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CASE STUDY

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## Abstract

*The case study presented in the article introduces an intense debate within the social science community in Hungary that arose due to a research report analysing the living conditions of Roma communities in segregated settlements. Firstly, the prevailing norms of the community which were violated by a young researcher are described. Then the article provides an overview of the research report that generated intense criticism against the author and outlines critics representing the “guards” and a defence of “separatist” researchers. Finally, it elaborates on the consequences of the debate and analyses why the study became the focal point of the intense criticism while introducing some potential explanations from the social psychology and sociology of scientific knowledge. All in all, the article does not intend to take a side in the argument only to give a constructivist analysis about the dispute.*

## Keywords

*scientific community, norms, debate, Roma*

## 1 Introduction

In a scientific community, there are always innovators, revolutionists and separatists who question established theories, introduce new techniques and apply new languages or approaches to previously examined and well-documented scientific problems. However, scholars calling into question or attempting to rephrase existing theories and norms or, in the words of Thomas Kuhn, paradigms of a scientific community, often find themselves under attack by the official guards of normal science (Kuhn, 1996). These guards usually question the competency, knowledge and principles of the innovators. The case study presented in this article intends to demonstrate such an antagonism through an analysis of an intense debate.

Firstly, this paper will outline the prevailing norms of the social science community in Hungary that were violated by a young researcher, Ágnes Solt. Then it will provide an overview of the research report that led to an intense debate and introduce critics representing the “guards” and a defence of “separatist” researchers. Finally, it will elaborate on the consequences of the debate.

In order to understand the participants’ personal attitudes, motivations and interests, the author chose to conduct empirical fieldwork. He conducted seven semi-structured interviews between 2010 and 2012, participated in a roundtable discussion organised by the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, initiated personal discussions, organised a radio talk show program with participants involved in the debate, and used electronic sources, e-mails and published and non-published materials as well.

## 2 The norms of a scientific community

Before going into the details of the debate, it is essential to present the social science community itself. In this section the “elders” of the social sciences in Hungary, whose research

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focus on the Roma minority<sup>1</sup> is introduced, and the prevailing norms of the field are outlined. It is indispensable to understand the background first as it provides insight into the participants' personal attitudes, motivations and arguments and, therefore, elucidates the intensity of the debate.

Csaba Dupcsik identified the streams of social sciences in Hungary with their ideal types (Weber, 1968, p. 6) concerning the Roma. The main representative of the critical theory, was István Kemény, who led an exploratory research program concerning the situation of the Roma in 1971. Kemény and his colleagues – mainly, Gábor Havas, Zsolt Csalog, Otilia Solt, Gabriella Lengyel, János Ladányi and Júlia Szalai – criticised the majority society for creating a disadvantaged status for the Roma. They described the relationship between the Roma minority and the non-Roma majority with terms such as oppression, discrimination and prejudice, thereby suggesting that the key to tackling the “Gypsy problem” could not be found without restructuring societal relations (Dupcsik, 2009, p. 26).

Colleagues of Kemény expressed solidarity with the Gypsies. In particular, Csalog made his commitment to them often explicit. When recollecting his first memories about the Roma, he said in an interview: “I was terribly upset when I saw how farmers treated them [...] Above all, my sense of justice was hurt [...] I literally had to close my eyes in order not to see how much they were duped” (Daróczy, 1997, pp. 36-37). Elsewhere, he talked about his relationship with the Roma by emphasising: “I am a Gypsy. My work with them led to massive solidarity, a sense of common identity and a sense of kinship and love. It is good to spend time with them; it is enriching and helps me to grow. It became a reflex to stand up for them, for my kin” (Csalog, 1993, p. 41). Several of Csalog's further research reports exhibited and testified to the author's acceptance and sympathy towards the Roma (Csalog, 1976; 1979; 1991; 1995; 1996; Kovács, 1989).

Havas, expressing a similar opinion about the situation of the Hungarian Roma in terms of disadvantages for the minority group, believed one should not forget about the majority society as “it maintains various mechanisms in order to keep the Roma, or those who are considered Roma by the society,

poor” (Pogonyi, 2000, p. 8). Havas claims that the source of the Roma's marginalisation is rooted in ineffective social policy and a lack of long-term planning. Besides his scientific work, the sociologist took part in civil initiatives supporting the Roma. For example, he was an activist as part of a grass-roots movement helping a village in the northeastern region of Hungary. The group's objective was to “break up degenerate circles that derived from a total lack of hope” (Havas, 1998, p. 32). They helped in the establishment of a local Gypsy NGO, had a local school opened and, thanks to their work, enabled the launching of new local business ventures (Havas, 1998; Tót, 2000). In addition, Havas was also a member of SZETA – an organisation that will be introduced later on.

Lengyel conducted several case studies about the Hungarian Roma. She researched a village close to the region of Karancs (Lengyel, 1982), musicians in Letenye (Lengyel, 2001) and the Gypsies of Tiszavasvári (Lengyel, 2004). She also emphasised the power of the majority society in influencing Roma communities.

Szalai addressed the vulnerability of the Roma and the prejudices towards them in an interview for the journal *Amaro Drom*. She also represented the ideas of critical theory by emphasising that

“being part of a minority group [...] in the case of the Roma means a terribly high rate of unemployment and having to face accusations of receiving social benefits [...] It is all about sweeping the Roma out from everything that is good in Hungarian society [...] I believe the real drama of the last decade – and we all are responsible for this – is that the negative connotation of ‘being Gypsy’ has been conserved for a long time”. (Kende, 2000, p.6)

Otilia Solt, who considered Kemény her mentor (Papp and Horváth, 1989), published several essays, articles and research papers about the poor and the Roma. She claimed that since the Gypsies did not benefit from land distribution in 1945, they “were condemned to be penniless once again” (Papp and Horváth, 1989, p. 78). She stood up for integrated education (Solt, 1976), spoke about the disadvantages of dismantling Roma settlements (Papp and Horváth, 1989) and led familiarisation campaigns regarding the Gypsies' lives and their difficulties in terms of schooling in Budapest (Solt, 1975; 1979). She argued against the regulation-orientated approach, which embraced the simplifying term of “Gypsy crime” (Solt, 1991). In her writings, she advocated the interests of the poor, the oppressed and the Gypsies and criticised the majority society, with its prejudiced institutions, for its unwillingness to explore and resolve various social problems.

Kemény and his colleagues established a movement called SZETA (Szegényeket Támogató Alap – “Fund for Support of the Poor”) in 1979. According to Solt, this grass-roots organisation, which aimed at enhancing solidarity towards the Roma, attracted friends, colleagues, writers and others who were

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<sup>1</sup> The Hungarian Roma are a rather heterogeneous population, consisting of groups such as the Vlach, the Boyas and the Romungro, and also several sub-groups (Szuhay, 2002). In addition, Roma differ in terms of spoken language (Kemény, 2002), integration into the job market, and socio-economic status, among other things. Despite the fact that the majority of the society fails to agree on who is Roma and who is not (Csepeli and Simon, 2004), the population is often considered to be one homogeneous group. Within this study I refer to ‘Roma’ as a single group, especially as available statistical data usually provide information only according to this homogenisation. It should also be mentioned that the traditional Hungarian name for this ethnic group is “Gypsy”, but the politically correct one is Roma. (The Roma themselves even debate whether “Gypsy” has negative connotations.) Partly because of the historical perspective of my investigation, I use both of the terms and consider them to be synonymous

interested in social problems. Members of the organisation spread the information about the initiative and collected donations for families in need. Out of the eight founders, Gábor Havas, Gabriella Lengyel, Magda Matolay and Ottilia Solt belonged to the Kemény school. As Havas recalled:

“Ottilia Solt organised meetings in her flat [...] and there she came up with the idea of establishing an organisation to support the poor. To do so two attitudes were strongly inter-linked: on the one hand, her commitment towards the poor, including the Gypsies, and on the other, her oppositionist stance”. (Diósi, 1999, p.91)

As in the socialist era, talking about poverty was considered taboo, and authorities would have probably banned the organisation, so the founders decided to operate illegally. It is therefore interesting to examine the mechanisms of dictatorship in terms of further insights into the work of SZETA and evidence about the norms of critical theory as the organisation was monitored by the secret police force, the ÁVH (Államvédelmi Hatóság – “State Security Bureau”). In 2011, I had the opportunity to familiarise myself with copies of files that were compiled by the ÁVH regarding the establishment and work of SZETA for records created between 1980 and 1984. In order to confirm the Roma-supporting attitude of critical theory, I will cite from some of these documents.<sup>2</sup>

A quote from an ÁVH officer noted that the aim of SZETA was to “support those who lived in extreme poverty, especially those who were poor beyond their own control and those with many children, in a way that diverged from the discriminatory practise of official social policy”. The secret police chased members of SZETA when they collected donations and solicited sponsors through the spreading of propaganda, the organisation of concerts (under the mask of “events of the Hungarian Young Communist League”), auctions, public readings, cabarets, photo exhibitions and choir concerts, the publishing of anthologies and books, the sending of fundraising letters and the personal collection of donations. As the ÁVH figured out later – and partly due to a program broadcasted by Radio Free Europe – foreigners could also send money and clothes to SZETA.

Officers of the secret police often noted that Gypsies also belonged to the target group of SZETA: “The aim of the regular monthly meetings was to distribute money among people chosen by them [...] 80-90 percent of the beneficiaries are from the countryside and the majority of them are of Gypsy origin”. According to another file, the organisers also aimed at “dis-mantling Gypsy settlements and providing solutions to housing

problems”. In 1981 the Council of Szabolcs-Szatmár County built four houses for Gypsy families, and SZETA decided to support their construction with used furniture. Besides the financial aid, the idea of legal support also arose due to the high rate of legal prosecution of the Gypsies. SZETA also provided legal assistance in other cases for members of the initiative who organised spontaneous guerrilla-actions in support of the Roma people. According to an ÁVH report, “they erected a Christmas tree on a playground in District XX – without any official permission – which attracted approximately thirty Gypsy children”. The Roma-supporting attitude becomes apparent in the following report as well:

“According to information received from Mr György G., who is currently under prosecution, ‘Smartass’ (the code name of Ottilia Solt) has received several letters, mainly from Gypsies from Szabolcs-Szatmár County, asking for donations of money and clothes. In the flat of Smartass about 500 pieces of clothes have been collected, which were to be arranged into 7-15 kilogram packages and delivered to the addresses of those who asked for help.”

Besides these acts of support, members of SZETA organised seminars and workshops on the situation of the Roma.

According to Dupcsik, critical theory became unequivocally dominant in Hungary in the beginning of the 1990s (Dupcsik, 2009, p. 243). As he emphasised, representatives of this theory were widely accepted, well-known and active, while scholars of the “deviance-oriented” approach were suppressed and published only three research reports between 1989 and 2006. As Dupcsik put it: “the approach, which I call ‘critical’, has an overwhelming advantage (both qualitative and quantitative) compared to other research approaches of social-scientific quality that focus on our compatriots considered to be Gypsies” (Dupcsik 2010b, p. 2). I agree with Dupcsik that institutions, members of the scientific community and professional journals today represent the values and perspectives of critical theory – and did so even throughout the course of the debate, which will be introduced soon. At the end of this section, it is important to repeat once more and highlight the central elements of critical theory:

1. Solidarity towards the Roma, and
2. an emphasis on the responsibility of the majority society in creating disadvantages for the minority.

### 3 The beginning of the debate

With the norms of the prevailing scientific community in Hungary having been introduced, the details of the debate that took place in the country in 2010 can be presented. The root of the debate was a study written by Ágnes Solt about the living conditions of Roma communities in segregated settlements. The author, having obtained her master’s degree from a prestigious social science faculty, continued her academic career as a PhD candidate and as a research assistant at a Hungarian research institute. Besides theoretical studies, she gained

<sup>2</sup> The following files contain information about the members and activity of the SZETA: 11-20/82/1980, 11-20/101/1980, 11-20/129/1980, 11-20/148/1980, 11-20/151/1980, 11-20/157/1980, 11-20/170/1980, 11-20/172/1980, 11-20/178/1980, 11-20/189/1980, 11-20/192/1980, 11-20/198/1980, 11-20/22/1981, 11-20/36/1981, 11-20/50/1981, 11-20/202/1981, SZETA 3-II-62/6/1981, 11-20/17/1982 and 11-20/76/1983.

significant practical knowledge as a contributor to and leader of several empirical research projects. Her areas of interest included the sociology of deviance, with a special emphasis on the insecurity of young people. When she published the study in question, she was already an active and integrated member of the academic community with a record of publication.

Solt's "Life Beyond Hope", a study ordered by a private foundation, was published on 1 October 2009. The purpose of the research was to explore the living conditions of residents in segregated neighbourhoods. In December 2009 the author presented her findings at a press conference, which generated waves of debate in the Hungarian media. Online and offline media, blogs and daily and weekly newspaper authors and radio broadcasters joined the debate by making, often explicitly, their personal opinion about the research project, the researcher herself and about the segregated areas, whose residents Solt identified primarily as Roma.

The "Taboo of the feral Roma" was one of the titles that appeared on an extreme-right blog in which the author of the study claimed that he jumped into the conversation only because of Solt's degradation to a "persona non grata"; however, he seized the opportunity by using only simplifying sentences and references to the article which depicted the Roma in a negative context. "It [Solt's study] is a fiction or a horror indeed", was the message of a well-known leftist daily newspaper (Ortutay, 2010) in reference to criticism coming from the Ombudsman for Minorities (Kállai, 2010). Shortly after this, the same NOL issue published articles from authors who found Solt's research exemplary and expressed opinions about the criticism, such as: "those who would have responsibility in creating policies from the findings of science are looking for fabricated methodological deficiencies in their huffy vanity to disguise their impotence" (Finszter and Korinek, 2009, p.1). In summarising the general expectations related to the various arguments, Lukacs (2010, p. 77) commented that "a professional scandal has evolved", and the study generated intense debate both in the mass media and also in circles outside the public view.

#### 4 The study

In order to understand the roots of the indignation and tensions, the content of Solt's study, which consists of 147 pages, is summarised in this chapter. The first section explains the purpose of the research project and introduces the target group. Solt's intention was to explore the variance in societal norms and to analyse the mentality of residents in segregated settlements – almost all predominantly Roma. In general, she wanted to learn more about the daily life and living conditions of the Roma while focusing on how they perceive themselves and the majority society. In addition, she attempted to identify possible explanations for antisocial behaviour through variables such as poverty, Roma ethnic origin and prejudices towards the Roma.

According to Solt, this approach was meant to "facilitate the social inclusion of the Roma" (Solt, 2009, p. 3) by introducing to the public the Roma's own perspective on how they experience the differences between minority and majority society. As Solt put it, the research findings made "it easier to understand the gap between the Roma and non-Roma in terms of communication and conflict resolution techniques and the reason why the Hungarian-Roma relationship has become so much more poisonous than economic and educational factors would suggest" (Solt, 2009, p. 4). Thereby, the research findings can "pave the way for a reconciliation and recognition of the rules of cohabitation between the parties" (Solt, 2009, p. 3).

The text contains three hypotheses: 1) the mentality of the majority society and the Roma is different; 2) one of the reasons why previous social-political interventions were not successful is that they did not take into consideration the differences in mentalities; and 3) even within the Roma minority, we can observe prejudices against the majority society.

The research methodology was based on grounded theory, which means that the aim of scientific interest was to understand a "subjective reality" of the target group instead of looking for an "objective reality" (Solt, 2009, p. 8). As Solt underlined, her enquiry was an interactive process between the researcher and the research subjects. She gave a detailed description of the interview guidelines, her method of approaching interviewees and the interview arrangements. She visited 26 settlements, examined daily life in 14 places, conducted interviews with about 250 respondents, and recorded 74 conversations with a total of 117 people. The length of the interviews was between 23 and 30 minutes.

Solt made the whole data processing procedure transparent and easily accessible for the public. She labelled the interviews along dimensions such as 'content', 'circumstances', 'style' and 'dominant emotions' in order to support her content analysis. Due to the special characteristics of grounded theory, preliminary theories or preconceptions had no influence on her work. On the contrary, she identified salient issues through data processing as they emerged during the interviews. Both the structure of her study and the section headings followed this process and highlighted the topics that were important for the interviewees: The rhythm of everyday life; Family; Solidarity and rivalry; Starvation and poverty; Jobs; Loan sharks<sup>3</sup>; Conflicts and taboos; The relationship between the Hungarians and the Roma; Communication and self-interest; Inspiring people and daily life; and Narratives and emotions.

The research summary concludes that the settlement members' belief that it is impossible to break out from extreme poverty was one of the dominant thoughts among them. However, one can find both individuals who fight against this attitude and

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<sup>3</sup> A loan shark is a person who offers – illegally – loans at extremely high interest rates.

believe in personal responsibility as a means of improving their lives, while there are those who criticise others in the settlement for not taking any action. But in general, the success and growth of individuals and families were not accepted and tolerated in the community. According to Solt, social control was very tight in the investigated communities, and its members did not allow their fellow residents to improve their lives which, as a consequence, hindered their mobility.

Solt claimed that the main communication strategy in the settlements involved the Roma emphasising their level of poverty and powerlessness. "This communication entails serious barriers and obstructions for individuals to recognise opportunities and trust that they are able to create their own destiny and induce positive changes. The 'looking for support from the outside' communication results in an ignorance of one's own responsibility and leads people to a feeling of powerlessness." (Solt, 2009, p. 83)

Solt underlined that members of Roma and non-Roma communities tended to avoid interactions with each other and that their relationship was tense and full of aversion, saying although it was stable, at least, on better days, it was hostile on worse ones.

Although the summary contains some controversial recommendations, it is the appendix that provoked most of the polemics. Titled "Field diary, photos, subjective remarks and experience in the field", it consists of 48 pages and begins with the author's warning of its subjective content. It shows that Solt intentionally ignored the terminology of the scientific community and the requirements for objectivity and preferred to write about her own feelings and impressions.

The appendix repeatedly refers to differences between the Roma and Hungarians. According to Solt, the latter "know how to behave and are able to manage expectations. In this respect, they differ greatly from those living in the settlements" (Solt, 2009, p. 90). Interviews with Hungarians felt meaningful, with pleasant interviewees who appreciated being interviewed and did not expect any benefits from participating. Hungarians were depicted as victims of the Roma's antisocial behaviour, which included thievery, rowdiness, the spanking of children and intimidation.

The author's description of the Roma reflects negative sentiments and criticism. She believed that "the main conflicts are among the Gypsies. They are results of loan sharking, jealousy and abusive behaviour" (Solt, 2009, p. 95). The researcher writes residents of a segregated Vlach Roma settlement turned aggressively against her: "A well-respected woman with a stentorian voice came out and forcefully warned us off with cursing. She set everyone against us. I was surrounded by local abusive young men. I was scared. It was the first time" (Solt, 2009, p. 93). Later, Solt recalled that "they were spitting after us, laughing at us and using dirty language. [...] They lacked any basic respect or kindness whatsoever" (Solt, 2009, p. 124).

Solt's experience with the people she came in contact with was that they were aggressive and "their primary strategy was provocation, threats and physical aggression" (Solt, 2009, p. 124). In reading the appendix, one can see Solt's disappointment in her clueless and desperate quest to understand the motivations for domestic violence and child abuse with apparent signs such as bleeding ears, broken noses and teeth, shiners and other injuries, and aggression among the Roma themselves and their behaviour towards domestic animals. As Solt revealed, further characteristics of the communities were frustration, seclusion from strangers, envy and taunt.

## 5 Differences in norms

According to Dupcsik, the study deviated from the prevailing norms of critical theory and, as a consequence, led to an extension of it with the introduction of his 'post-critical theory'. As he pointed out, Solt's approach was one which was not only critical of the majority society and its prejudices, but also of critical theory itself: "Post-critical theory takes a critical perspective of critical theory that creates taboos and masks and distorts reality as if everything was fine with the Roma by suggesting that their problems derive exclusively from discriminative oppression from the non-Roma" (Dupcsik, personal communication, 19 August 2011).

Dupcsik identified three important characteristics of post-critical theory:<sup>4</sup>

1. Criticism of critical theory.
2. An attempt to dissolve taboos. As Dupcsik explained, "ironically enough, they wanted to experience a moment of 'we speak out' again, a sentiment that had been so inspiring for advocates of critical theory in the 1970s." (Dupcsik, 2010b, p. 3) Another interviewee of mine also pointed out that "Ágnes recognised a new wave. She was keen to speak the truth and to avoid being compromised. She believed that a lot of things were biased, and she wanted to avoid being biased." (Anon., personal communication, 14 February 2012) Solt herself agreed with this opinion and claimed that she "has analysed things in such a way that have not been stressed in Gypsy research in Hungary" (personal communication, 16 February 2010).
3. A shift from the prevailing idea of Kemény, which explains the Roma's disadvantages based on the majority society's prejudice and discriminatory practices. In contrast, post-critical theory emphasises the Roma's own responsibility. Dupcsik pointed out that although the idea

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<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that the 'post-critical theory' was a newly emerged approach that became known to the scientific community due to the Solt-case. Until recently it has not been able to reach real professional achievements. Thereby, the number of the appropriate professional sources (as scientific journals, books and conference papers) describing the characteristics of the 'post-critical theory' is limited.

had already been present in the media, this was its first appearance in social sciences, and Solt's work was the first attempt at legitimising the ideas of post-critical theory.

The difference between critical theory and post-critical theory seems to be the principal reason for the tensions that arose after publication of the study. I agree with Bourdieu, who once claimed that a scientific community should be perceived as a social arena in which tensions are internally structured. The structure of the academic field is determined by agents (researchers, groups and laboratories) and, more precisely, by the structure and quantity of capital available for actors. This approach describes a scientific community as a dynamic structure, as opposed to a static one in which power allocations are constantly changing. The more scientific capital a person owns, the more power she or he owns within the field. Conflicts in a scientific community are the result of struggles between the powerful (who have accumulated capital) and the relatively weak (who lack capital):

“The former are able, often effortlessly, to impose the representation of science most favourable to their interests, that is to say, the ‘correct’, legitimate way to play according to the rules of the game. [...] Their interests are bound up with the established state of the field and they are the natural defenders of ‘normal science’ of the day. They enjoy decisive advantages in the competition, one reason being that they constitute an obligatory reference point for their competitors”. (Bourdieu, 2004, p.35)

In brief, those who attempt to introduce new approaches which contrast with prevailing norms might face resistance from those who represent the mainstream. In this regard, Solt was the one introducing a new approach and, therefore, had to face resistance from the powerful advocates of critical theory.

## 6 The main critiques of the study

As a result of the deviation of Solt's study from the mainstream and the prevalent norms of the scientific community, criticism arose. This section summarises the main points of Solt's opponents.

1. Methodological concerns. Critics made explicit remarks about their methodological concerns related to the sample collection, applied guidelines and methods, field work, interviews and their analysis, embeddedness of the research project in the literature and Solt's research work.
2. Discrediting of the person. Solt had to face attacks against her person through negative comments and attributes connected to her personality. It becomes clear that criticism was not focused exclusively on methodological concerns when we read commentaries claiming that she used statistical software in an “amateur manner”, that the references attached to her footnotes were used as a kind of decoration, the research was bound to “methodological slovenliness”, the researcher was considered to

be “naïve” and “obtuse”, the research was fundamentally “misguided”, or the description of the applied methodology fit into “introductory handbooks” which cannot veil the fact that “the different techniques applied in the research confusingly interfere with each other”.<sup>5</sup> The criticism, apart from including references to Solt's cognitive capacity, often used emotional and value-driven judgments and sometimes short-tempered barbs. Or, as Margitay claims, the critiques, irrespective of the methodology, were targeted at the personality of the researcher as well (Margitay, 2007). This rhetorical strategy – limiting the occurrence of rational debate – suggested that the researcher was incompetent and lacked the necessary qualifications in the domain.

3. Breaking solidarity. The third element of criticism claims that Solt broke some ethical norms of the scientific community such as the requirement of solidarity.

a) Solt's text intensified negative attitudes towards the Roma. According to Dupcsik, “Solt's study draws an important line between the Hungarians and the Gypsies. [...] Such a marked and significant distinction used throughout the article can polarise the non-ethno-specific elements of the description and the analysis into two opposing segments” (Dupcsik 2010a, p. 81). He pointed out that this polarisation has amplified negative images about the Roma. When Solt used language with negative connotations to portray the Roma such as “jealousy”, “aggression” and “man is wolf to man”, she was suggesting that the Roma are the “bad ones” while, on the contrary, the Hungarians are the “good ones”.

Dupcsik also highlighted the fact that the negative impact of the study was amplified by an irresponsible media, which prefers simple messages to communicate “clichés or popular fallacies supported by so-called scientific evidence” (Kovács 2010, p. 3). This is especially true when a scientific research has the potential to justify negative attitudes and, thus, reinforce existing prejudices against the Roma. As Kovács recalls, “we could see that many snapped at the opportunity and were strengthened in their prejudice and limited experience: ‘Yes, the Roma of the settlements are like this, indeed’” (Kovács, 2010, p. 3).

- b) Solt showed negative sentiments towards the Roma. As I have pointed out earlier, the appendix of her study contained the researcher's own personal remarks – including those that later became a target of criticism. According to some opponents, the appendix proved that Solt “does not like the Roma” (Dupcsik, 2009, p. 1);

<sup>5</sup> The citations are from the academic debate. Members of the scientific community criticised Ágnes Solt using these words.

“the report proved the author’s incomprehension and indisposition towards the Roma. [...] She [...] provided valuable insights into mentality: her own mentality and not the Roma’s. It would be more pertinent, thus, to title the study ‘An urban intellectual’s first encounter with culture shock.’ It would be interesting to code and run through the same data analysis process to see how often she felt it necessary to express her indisposition, disgust and astonishment”. (Dupcsik, 2009, p.2)

Later on, Dupcsik described Solt carrying out her work as if “somebody, suffering from a serious case of claustrophobia, wanted to research the subculture of cavemen” (Dupcsik, 2009, p. 2). Another opponent claimed during a discussion held at the Institute of Sociology that “Ágnes Solt treated the subjects of her interviews inhumanly, and she seemingly could not overcome the cultural differences that she felt between herself and her interviewees” (Kovács, 2010, p. 4). The same opponent pointed out the potential effects of the researcher’s facial expressions full of disdain and horror when interacting with the Roma.

## 7 The first reactions to the criticism – the defence

Ágnes Solt responded to the criticism repeatedly and in various ways. She had the opportunity to publish in scientific journals, to speak at the above-mentioned discussion held at the Institute of Sociology and also to express her opinion in various other forums accessible to the wider public such as radio shows, online portals and other media outlets. In this section I will summarise Solt’s defence strategy and her responses to the main points of criticism.

1. Methodological concerns. Solt welcomed the criticism and partly accepted some elements of the critical remarks regarding the applied methodology. She promised to refine her phrasing and terminology and to correct the problematic parts. She wrote in Esély: “I have learnt a lot from the criticism and attempted to build some of them into the study that I wrote on the basis of the research” (Solt, 2010a, p. 83). She said during the discussion at the Institute of Sociology: “I will be much more aware of the terminology and the phrasing which, I have to admit, were reasons for misunderstanding” (personal communication, 16 February 2010).
2. Discrediting of the person. Solt made several attempts to reinforce her legitimacy by presenting herself as an experienced and well-prepared researcher. These attempts were reactions to the criticism which questioned her competencies and professional knowledge and, therefore, her legitimacy as a full-fledged member of the scientific community. At the non-public debate Solt referred to her competencies acquired from her numerous projects in the field. She gave detailed insights into her professional background in Esély:  
“Due to preconceptions regarding my personality, I have to make it clear that in the course of my practice

in empirical research, I have worked in both the longitudinal and in-depth interview styles, of which I have carried out almost five-hundred [...] Besides the above-mentioned target groups, I recorded longitudinal interviews with at-risk youth, their families and professionals who work with them. After all these experiences, I began the research in question. During my professional praxis I gained competences in verbal and non-verbal communication, which facilitated the interaction with my interview subjects and, therefore, allowed me to obtain the specific information I needed”. (Solt, 2010a, p.90)

3. Breaking solidarity. Solt accepted, effectively, that the study had adverse effects to the extent that it led to stronger anti-Roma sentiments in Hungarian society. At the debate held at the Institute of Sociology, Solt distanced herself from the media scandal which was generated by the study: “I lost control over it. In retrospect, I very much regret that it became public because it seems that it did more harm than good for the participants” (personal communication, 16 February 2010). All in all, Solt accepted these kinds of critiques.

Solt expressed explicit reactions to the critiques regarding her contravention of the scientific community’s ethical norms. She felt obliged to emphasise that she did not have any negative thoughts towards the Roma, writing in the Esély article:

“I did not perceive the residents of segregated settlements as natives of a completely different culture. I did not visit them with preconceptions of their Roma identity and culture that would have forced me to face a group of mysterious people. The main difference between us was that they live in extreme poverty, are socially excluded, are rejected by the non-Roma and, thus, are immeasurably defenceless.” (Solt, 2010a, p. 84) She considered it important to emphasise her trust-based relationship with members of the target group:

“The goal of repetitive sampling was to assess the hospitality of the interviewees – whether their approach is ambivalent, benevolent or hostile. If we had experienced ambivalent or hostile approaches on their part we could have concluded that previous visits had been unsuccessful because we hadn’t established trust and authentic personal relationships which would have led to us being unaccepted, discredited and not trusted. [...] Without exception, they welcome our returns benevolently, in a friendly way.” (Solt, 2010a, p.86)

This approach was tentatively reaffirmed by a high-ranking employee at Solt’s institution: “Connecting Ágnes Solt with racist language is simply nonsense” (Anon., personal communication, 16 February 2010). In general, these signals meant to contradict the criticisms concerning the author’s presupposed prejudices towards the Roma. Solt made it clear that she did not have a negative attitude towards the Roma at all.

## 8 The end of the debate – the re-written study

The overall goal of the scholar in carrying out a study is not only to share ‘objective’ information with members of the scientific community, but also to persuade: they refer to other authorities (already established scholars) and theories and methods and use quantified datasets, and profit from their rhetorical skills by trying to obtain the appreciation of fellow scientists while mitigating their criticism (Schickore, 2008; Latour, 1987). Solt’s study was not completely suitable for this task; it proved to be insufficient in terms of the applied research methodology. The author did not give evidence of her commitment to the group norms, and her study consisted of subjective value-judgments as well. Therefore, a modification of the study became necessary.

At first the controversial appendix was omitted; with this the length of the study decreased from 147 to 98 pages. However, it was apparently not enough to eliminate the researcher’s norm-breaking comments. The modified study was published in *Szociológiai Szemle* (Review of Sociology) in 2011, and I compared this new modified text with the original research report – the following paragraphs summarise the differences I observed.

Although the size of the original text was reduced by the author, the structure and the phrasing remained relatively unchanged. The same chapters followed in order, and the text remained basically the same as before. However, slight modifications could be seen in the first and the final part of the study:

1. In the original text Solt described residents of the segregated settlements as members of homogenous Roma communities: “The residents of the segregated settlements, with respect to ethnic affiliation, are Roma” (Solt, 2009, p. 5). In the modified text, although only slight, a few shifts in phrasing can be observed: “Before starting my empirical research, I had knowledge of two components of social exclusion: I knew that the majority of segregated residents are Hungarian, Vlach or Boyash Roma people, and that they consider themselves Roma” (Solt, 2010b, p. 100).
2. While the list of references attached to the original study consisted of only one page and only 18 references, the modified version was made up of three pages with 51 references. With the emphasising of references to other authorities, the text became more serious, more professional and more relevant to the international scientific literature (Latour, 1987) and, therefore, the statements seemed to be more valid and less assailable.
3. A small modification was made in that the name of the cultural anthropologist who contributed to the field work disappeared from the modified list of contributors.
4. The titles of some section headings were softened. “Cooperation and rivalry” was modified to “Community cooperation and level of solidarity”, “Starvation and poverty” was changed to “Inheritance, reasons for and

consequences of poverty” while “Loan sharking” disappeared and the text of the chapter was incorporated into “Livelihood opportunities”.

5. The original text enquired as to the responsibility of the residents living in segregated areas in creating their own situation: Do the Roma want to be isolated? What are the underlying cognitive processes which lead the segregated residents to choose isolation? What prevents them from assimilating to the norms of the majority society? What conflict resolution strategies do they lack that isolate them from the members of the majority society? Solt tried to answer these questions, and in doing so, implicitly suggested that the segregated residents should have been blamed for their own situation.

At the same time, in the foreword of the new text, she dwells on the importance of the external prejudice generated by the majority society: “I was fully aware that these people, beyond their own misery, suffer from the majority society’s antipathy, suspicion, or even disdain and hatred” (Solt, 2010b, p. 100).

6. In the concluding part of the original study, the author claimed that the strategy of the examined community for survival itself explains the despairing mobility prospects. Contrary to this, the new study mentions that the strategy for survival does not originate in the ethnic affiliation of the target group but it is rooted elsewhere: “On the whole, after comparing the results of the present research with other quoted – both Hungarian and international – research results, I argue that the strategy for survival and the mentality of the socially stigmatised, extremely poor minority cannot be explained by Roma culture (or by any Roma subculture), and cannot even partially originate from it” (Solt, 2010b, p. 130). Thereby, Solt not only emphasised the responsibility of non-Roma society, but expressed her agreement with one of the theses of critical theory: that the Roma can be considered rather a stratum than an ethnic group.

In brief, the study was modified, and we have good reason to think that it happened due to pressure from the scientific community. Solt amended the description of the methodological background, corrected and reflected on possible mistakes and, in doing so, improved the quality of the article. In addition, she put more emphasis on the responsibility of the majority society and on the fact that we cannot explain the Roma’s situation by claiming that it is entirely a result of their own doing. She emphasised that the ethnic affiliation of the Roma cannot explain their segregated status. Accordingly, she aligned her approach with the norms of critical theory.

## 9 The discussion

This case study presented Ágnes Solt’s research report, which triggered norm-protective mechanisms in the scientific community and generated intense criticism against the author.



One of the manifestations of this mechanism was apparent in how members of the Hungarian social science community put significant pressure on Solt, who recalled after the debate: “I have survived a paradigm shift. It was fierce. I have never felt this before. I felt that they wanted to destroy me. It was a brutal feeling. They want to destroy me and they can destroy me. Professionally, humanly, in any way” (personal communication, 13 March 2010).

A participant in the discussion at the Sociology Institute highlighted the practice of exclusion: “There are men of knowledge and men of science who undoubtedly own science, who handle scientific questions mono-disciplinarily and who are on the correct side. I mean on the correct side of the barricades. And they shout ‘Enemy!’ if someone articulates opinions opposite to theirs” (Anon., personal communication, 16 February 2010).

Other exclusionary practices emerged when the dynamic realignment feature of the scientific field activated. As Solt recalled, with the intensification and spreading of critical voices, the number of her supporters steadily decreased. A good example of this was when Solt’s anthropologist associate at the Institute of Sociology requested her name be omitted from further references because she could not take responsibility for the contents of the study. To my enquiries on the background of this retreat, Solt answered: “The associate asked me to remove her name from everywhere. She retreated because she is writing her thesis with X, and X is her director of studies and is completely fed up with her, so she could be flunked and, therefore, does not want to be involved” (personal communication, 13 March 2010). According to Solt, another important supporter also disappeared when the debate intensified. As she put it:

“He considered my research report fine and told the editors of the Review of Sociology to order a copy. This was before noon. His opinion changed suddenly by the afternoon. He wrote an email and emphasised that my study did not fit the requirements, neither of anthropology, nor sociology or social psychology. And its effects are terrible. So it was completely the opposite of what he had told me in the morning.” (personal communication, 13 March 2010)

Hierarchy in the scientific community, dependency and patron-client relationships led to the galvanisation of lobbying-type activity against the researchers and their proponents who contested normal science. Being afraid of reprisals from the field’s dominant and pro-normal science representatives, Solt reported that it is difficult to stand up publicly to their agenda: “As the outcry of the opponents intensified, an increasing number of people who had assured me of personal support indicated that they could not risk siding with me anymore. They expressed their agreement and what they thought of me, but feared to speak about it publicly.” (personal communication, 13 March 2010)

The described process is especially interesting in the light of previous articles written by others showing Roma in segregated

settlements in a negative context. For example, Otilia Solt herself wrote about the consequences of eliminating the Roma settlements. The places where the Roma had been moved to:

“became littered with all kinds of garbage imaginable. All of the barracks have their own prostitutes with the potential to destroy the marriages of neighbouring families and to attract police attention. [...] They have their insane and criminals as well. Males of the families moving into the barracks are becoming criminals or alcoholics within a few months. Women are impatient; they beat up and yank their children around. Hate and murderous passion are widespread; adults and children and women and men equally live a life of physical aggression. Knives, bricks, axes and fistfights are usual elements of police arrests there, which average two a day. Every second Gypsy is in jail or has just been released from or is about to go to prison. [...] Being envious of their luckier fellows, they are regular guests at the mayor’s office, demanding things resentfully, threatening suicide and the massacre of their families, and quarrelling with and spying on their peers, in addition to fighting with their peers about whether the latter’s lives are easier than theirs and then trying to resolve any ‘injustices’ by making these peers’ lives miserable.” (Diósi, 2002, pp. 89-90)

In 2002, Dóra Pálos summarised her experiences and feelings about a Gypsy community living in a village in Romania. As the author put it in the book (which came into existence thanks to the cooperation of the Institute for Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Cultural Anthropology Department of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Eötvös Lóránd University): “I visited them. They were drinking there. Something was repulsive for me. [...] I was really afraid”. A bit later she revealed: “I could not stand it. I felt disgusted. I found the people around me dumb, devoid of sense or any sign of thought. They cared only for themselves while their children were expelled to the streets, covered with mud, exposed to flies and fungal disease. [...] It was like a nightmare! [...] ‘Quickly! Leave this place!’ I said to myself” (Pálos, 2006, p. 93). Other studies (eg Bakó, 2006; Horváth, 2002; Stewart, 1994; Durst, 2001) were also able to strengthen the prevailing negative attitudes by describing the Roma’s prejudices towards the non-Roma, the envy and aggressiveness prevailing in their communities, the young age at which Roma women give birth to children and the irresponsible way Roma spend welfare money.

In taking these aforementioned facts into consideration, questions may arise: What are the origins of ‘indignation’ and of the vigorous attention surrounding the study? What is the reason that Solt’s study become the focal point of criticism? Why did Solt declare that ‘The unusual attention covering my study and also the tensions that are being targeted at me are remarkable’ (Solt, 2010a, p. 83). How can it be explained that, at the debate organised at the Sociology Institute, Solt was “stewed in hot oil”, “quartered”, “put to the sword”, “crucified” and

“spit upon” (Anonymous citations from the participants of the debate held on 16 February 2000 at the Institute of Sociology)

Although several reasons could be identified, I would like to focus on a potential explanation from social psychology. As the discipline underlines, people express more negative attitudes about a negative member of their own group than a negative member of the outgroup. Here, it is important to emphasise one more time that Solt was a member of her own scientific community; criticism arose from inside the group, which might have made the debate even more intense.

As Hogg and his co-authors underlined:

“Members can intentionally betray a group by practising treachery or acting as a stalking horse for a despised outgroup. They can also intentionally try to destroy the group by introducing schism [...] or acting as revisionists. These behaviours are often viewed as a profound betrayal of loyalty and group trust. Since loyalty and a sense that you can trust your fellow members to act in the group’s best interests lie at the core of group life [...] betrayal of these expectations is a cardinal violation that invites severe punishment by the group.” (2004, pp.193)

Abrams described this process similarly while drawing a picture of the exclusion of deviants from the group: “Traitors are rarely tolerated for long, and vengeance is often brutal. [...] We propose that people use judgments and evaluations of individual group members to sustain the prescriptive norms of their ingroup [...] By isolating antinorm deviants from the ingroup, the norms of the group are both clarified and strengthened” (Abrams et al., 2004, pp. 161-162).

Sociology of scientific knowledge also has analysed the phenomenon of social exclusion in scientific communities. Hardwig emphasised that an indispensable characteristic of a scientific community is trust (1991, p. 693). In order to fulfil the increasingly work-intensive requirements of data collection and analysis and to obtain the necessary pool of information, specialisation and teamwork is becoming crucial for scientists. As a consequence, there is a decreasing number of scientists who possess comprehensive knowledge of the theoretical backgrounds of other approaches and the technical and methodological apparatus leading to new scientific achievements. Under these circumstances the importance of trust is rapidly growing. If scientists do not have necessary information about other scientists, but trust them – that is, they accept their epistemological character in terms of, for example, competency, scrupulousness and ability to self-assess (Hardwig, 1991, p. 700) – they can accept their scientific results as well.

However, trust emerges only under specific conditions. Scientists are trusted only if they share norms which enhance coherence and group identity. Members of the community

accept norms and the set of rules of the group by expressing “joint commitments” (Gilbert, 1994, pp. 246-248). University enrolment examinations and the subsequent series of exams, the process of graduation, the application procedure for PhD programs, the process involved in achieving a PhD and publishing represent the milestones of a suitable control mechanism in which researchers can display their personal credo and demonstrate their acceptance of group norms or, as Bourdieu said, their habitus (Bourdieu, 2004). Scientists who refuse to accept these norms might lose the community’s confidence and, therefore, be disqualified from the scientific community (Schmitt, 1994).

Margaret Gilbert described in detail how scientific communities reacted when a member formulated ideas contrary to group norms by introducing the concept of “shocked surprise” (Gilbert, 1994, pp. 236-241). She emphasised the emerging astonishment and disbelief on the part of the community that accompany rebellious ideas. In my opinion, the source of the strong criticism towards Ágnes Solt and the highly emotional response was a sign of shock because the group’s own member broke the norms of the scientific community. “It is clear that she came from the same place and raised the same questions, but in many aspects it seems obviously dangerous what she represents” (Anon., personal communication, 14 February 2012) was a statement which came from a meeting at the Institute of Sociology. As another participant of the meeting explained: “It was not only about her conclusions and the applied methodology, but mainly about the Roma. There is prudence. [...] There seems to be cliques finding out an approach, a politically correct spiel. And there is Ágnes, who is not interested in it” (Anon., personal communication, 14 February 2012). Lukács commented: “A peculiar, strange debate arose [...] regarding critics of Ágnes Solt not accepting different findings from their own, although they have no right to ‘monopolise’ the researches on the Gypsies” (2010, p. 77). Another interviewee emphasised that “an easily identifiable intellectual community came into being over the last twenty years through whom people became accustomed to finding negative talk about socially excluded groups, including the Roma, intolerable. For members of this community it is simply unacceptable” (Anon., personal communication, 16 February 2010). Solt was a member of this community; however, her approach proved to contradict the prevailing norms, and she had to bear the brunt of the attack from her own scientific community. By refusing these ruling norms and not accepting the “correct”, legitimate way to play, she generated resistance inside the social science community to which she belonged.

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