

Blanka Szilasi

“Let Us Raise Your Daughter As We Want!” | The Relationship Between the Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law in the Roma Community of Dány from a Cultural Anthropological Aspect

Introduction

The topic of this paper is the relationship between the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in the Dány Roma community. The research focuses on how the relationship of the mother-in-law and the young daughter-in-law works and what makes it so important in the community. Through this issue, the relations of these women in Dány, why these relations are so important and how this changed in the past few years, are presented.

I first met the topic of Roma marriage when I volunteered at the BAGázs Public Benefit Association. By early 2018, I was volunteering at Dány in a girls club. During these sessions, I realised how strict the rules are that govern the life of these girls. After I gathered more information about marriage traditions, gradually it became clear to me that I want to research this topic.

The Roma community of Dány, being a reserved community, preserves its language, its social structure and traditions. It is important to research a community like this from a cultural anthropological point of view, to gain knowledge of Roma communities in Hungary and to understand the relations between non-Roma and Roma communities in the past and the present. The examination of the traditions of the Roma community of Dány and the constant change of these traditions as a reaction to the interaction within and outside the community and between individuals contributes to the knowledge of the customs and the functioning of the community, which will help the understanding and the acceptance from the non-Roma communities. However, it is important to note that by looking at one particular group at one particular time, it only gives us a snapshot of the traditions of the community. In the Hungarian society of today, an overview of this kind is important, since the two groups often only know each other

superficially, at a stereotypical level, which gives birth to contradictions between the Roma and the non-Roma. However, it is important to highlight that Roma are not a homogeneous group and neither are Non-Roma. There are groups and subgroups within the Hungarian Roma society and all these groups are made out of individuals who form, react and therefore maintain or change the traditions of their close environment and community.

The paper consists of three parts. In the introduction the topic of the research is determined, the most important definitions are described and an overview of the anthropological research literature written about this topic is given. This part also includes the introduction of the research question and the presentation of the method of cultural anthropological research. In the methodological part of the Dány Roma community, my relation with the field and my methods of research and analysis are presented.

In the second part of the paper, the recorded interviews are analysed. The analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part, the relationship of the mother- and daughter-in-law is dealt with. Here, it is written why this relationship is important in Dány and what the expectations are of the community towards the mothers- and daughters-in-law. In the second part of the analysis, the change of the importance of this relationship is shown. The possible reasons for this change are also collected.

In the end, my experiences are summarized and a conclusion – which comes from the analysis – is drawn. Finally, possible future research topics are suggested.

Literary overview

In the following part, necessary concepts are defined and an overview of Roma marriage and the cultural anthropological literature considering the relationship between mother and wife is given.

Cultural anthropology often deals with Roma society and culture. When researching a Roma community, the researcher needs to be aware of three facts about Roma. These facts are noted by Csaba Prónai in *The Anthropology of Gypsy Cultures*.

“1. The Gypsies cannot be linked to any country, that is why we call them “transnational”, that is “belonging to several nations at once.”

“2. The term “Gypsies” does not only include one ethnicity but includes more groups belonging to different cultures. In fact, they are “multiethnic” or “pluriethnic” (several ethnicities different from each other) people.”

“3. The Gypsies always live in at least “two worlds”: on the one hand in their community, on the other hand in the surrounding non-Gypsy world. This is expressed through the “transcultural” term which means the betweenness amidst different cultures” (Prónai 2007:206, translated by the author).

Since Romas are transnational and multiethnic, Roma communities are diverse, and different from each other. Therefore, even the cultural anthropological literature does not deal with the homogeneous culture of this ethnicity. In addition, since Romani people live in two worlds, they adapt to the surrounding majority society. This also shows, as it can be found in the anthropological literature that deals with Romani cultures, that the aim of these works is not the description of Roma society, but always to depict the present circumstances of the given small community.

The following collected publications are connected in some way to the topic of Romani marriage upon the facts Prónai listed (2007:206). These publications are shortly introduced so the reader can get a general picture of the relational systems, rules and norms that surround marriage in a Romani community.

It is important to clarify what the literature states as marriage and Roma marriage. In his book, *Small Places, Large Issues*, Thomas Eriksen (2006) writes the following about marriage: “one of the most important aspects of the study of marriage practice and the relevant rules is related to politics, alliances, and stability. As every group is exogamous at some level, marriage necessarily brings alliances outside the nuclear family, the branch or the clan” (p. 149, translated by the author). So, marriage is an alliance that not only binds two people, but also their families. This is also supported by Patrick Williams (2005), in his book titled *Gypsy Marriage*, when he states that the Roma society is built on political relations. If we say that only the modalities governing marriages determine, on the one hand, the place where the individuals stand relative to each other in the Rom [Roma] society, and on the other hand the division of them into different groups; this means, that their situations and their division are based on political factors (Williams 2005:338).

According to cultural anthropological literature, it is true for several different Roma communities that Roma girls are placed in line for marriage at a relatively young

age. "At around 14 years of age, the girls who are the more developed, well-spoken and who are close to the *romnji* [Roma woman] ideal get married. (...) The girl who gets married at around 16-17 years of age does not count as old either", writes Boglárka Bakó (2006:188, translated by the author), who examined a southern Transylvanian Roma community in 2003. By developed one should think both about physical development, such as having a period and mental development such as being able and interested to participate in adult conversations. According to Michael Stewart (1993:41) in his book titled *Brothers in Song*, Roma marriages are often not registered and are not considered official by the majority of society. He writes: They were married long before in "Gypsy style" (Romani) before they went to the registrar to get the necessary papers for a bank loan for "newlywed" couples (Stewart 1993:41).

Marriage in Roma communities brings serious consequences, even if it is not legal on paper. As it is found in cultural anthropological research of different Roma communities, the young wife gains a new role and task through marriage. The change of status means that she will play a bigger part in social life from then on (Williams 2005:344). In most of the examined communities, the role and the status of the young husband also changes when he gets married: they will have other rights and obligations. He will become a Rom [adult Roma man], equal to any other Rom (Williams 2005:351). This statement is also verified by Cecília Kovai (2006:200), when she writes in her research about the Gömbalja Roma community that, "We can direct our questions toward the relationship in which man and woman find themselves in one another while keeping other boundaries in motion like kinship, change of positions of power, the ownership of the body. This relationship in my field is called "marriage". In this relationship, the boundaries are not between man and woman but are made through their relations" (Kovai 2006:200, translated by the author). As Kovai also writes, through marriage the life of the young married couple is framed with new rules, especially the life of the wife. To understand the system of the family's roles, we need to clarify what position women have in society. As Eriksen (2006:167) writes, women have more work than men, they cannot use public places as freely as men and "their responsibility is to lead the household. Whereas men deal with the external relations of the family" (ibid, translated by the author). According to Stewart (1993: 208) the inequality between the Roma women and men of Harangos already shows up from childhood. The subordination of Roma women to men is not only limited to the moments of social life. He argues that the girl's social

status – unlike the boy's – from birth makes it impossible for her to be a complete and unquestionable member of Roma social life. The inferiority of women also shows in further education and work. “The most threatening danger for a young Roma woman is if she stays without supervision and gets under external, bad influence”, states Bakó (2006:189, translated by the author) when writing about urban studying and work. According to Bakó (ibid), Roma girls do not study further in high school, as their non-Roma companions, and go to work only if it is necessary to support the family. However, this might have been the case at the time and in the particular place where Bakó did her research, it is clearly not the case everywhere. There is little data about Roma youth and their dropout rate in Hungary, since ethnicity is a sensitive data. Moreover, because it is compulsory for everybody to attend school until the age of 16, it is very much likely that children at least start secondary education. Furthermore, in Dány, there is a visible tendency that Roma girls attend and finish secondary education.

Men and women have different obligations in marriage. As I have written, the men “deal with the external relations of the household”, while the women “are responsible for the housework” (Eriksen 2006:167, translated by the author). In several communities, Roma men will become full members of the society of adult men when they marry. It takes time for the young husband to become independent from his father, but after his marriage, he does have more rights than before. He takes equal responsibility in work and social life (Williams 2005:351-352). Contrary to this, the tasks of the women take place in private spaces. As Stewart (1993) also writes about the women of Harangos “almost all the housework, from childcare, through cooking and washing to the annual painting of the house are the tasks of the women” (p. 50, translated by the author). This does not mean that women do not have power in Roma society. It is true that “in the Roma world the romnji are “subordinated” to the male world” (Bakó 2006:192, translated by the author), though women are responsible for managing some of the important areas of life. According to Bakó (2006) the power of women “cover areas of women’s life like childbirth, parenting, the managing and “maintaining” the household. The latter is an important task for women because this includes the budgeting of the salary, cost management and the repayment of debts in order of importance” (p. 192, translated by the author). Lydaki (2006) sees the influence of women differently in private spaces. In the study entitled *Gypsy Women*, she states that the roles of women secure the survival of norms in the greek Roma society. As she says, “the power of women in the family and

individual spheres, and the responsibilities in parenting secure the preservation of values and gives them the possibility to pass on the traditional behavioural patterns” (p. 211, translated by the author).

The residence of the newlyweds is also an important element of the marriages. In the ideal case, the married couple moves to the boy’s family. Williams (2005) describes marriage which is considered ideal in the following way: It is a part of the Rom Gypsies ideology (...), that the men enjoy precedence over women. So (...) the young couple moves to the parents of the boy (p. 335). In the moment of the marriage, or even more, with the couple moving in together, starts the relationship of the bride and the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law is usually the oldest woman in the household. She is responsible for the household, the children, the order of home life and, as it has already been mentioned, the passing on and preservation of the values. Several cultural anthropologists (Williams 2005; Stewart 1993; Bakó 2008) state that it is the task of the mother-in-law to teach the new wife the customs of the family. Although the mother of the young woman has prepared her for the bori [bride] role, the mother-in-law always finds something objectionable, so to say, she takes control over the bride (...), to make her a wife, daughter-in-law, housewife as she should be. – writes Williams (Williams 2005:346). The mother-in-law does not spare the wife, often she gives her the most and hardest jobs. “If the girl turns into a bride, the work compulsion is even stronger in the house of the parents-in-law than at home. Sometimes she needs to wake up before the others and finish her work when her in-laws are already watching television (...) If she goes to the city with her mother-in-law, she carries the heaviest packages and she walks behind her mother-in-law, in the same way, a romnyi follows her husband” (Stewart 1993:50, translated by the author). It is not rare that the wife has had enough mistreatment from her mother-in-law or husband that she moves back to her parents’ home. These travels usually do not take longer than one or two weeks, in most cases the wife, after a longer or shorter break returns to the household of the mother-in-law (Williams 2005:346-347).

The life of the bride at her mother-in-law’s is not just stressful due to the physical work. The family of the husband has a lot of expectations towards the young woman in how to behave respectfully. Bakó (2008) shows the example of the bad wife through a girl called Zsuzska. “Zsuzska (...) did not “listen” to the elderly lady, argued with her, protected her independence, did not let her have a say in her private life. All this led to anger in their relationship and the old lady did everything she could to expel the young woman from the

common household.” (p. 136-137, translated by the author) As we can read, the bride needs to be obedient, she cannot argue with her mother-in-law.

The young woman does not have an easy job: arriving in a new family – at least she feels as if – she needs to live in a reversed world: she has to get used people speaking contemptuously about those who she admires (her own family) and praise those whom at home they despised (the others, the family of her husband amongst them), she needs to consider her own family as strangers, but at the same time she is looked upon as a stranger by her new parents (Williams 2005:348).

The topic of Roma marriage is broad, the customs vary from community to community. It is important to bear in mind that the above described publications do not describe Roma community as a homogeneous group, but draw a picture on the particular communities. By doing so they are able to describe what are some similarities and differences in Roma communities and therefore look critically on the generalization and stereotypical labeling of Roma in Hungary. This paper also concentrates on one particular community, the Roma of Dány. By examining the relation between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws of Roma of Dány, I try to explain and provide a deep insight of the statuses in Vlach Roma families in Hungary and how these statuses change by time. In the following part of my paper, the research question is outlined.

Research question

The research question concerns the Dány Roma community, and the relationship between the wife and the mother-in-law, I examine several aspects of their relation. I have four main research questions. What are the roles of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws in the families of Dány Vlach Roma community? What are the important elements of this relationship? How did the relationship of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws change? And how does Non-Roma majority influence this relationship and customs of the Dány Roma community?

I try to understand the power dynamics between women in families after weddings and how these power dynamics are translated into cooperation or conflict between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws. Moreover, I look at the change in power dynamics in the last decades. This research looks for the answer to the importance of the relationship between the mother-in-law and the bride in the Dány Roma community today. If we examine the relationship of mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws we are able

to understand how Vlach Roma communities change in Hungary. Since the mother-in-law passes her knowledge about Vlach Roma life to her daughter-in-law, one can capture the continuity of customs in this relationship. As it has been written, at the beginning of the common life of the married couple, the mother of the husband has a significant say in their life and especially in the life of the young woman. The mother-in-law teaches the bride how to be a “*good wife*” and “tries to get the bride used to the important house rules in a short period of time” (Bakó 2008:138, translated by the author). The research also tries to find the answer to what extent the ideas of the bride and the mother-in-law clash about house rules and the norms of the community. In Hungary there is historical tendency, that only Roma who assimilate and give up their Roma identity are able to become accepted by the non-Roma majority (Szelényi, Ladányi 2006:19-20). I argue, that the brides in the Dány Roma community tend to leave certain habits to be able to be accepted as a member of Hungarian society by Non-Roma.

In the next subdivision of the work the methodology with which of the research is presented. The segregation in Dány is presented, my relationship with the research field is outlined, and the surroundings of the collection and recording of my interviews and the method of their analysis is written about.

Method

Firstly, it is important to present the Roma community in Dány. The Roma people in Dány consider themselves Olah Romas, who speak a dialect of the Romani between themselves. The community lives isolated from non-Romas. This can also be seen through their place of residence in one spot, at the edge of the village and that they did not completely take up the Hungarian language. Due to its closeness, the community today has the possibility to live according to their Roma traditions. The families living here are large, usually with three children and the different generations of the family live in one household. The women of this area wear skirts till this day, in accordance with the purity expectations.

From several points of view, the territory shows a picture of poverty. Several houses use the electricity illegally and are half ready or a part of them is in ruin. Some of the people living here have chronic illnesses, are in a bad health situation. Many of the inhabitants have low education and there are a lot of them who only finished elementary school or only a few grades.

Overall, the Roma settlement of Dány cannot be identified with poverty. There are a lot of nicely whitewashed houses, decorated with bright colours, we can even find storey houses in the settlement. There are stone lions or horse statues on one or two fences and expensive cars parked before them. Some teenagers go around with new smartphones and earphones. In addition, a lot of children are dressed up in new, pretty clothes. The teenage girls, on some occasions, boasted to me about their gold jewellery.

It stands out from the description above that there are multiple differences between the different parts of the settlement. Nonetheless, Romani language and the hostile attitude from non-Romas created unity in the area. Therefore, traditions and adherence to ethical rules are important for the community. In the following, it is presented how I got into a weekly relation with the inhabitants of the Dány Roma settlement, and how I decided to research this community for my paper.

I first visited Dány in October of 2017 and the past few years I formed several personal connections with the girls and women of this area. The fact that the women there already knew me benefitted me in my research. My interviewees were very welcoming, either because they knew me or because the family had a good opinion of the Association where I worked as a volunteer. Though my connection to the Association did cause difficulty during my research. Since most of my interviewees knew me before, it is possible that they were not completely honest with me. They knew that due to my volunteering I will stay near them and this could have affected them in what they said to me. In addition, I, as a non-Roma volunteer, represent the opposite pole for them. As Kata Horváth (2004) writes “the Roma world in the Romas mind can only be built up as the non-Roma world’s counterpart. This approach distinguishes the different Roma groups from the non-Romas” (p. 42, translated by the author). So, the inhabitants of the community behave differently before me, a non-Roma researcher, than amongst themselves. This issue is also mentioned by Péter Nagy (2007) when he talks about the consciousness of the Bag Romas. The Romas of Dány, similarly to the ones of Bag “are always aware of what they say and to whom they say it. Constant alertness, attention, guard above what they say to whom because they have to say different things to the initiated and the outsiders” (Nagy 2007:202, translated by the author). With the knowledge of this, I started my research.

During the research semi-structured interviews were recorded with the brides and women of the settlement. The interviewees were chosen in two different ways. On the one

hand, targeted sampling was asked, that is I contacted mothers-in-law and brides relying on my intuitions of extensive and prior experiences, whom I thought can give me the deepest possible insight into the relations of the Dány women (Babbie 1996:313). On the other hand, the snowball method was used, each of the interviewees was asked if they could recommend another woman from the area who would willingly talk about the topic.

During the research, it was planned that I talk to 15 women from the Dány settlement. From this, only 13 were recorded. The arrival of the coronavirus to Hungary is the cause of the missing two interviews. It was planned to record the last three interviews one day after the closure of most institutions in Hungary. By this time the association I volunteered with, notified me that we will suspend our work at the settlement for some time. That day one interview was recorded, but the other two interviewees were not at home at the time.

The finished interviews were analysed. In every interview, the important parts were highlighted, and a code was assigned to them. After this, the codes were assigned into code groups to make them more transparent. The interviews are anonymized. When choosing the new names Roma nicknames were used that are common in the settlement. Close attention is being paid not to use any name that my interviewees are called.

Analysis

The analysis will be about the relationship between the wife and the mother-in-law. Those behavioural expectations which both the mother-in-law and the bride needs to follow to maintain a good relationship are presented. In this subchapter, it is also explained why the good relationship of the mother- and daughter-in-law is important. Finally, it is also presented that the importance of this relationship began to decline in the past years and the possible causes for this tendency are explored.

The significance of the mother-in-Law and bride relation in the Dány Roma community

The research of the relationship of the mother-in-law and the bride is in several ways subjective since every relationship is unique. Despite the mosaics of the individual stories, the positions of power and the main rules become outlined. This is also why one needs to deal with these stories with adequate sensitivity, as Péter Nagy also states, “there exists not only one truth, but countless” (Nagy 2007:213, translated by the author).

As in other research, it also happened to me that during my interview my conversation partner changed her opinion about the given subject. According to Cecília Kovai (2006), the “Gypsy speech” is situation-dependent (p. 196, translated by the author), that is, it is not indifferent to what role the narrator plays in the story. Sometimes it occurred that I could not talk with my interviewees in private. In these situations, I knew that I would hear the truth that is convenient for all those present. As Horváth (2006) says, “in the moment of utterance everything is true, and you have to reply to it accordingly” (p. 243, translated by the author). This is why the words of the women of the settlement cannot be questioned by me, even in a case where I receive other information from different sides.

The mother-in-law, as the guardian of values

As Eriksen states in his work entitled *Small Places, Large Issues*, advanced age is usually linked with extensive experience, wisdom and common sense (Eriksen 2006:175). This is also the case in the Roma community I examined. According to Bakó (2008), the Roma woman has different power statuses at different points of her lifeway. “Zsuzska is a 36-year-old Roma woman. Maybe there are a lot of years in front of her, and if she understands, she can learn a lot of things related to the coming life stages of being a Roma woman: she can get to know teenage motherhood, the problems of motherhood in the case of a son getting married, can become a “nannyó”, the oldest female member of the family who decides everything, and later a “néne” tired from work and on the periphery.” (Bakó 2008:149, translated by the author) In the Roma community in Dány the respect of the “bábe” [mother-in-law, grandmother] is similar to the respect of the “nannyó”. The bride needs to respect her mother-in-law, even if only for raising her partner and that she raised him to be honourable. This thought was explained by Rubina when she was asked if it is important that the bride and the mother-in-law have a good relationship.

“Just because the bride is with the son of the mother-in-law, that is why she should show that respect, so...They do not have to love each other, but at least they should respect each other, and give that to one another...That is the bride should give respect, because the mother-in-law is older and raised a boy for her, with who (...) she will live her life. (...) She gets as much respect, because she raised a man, with whom she will live her entire life and is honest.” (26-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

In Dány, mothers and mothers-in-law are the ones responsible for the passing on of the community's moral rules. They learn what the expected behaviour is, over years from their mothers, then from their mothers-in-law. It is the task of the mother-in-law to teach the bride the value system, world view and the right behavioural patterns. Mónika, whose parents keep animals, adapted easily to her husband's family who were farmers, because the two family's work and customs were similar.

"What kind is a good mother-in-law? (...) Primarily what a good mother-in-law is depends on what the family does for work. Because if they are not familiar with each other, then she basically will have difficulty. If she gets in there, then it will be harder for her to pick up these habits and it will be harder for her to know her job and how and what to do." (25-year-old woman, housewife, farmer, translated by the author)

Mára told me how grateful she is to her daughter-in-law because she followed the customs of her house. If the bride respects her mother-in-law, she follows her traditions. These gestures make the basis of a good relationship.

"You know honesty means very much. Very-very. I respect Kiara a lot because she was a little girl, a virgin. If someone is a virgin, they appreciate it very much. My boy was tried by somebody else, well she was not. I will raise her for myself. Well, no? She will learn that habits are different in every house. I am grateful, she helps in everything." (45-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author)

The older women have greater power exactly because they are a less "threatening" sexual force (Eriksen 2006:175, translated by the author), their husbands are not threatened by the danger of infidelity. In a lot of cases the women of grandmother age, after leaving their husband or after his death, do not look for a new partner for themselves. Borcsa, who does not live with her husband anymore, explained this to me as well.

"I am a grandmother since I have grandchildren. This is why and not that, that I am saying this now, like this. Because I could say at any time, that I grab my child, I do not have little ones, nor big ones, only grandchildren. I get myself a partner and get with him, but no. If they would say that he is some sort of a billionaire, millionaire, no. It is not even in my mind, because it was enough for me." (48-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

There are other "bábe"-s as well, who do not keep the customs. The mother-in-law of Virág quickly lost her husband. The woman, after the death of her husband, got

acquainted with several men. This was not looked upon well especially from her sons, who often acted roughly with her.

“They had sex. Ran out the father [the father of the daughter of Borcsa, that is the husband of Borcsa], and shouted, “Oh, what did I see, oh what did I see!” And I tell you, that he was 13 years old and lived in one room with them and poor thing climbed off the bed and crawled and climbed on all fours and knocked at the Combos door, to let him in. And the Combos instantly knew what was happening. And then Gyuri, the man of Csilla and my brother-in-law, Tóni grabbed her by the hair and the old lady was beaten, they wanted to hit her head with an axe. Because she became a wench.” (44-year-old woman, public worker, translated by the author)

If a woman behaves “*unrespectably*”, her sons try to restrain their mother. Stewart reports a similar case when an old lady moved in with her daughter due to her husband’s unbearable behaviour. The action of the woman could be judged freely by her sons. They complained about the shame that their mother’s act created in the family. One day her sons decided to take their mother home, but they just took her in front of the horse carriage and restrained her there (Stewart 1993:209). Similarly, to the story written by Stewart (*ibid*), the sons-in-law of Borcsa judged their mother’s “free” lifestyle.

As one can see, the elderly also must keep the rules regarding women in the Dány community. By living according to the value system of the community, they not only avoid conflict with the men, but also show an example to their girls and daughters-in-law. It is important for the wife to take over the habits of her mother-in-law to maintain and to pass on the mentality, amongst other things. With the mother-in-law successfully passing on the correct behavioural norms, it also proves to the community that she and her family follow the community’s ethical rules.

The daughter-in-law, as the transmitter of values

Prónai states in *The Anthropology of Gypsy Cultures* that the “binary oppositions”, two-pole opposites can be found in every community (Prónai 2007:208-209, translated by the author). With the help of words, the people classify the things in the world, transforming and shaping reality this way (Prónai 2007:208-209). During the research, I became aware that the statement according to which the actions of the members of the community point in two directions, they are either “good’ or “bad”. My conversation partners, as well other

people from the settlement, often have extreme judgments. Someone is either “good” or “bad”. The bride is either the biggest confidant of the mother-in-law or the bitterness of her life. In the following analysis, it is written about what those expectations are, which the bride needs to follow in the interest of not being called “bad” by the community.

For the bride to live according to the value system of her husband’s family she needs to take up their identity. She needs to consider her mother-in-law as her mother. During the interviews, it was mentioned several times that for a good mother- and daughter-in-law relationship it is essential that the two women think of each other as each other’s biggest confidant, almost as a mother and daughter.

“My mother-in-law is like my mother. We discuss this is good for me now this hurts, oh, I am not in the mood for washing the dishes. Alright, then we will wash them later. She never even said anything about that I am in the attic until 10 am, like “how long does that woman sleep”, nothing, no.” (22-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

It is clear from Kiara’s narrative that she has a good relationship with her mother-in-law. Due to the fact that she considers her mother-in-law her mother and that is why she respects and accepts her opinion and rules. The mutual respect also manifests through the fact that her mother-in-law, Mára, does not determine what she has to do and when. Mónica was asked, who is that person with whom she can share her feelings, from whom she can ask for help if something hurts her. Mónica shares one kitchen with her mother-in-law, both of them work at home, run the household and take care of the animals. Due to the close relationship, a good relationship is essential. As one can see below, the key to a good relationship is mutual trust and accepting one another as family members. Both sides need to work for a relationship like this. Since mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws often live together, the physical proximity can easily turn into conflict if members in the family does not have a good relationship with one another.

“We always say with my mother-in-law that a very great girlfriend is not good, because it never brings anything good, usually it is bad. I can only say of this that my relationship with my mother-in-law is very good and if there is anything like that, I can sit down with her and can talk about it. This is how we are together like this.” (25-year-old woman, housewife, farmer, translated by the author)

As we can see from the point of Mónica, her closest friend is her mother-in-law. By being closer to her than her girlfriends there is mutual trust between them, which strengthens their relationship.

To understand the changes described later, it is important to know what kind of expectations the daughter-in-law has to meet; what kind of tasks she has. In the book, *The Gypsy Women*, Okely writes that the Roma women have to do a lot of housework. The more children the wife brings into the world the more appreciated she is in society. Food acquisition, the cooking, and the cleaning is also her obligation (Okely, 1996). It is no different from the Roma of Dány. The daughter-in-law needs to be “good”. The bride who does not do the tasks mentioned above is considered “smelly” (Stewart, 1993). Yet in the following analysis those expectations are presented which determine the mother- and daughter-in-law’s relationship, above the behavioural regulations mentioned earlier. These are behavioural rules which supplement the expectations of the household and parenting. They do not answer what the bride has to do but how she needs to do them.

The first and maybe one of the most important expectations towards the wife is that she adjusts to the customs of her mother-in-law. The “good daughter-in-law” cooks, washes, cleans and raises the children, but is not indifferent to how she does these. The Dány bride has to listen to her mother-in-law even if she does not agree with her. The story of Léna who got into her husband’s family at a young age is an example of this. As long as she did not give birth to her own children, she took care of her mother-in-law’s children, while she also tried to meet the family’s expectations.

“But my relationship with my mother-in-law, how should I say it... I listened to what she said to me, I did not answer back, although she looked down on me in my eyes and I did not do anything wrong. Because our neighbour was a Hungarian who said, pay attention, my daughter. Said, well my daughter, another bride would not have, she would not have even tolerated one minute, not even that much, but you, next to seven children and 14 years old. And I listened to my mother-in-law because she was older obviously, I almost could have been her daughter obviously, at 14 years old. For surely, she only wants good for me and I listened to my mother-in-law, to what she said to me and although it was bad for me, even then. I did not care for it and that’s that. And I talked the same way as they said so that this would be like this, that would be like that” (52-year-old woman, unemployed, translated by the author).

The bride not only has to listen to her mother-in-law and take up her customs but also needs to take care of the older lady. In an ideal situation, the daughter- and mother-

in-law divide the work between themselves and help each other. I asked Mucus why it is important for the bride and the mother-in-law to get on with each other.

“If she can help then they should help each other. (...) Well, because, if one can not go to school, then there is help. [So, they need to...]Yes, yes they should join” (46-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author).

The bride however needs to take care of her mother-in-law, even if she has a bad relationship. Virág lives in one place with her mother-in-law, however, their relationship is so bad that they have not spoken in years. Nevertheless, the woman, when her mother-in-law needed to be cared for, completed her obligation without question.

“I said that I will be separate. You cook for yourself, I cook for my family, and that’s the end. And she had an accident. (...) On the stairs, her leg shattered. (...) And imagine I cared for her for six months. She recovered and I was the bad one.” (44-year-old, public worker, translated by the author)

If the bride is unwilling to adapt to her husband’s family the community strongly criticizes her. The mother-in-law complains everywhere about the shame that her son brought a *“bad bride”* into the family. If the bride goes out a lot, they immediately suspect infidelity. Suspicion also occurs if the bride deals too much with her appearance. Mára is a mother, mother-in-law and grandmother in one. Earlier she worked with young Roma girls from Dány, who she thought beautified themselves too much. The lady had a clear opinion that these girls were not loyal to their husbands.

“I do not like those nails, eyelashes, plenty of money. Well no? Rather they should buy something for the children, what they need. Why does she decorate herself? She is good like this for her son. No? I worked with this bride and she said, oh, I have an appointment for eyelashes, I will get hair put up for a hundred thousand. But who does she do it for? I really upset myself. „My husband.” But I say, not for your husband, you make yourself for someone else” (45-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author).

It is even a greater shame if it turns out that the bride cheated on her husband. Léna’s son and wife have a stormy relationship. The couple lived at Léna’s for ten years and during this time several quarrels occurred. The wife, Rubi, cheated on her husband and since then she moved back with her parents. After it came to light that Rubi cheated on her husband, the girl did not let from her independent lifestyle, which brought shame to Léna’s family.

“And she deliberately, she says, I will go there deliberately and then we said to her, you have the eye to go there?! She said, why not? And then she is not irritating? Well, we also said, we talked across from her, she sat there, we sat here, what is it for, what you are doing? Are you doing it deliberately? Do you deliberately shame us? Because this is shameful for us if she is not ashamed of herself because the people talk about us. “Oh, his wife did this and that”, but who cares about them? She is that kind of a woman, that’s that. That’s that, that’s that.” (52-year-old woman, unemployed, translated by the author)

As we can see from Léna’s story that the fidelity of the bride is not only important because of emotions. The actions of the bride change the opinion of the family. It is a great shame for the mother-in-law if she cannot watch out for her daughter-in-law.

As the analysis above shows, the bride needs to do everything she can to adapt, if she does not want to clash with her mother-in-law. The bride has to learn the cooking, washing, cleaning methods used in her husband’s family, she needs to listen to her mother-in-law and help her. They expect the bride to be direct, become friends with her mother-in-law and her husband’s family, but her biggest confidant should be her mother-in-law. In addition, she has to be “*nice*” and “*clean*”, but she cannot show the appearance that she would want to please other men.

Though, based on these things my interviewees said, some kind of changes can be discovered in this strict set of rules. For the brides of today, it is less important what the community thinks of them, the good relationship with their mothers-in-law is less decisive. In the last part of the analysis, it is presented what kind of changes I found in the mentality of the young brides compared to the older generations. In addition, the possible causes of this change are also collected.

Changes in the significance of the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship

During my visits to the settlement and my conversations, I became aware that the Roma girls often contrast the old customs with emerging ones. I often heard the terms “*these wives today*”, “*the elderly think otherwise*”, “*it is not like this today*” and other expressions. It is difficult to determine how a community’s norm system changes because they are always evolving. In the next rows, these changes are presented.

The first analysed change, which was mentioned by several women from Dány, is the loss of power of the mothers-in-law above their daughters-in-law. My conversation

partners said that the brides today do not listen to their mothers-in-law and they do not do the tasks entrusted to them.

“Well as one takes it I think. Well, most of the brides get on with their mothers-in-law, the most do not. The most I think since the world has also developed like this at the Romas. Since they like to come, go, party, like this and that, night programmes and everything. And you know most of the mothers-in-law still live in the past, (...) who still cook, wash, clean, and so on. And you know a lot (...) do not live like that anymore and do not think of it like that. Life today is not like you need to wash, to cook. And I think (...) because of these things they do not get on. Yes, there already is a shift. Now I say so, now there is no such thing, that the girls wear long skirts, of course, many do not like that either. (...) Several do not get on, because it could be that the wife sleeps until ten, eleven and like they are awake from seven. Maybe because of this as well.” (26-year-old woman, active worker, translated by the author)

As it shows from Rubina’s narrative, for the wives today, other values are more important than the older generations. One of the causes for this change is that the young brides take up certain elements from the non-Roma community when in contact with them (Prónai 2007:207-208). What Rubina calls development, that is the acceptance and reusing of non-Roma elements (Prónai 2007:207).

That the young of Dány respect the former norms, behavioural rules and traditions less is due to the fact that more and more of them are on some sort of social media portal. In the Dány community, the parents and the husbands often limit the use of social media for the girls, because they are afraid that the girl would find herself a partner there.

“[Szamanta:] Yes, you know it is just weird for us, that we did not grow up like this, we did not do anything like this, I already, from the age of 8-9, for me it was like I cleaned, so I would do something. Because my mother taught me. (...)
[Cserhaj:] Now is not like our time was. [Szamanta:] (...) I did not have a telephone. Or earlier the telephones were not like this. [Cserhaj:] Facebook was not so popular. Now the Romas also do things on Facebook, like the Hungarians.
[Szamanta:] As an example they write to other boys, to look for somebody else for themselves. Instead of their husbands. You understand. [Cserhaj:] She means, that for you it is natural that you have more boys in your life. Like more partners. Let us say you break up with him, comes the other. And with us, this was not like

that. Now the custom is that they cheat on their husbands and have more boyfriends. Like, through Facebook” (26-year-old woman, housewife; 28-year-old woman, housewife, translated by the author).

With the girls having Facebook, the community not only risks that the brides cheat on their husbands or that they escape. As it shows from Szamanta’s and Cserhaj’s conversation, social media also became the transmitter of a non-Roma value system.

Roma live on the edge of Hungarian society (Stewart 1993:127) and the Roma know that the non-Roma look down on them, that they find it difficult to bear the presence of the Romas – writes Stewart in the *Brothers in Song* (Stewart 1993:127). The feeling in the Romas, which is created by the non-Roma community, which has power over them and is hostile against them, is called “siege mentality” (Stewart 1993:130). The reaction of the older generation in the Dány community to the “siege mentality” rather fits Stewart’s experience, which is that “one of the characteristics of resistance is the homogenization of the activities” (Stewart 1993:130). Dóra Pálos also reports the “siege mentality” in her research “*Gypsies*”, “*New Hungarians*” or “*Roma*”? Pálos studied the differences between the generations and came to the conclusion that the younger generation is more willing to adapt to the majority society (Pálos 2004:346). A similar process also started in Romas of Dány. The young generation, not only in personal interactions but also in the online sphere experience the feeling of “siege mentality”. This is the reason why, while the seniors choose the strategy of homogenization, the younger generation, due to the greater pressure, tries to assimilate. This is why it is possible that they also take up customs from the majority society, like dating, which is not usual in the Roma community of Dány.

The power loss of the mothers-in-law also comes from the fact that the respect of the elderly is declining in the community. As it also shows from the narrative of Rubina, Cserhaj and Szamanta, the worldview of the older and the younger women greatly differ from each other. Thanks to this, the position of the elderly is starting to change in the Dány community. “Traditionally, in Roma society the old people have a key role, they think that due to their age they have the most knowledge, so their figure is identified with the wise” (Pálos 2004:344, translated by the author). This analysis, so far, also points this way, which showed, that the bride needs to respect and listen to her mother-in-law. Today, however, this authority is disappearing. The mothers-in-law learned other rules from their mothers-in-law than to which the daughters-in-law of today identify with.

In the last subchapter of the analysis, the changes in the Dány Roma mother- and daughter-in-law relationships and the reasons for these shifts were explored. The research question is answered in the next chapter.

Summary

Conclusion

In this research, the Dány Roma community was examined. To this day, the majority of the community lives according to Roma traditions and thus the relationship of the daughter- and mother-in-law has an important role. Since the two women live together for years or decades, every little conflict has significance. The mother-in-law appears as the guardian of values in the community. She lives according to what was taught to her by her mother-in-law, she does the same tasks and represents the same mentality. It is her task to teach and pass on the value system of the family and the community. In Dány they think that the daughter-in-law will be the one who will carry on the traditions; the value system of the family. The community expects the daughter-in-law to listen to her mother-in-law, take up her customs, learn to manage the household and the norms of raising children. The wife needs to take up the identity of the family and the community so she can pass those on later to her daughter-in-law.

This perception is changing. The relationship of the daughters- and mothers-in-law are different than before. It is noticeable in Dány that some of the brides do not behave in an expected manner. They do not obey their mothers-in-law and they do not take up their habits. Contrary to this, new practices appear in their life management, which somewhere corresponds with the non-Roma norms. For example, waking up late, continuing nightlife, the usage of social media or dating. This change can have more reasons. On the one hand, the young Roma women of Dány are more severely affected by the feeling of “siege mentality” by being present on social media. The young generation, instead of isolating themselves, tries to assimilate into the majority society, takes up their customs, which are alien from the Dány community. Along with this, affected by a modern, rapidly changing and globalising world the young cannot identify with the generation of their mothers-in-law, thus the latter lose their authority and power over their daughters-in-law.

This observation suggests that the Dány Roma community is changing. Romas in Dány keep the traditions, pay attention to and follow the rules. Their norm system is still

very strong. If someone does not follow the rules, the community condemns and exiles them. However, the number of violations is growing, which becomes more accepted, thus the value system of the community changes. The wives of today respect the values of their parent's age group less. They work to get those life management norms accepted in the community that they have already adopted.

The further possibilities of research in the topic

It is important to highlight that the practices and relationships written in this paper are more nuanced than what I had a possibility to research in the past months. The decrease of the significance of the daughter- and mother-in-law relationship has a lot of other possible reasons. Due to the limits of the research, all the possible solutions cannot be explored. Nevertheless, this paper can be a good base for further research. As it can be seen from the analysis above, lots of kinds of interpretations can be used when examining the relations of the Dány Roma community. So the topic of the paper is suitable for further, deeper research. It would be especially worth researching this topic with the participant observation method, in the interest of gaining a more nuanced picture of the practices and tendencies of what this paper could show.

The Dány Roma community is a special and exciting research area. The research of the evolution of the fate of the women of the settlement and their relation to the non-Roma society and the internet is an exciting research possibility. It could be an important research topic, how the change of the prohibition of the community's media usage in 2020 changes, due to the appearance of distance learning and more comprehensively how the use of social media further transforms the mentality of the Dány women and the value system of the whole community.

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