

This paper analysis how the ‘hidden costs of upward social mobility’ (Cole-Omari, 2003) affect family formation, work orientation and childbearing intentions among academically high-achieving, Roma women with university degree in Hungary, and what consequences of their social ascension has on their childbearing practices. We demonstrate through our intersectional analysis of the narratives of 65 Roma women, gathered by semi-structured, in-depth life trajectory interviews, how preferences towards work and family are constructed in this group and how these preferences are related to their reproductive strategies. These women, aged between 26-59 years old, have an average of 1.1 children. One of the hidden costs of their upward mobility, we argue, that they cannot realize their fertility intentions, due to their difficulties in partner selection. Our research has also demonstrated how life-story narratives can illuminate the complex interplay between gender, class and ethnicity/race in relation to the construction of individual preferences towards (paid) work, family and childbearing. We argue, on the basis of our findings that social categories such as class and ethnicity/race are still ‘strong’ social facts that can shape people’s lives, construct their preferences, and hinder their choices. Most of our studied Roma women have developed a ‘minority culture of mobility’, to mitigate the price of their upward social mobility, of which a particular element is their involuntary unrealized childbearing intention.

Comparing our 65, academically high-achieving Roma women with a non-Roma Hungarian women sample of the same educational level (N=40), we aim at unravelling those hidden costs of upward mobility which contribute to different fertility outcomes for college educated, first generation professional middle class Roma and non-Roma women who come from a working class family background.

In the case of our Roma sample it is striking to observe how social mobility does not go together with their subjective well-being, a research finding well documented also for the Afro-American academically high-achieving women (George – McNamara 1984, Jackson et al. 1986, Hochschild 1993). It is because upward mobility involves many psychological insecurities, ‘emotional costs’ and burdens for the ‘visible minorities’, or ‘women of colour’ as the academic literature recently started to call not only the Afro-Americans but also the Roma women (Brooks 2012). Cole & Omari (2003) name these burdens the “hidden costs of upward mobility”, and argues that due to these costs, the life of the first-generation Black middle-class women is much harder than that of the Whites.

A part of the tensions of identity come from the difficulties of keeping up relationship with the family and the community of origin and establishing new ties to the majority society, whom members they encounter on a regular basis during their educational and working career. The

rejection from the 'White' middle-class, their attained group, and the detachment or the growing social distance from their original, working class community, together result that many of our respondents feel that they are in "an empty space", "on a no-man's land". They feel not any more homes in their old, "Roma" world, but not yet are belonging to their new, 'white' middle class world, facilitated by their educational achievement.

Another source of identity conflict for many of our interviewees is the collision of the modern and traditional values between them, the highly educated Roma women and their communities of origin. It leads to the feeling of being outcast, lonely, and also, to find it difficult to meet the right partner with whom they can imagine to establish a family. This latter can be called also one of the hidden costs of upward mobility.

It was obvious from the construction of the narratives of our interviewees that one of the biggest hidden costs of upward mobility, on top of the above-mentioned ones, is the difficulty of finding the desired partner/spouse and the vulnerability of the partnerships. In our sample, a bit less than one third of the women (28 percent) in their thirties have already been divorced, and this proportion is even bigger (33 percent) among the middle aged (forty years and older) ones. On the other hand, in the young generation (among those in their mid- twenties), there is only one woman who is married; while almost half of them is single.

Among the college educated women, only one third reported to have Roma partner/husband. Most of them are married or cohabit with a Gadjó (non-Roma) man, and few have a partner of Jewish origin. Two used to get married to an American (Black) guy, but already divorced "because of cultural differences".

Some of our respondents coming from traditional Roma communities reported 'arranged marriage' at their younger age (17- 18 years old). Soon all of them managed to escape from these unwanted relationships, despite of their community of origin disapproval. However, they still struggle with the stigmatisation for being 'a divorcee', an outcast; and they still find it difficult to meet the right man whom they can imagine to start a family.

The main reasons for the high rate of divorces, however, originated in the 'marry downwards' tendency among our graduate Roma women. Due to their difficulty in finding their long-term partner, many college educated Roma women from working class family background cannot realise their fertility intention and therefore have a lower number of children than their non-Roma counterparts.