

While recording this interview in a modest cottage, there was a mother who was confronted by her son's words. She expressed herself as follows:

Well, you were brought up like this, you were spoiled, but you never told me anything bad. This is already in you! You swore, okay, but you were five, six years old! But as you were 14, 15 years old you were a normal boy. (P.B., 50 years old, female)

The responses have been deliberately published word-by-word, in a slightly abridged version of the interview. Members of both middle and upper social classes, living in segregated parts of the study villages of Kravany and Hranovnica, expressed similar opinions. In what was considered the poorest classes of the settlements, the love of children was observed as immense. This observation was noted in everyday routines, for example, with the care of newborns, the mother would embrace her child lovingly, or the father would caress his son. Verbal responses can often be framed towards what the researchers want to hear. Hence the truth in these could be greatly distorted and they lacked adequate validation. However, it is difficult to fabricate the non-verbal communication, body language, looks, or gestures. Nevertheless, there were also opposite opinions:

Education is different when you compare the settlement, Mlynská street and SNP street (the poorest parts of settlement). They do not have the upbringing of children in the settlement. Children educate themselves; they only bring those children. We are divided into three groups, such as family (i.e., poor, settlement, author's note), medium family and a better, higher family. Sometimes parents respected their children and children their parents. Then the parents cared about the education, attended parents' meetings at school, there was a hall full of sitting parents, and they were interested. (L.H., 45 years old, male)

In all three social layers of the Roma community, the love of children was evident. These Roma children are the reflection of their culture. Few 'white' children are brought up on the street with a key around their neck. The Roma children are raised by the settlement. This contradiction is best described by a Roma woman (H.P., 40 to 45 years old):

We, the Roma people, terribly love our children. We would give them even our last; even the white kids do not have this what Roma children have. Every day with our children is sweet,

even if there is no money, I do not know ... even when she does not cook (mother), but she gives the children what they want, mom will buy it to them, even if she does not cook what she would like to cook. She cooks a full pot of soup, but she will satisfy her children. At least on the 18th, 19th, 20th of the month (date of money allowance for poor people in Slovakia). It does not matter which family, but they give their children also from the last. Last few years, the children do not want to go to school on 18th, 19th, 20th, because they go to pick up allowances with their parents. We can thus say that they cannot live off, they do not have, but they look after the children. They love their children, but it is about the time and education.

Conclusion

Every day spent in the settlement was an experience, and each visit of a new family brought some new knowledge. The atmosphere was unique in all respects. During the interview, people kept coming to the house as children, family members, and others wanted to see a 'gadjo' [white person], who for them was the journalist writing a book about their life and culture. They would mend the television and position the satellite. The children were crying, and the adults were smoking tobacco from a rolled cigarette. In this atmosphere, it was almost magical to talk about the relationship between parents and children. The period of 'enlightened' is gone and so are the views of Augustini ab Hortis Samuel on education. It is not just about the mothers who bear children into a pit, teach them to dance, collect alms, and steal. Roma people, similar to Slovak people and all human beings, love their children and realize that education is important, especially at a young age.

The main differences between centuries is more freedom in family education in the present. It shows mainly in the independent decisions of the children: choice of partner and career. The principal common thing which is the same within centuries is strong familial bond not only between close family members but also between distant relatives.

References

- Augustini ab Hortis, S. (1775, 1776). Von dem heutigen Zustande, sonderbaren Sitten und Lebensart, wie auch von denen übrigen Eigenschaften und Umständen der Zigeuner in Ungarn. (translation Urbancová V 1994). [On the present situation, special manners and way of life, as well as other characteristics and gifts of the Gypsies in Hungary]. Wien: Kaiserlich Königliche allergnädigste privilegierte Anzeigen aus sämtlichen Kaiserl. Königl. Erbländer, 1775, 1776. Num. 20-45 (1775), Num. 1-14 (1776) (German, Slovak).
- Benedict, R. F. (1946). *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. United States: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of the Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Horváthová, E. (1964). *Cigáni na Slovensku*. [Romany in Slovakia]. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Science (Slovak).
- Kozubík, M. (2013). (Ne)vinní a dilino gadžo. [(Un)guilty and dilino gadžo]. Nitra: Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovak, English, German).
- Kozubík, M. (2015). Traditional Romany Culture – Myth or Reality? Reflection of Samuel Augustini ab Hortis Work „Zigeuner in Ungarn“ in Context of Helping Professions. Krakow: Krakowska Akademia.
- Kužel, S. (2004). Výzkum nebo etno-politika? [Research or Ethno-Policy?] In: Jakoubek, M. – Hirt, T.: Romové: kulturologické etudy. [Roma: Cultural Study]. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk (Czech).
- Stojka, P., Pivoň, R. (2003). *Amáro Trájo. Náš život*. [Our Life]. Nitra: InfoRoma (Slovak, Romany).
- Strauss A., Corbin, J. (1998). *Grounded Theory in Practice*. San Jose State University: Sage.