



Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology  
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences  
**Katholieke Universiteit Leuven**

# **GYPSIES IN SLOVAKIA: AN AILING CULTURE**

Advanced Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology Research Paper

- supervised by professor **Johan Leman** -



***Tomáš J. Fülöpp***  
August 1999, Leuven

✉ Naamsevest 38, Leuven 3000, Belgium, ☎/fax +32 - (0)16 - 23 02 54  
💻 Tomi @scientist.com, <http://www.earthcorp.com/TJFulopp>

## **CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>2. HISTORY AND BASIC TERMS .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>2.1 Gypsy People.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
2.1.1 Children of the Wind .....	IV
2.1.2 Out of the Indian Cradle .....	IV
<b>2.2 Slovakia.....</b>	<b>V</b>
2.2.1 A Concise History of Slovakia .....	VI
2.2.2 Slovak Population, Minorities, Languages and Religions .....	VI
<b>2.3 History of the Slovak Gypsies .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>2.4 Clarification of Terms .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>3. WORLD AND THE SLOVAK GYPSIES.....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>3.1 Populations and Varieties .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>3.2 Languages.....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>3.3 Customs and Beliefs.....</b>	<b>XI</b>
3.3.1 Birth and Children .....	XII
3.3.2 Marriage.....	XII
3.3.3 Death .....	XIV
3.3.4 Religions, Superstitions and Taboos.....	XV
3.3.5 Body Law, Clothing and Nutrition.....	XVI
3.3.6 Kinship Organisation and Control.....	XVII
<b>3.4 Crafts, Skills and Art.....</b>	<b>XVIII</b>
3.4.1 Metalworking.....	XIX
3.4.2 Music, Dance and Theatre .....	XIX
3.4.3 Fortune Telling .....	XX
3.4.4 Storytelling, Legends, Poems and Literature .....	XX
<b>3.5 Living Standard .....</b>	<b>XXI</b>
3.5.1 Nomadism.....	XXI
3.5.2 Housing.....	XXI
3.5.3 Health .....	XXII
3.5.4 Subsistence.....	XXII
3.5.5 Criminality .....	XXIII
3.5.6 Education.....	XXIV
<b>3.6 Relations Between the Gypsies and the Majority .....</b>	<b>XXIV</b>
<b>3.7 Migration.....</b>	<b>XXVIII</b>
3.7.1 Ancient Migrations in Eurasia .....	XXVIII
3.7.2 Contemporary Migrations.....	XXIX
3.7.3 Exodus of the Slovak Gypsies .....	XXIX
3.7.3.1 United Kingdom, October 8 <sup>th</sup> , 1998 .....	XXIX
3.7.3.2 Belgium, autumn 1998.....	XXX
3.7.3.3 Finland, July 7 <sup>th</sup> , 1999.....	XXX
3.7.3.4 Norway, July 27 <sup>th</sup> , 1999.....	XXXI
3.7.3.5 Denmark and Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, Austria, Ireland? .....	XXXI
3.7.3.6 All Shengen Treaty Signatories?.....	XXXII
<b>4. „DIAGNOSIS” .....</b>	<b>XXXII</b>
<b>5. INDEX OF SOURCES.....</b>	<b>XXXIV</b>

They made up their minds and they started packing  
they left before the sun came up that day  
an exit to eternal summer slacking  
but where were they going without ever knowing the way?

*Fastball - "The Way"*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Seen as dirty vagabonds with odd habits and mysterious origin, who could not be classified into any of the social levels, Gypsies were not welcomed by medieval Europe when they started to appear in the south-east corner of the continent some ten centuries ago. The inhabitants of the countries to which they arrived were initially enchanted by their extraordinary histories, but when the magic of the unknown disappeared, they started to regard them as invaders, delinquents and godless.

Among many, the most widespread theory claimed they had come from Egypt. That's where the root of their names in many different languages comes from: *Aegyptius* in Latin, *Egyptien* and *Gyptien* in French, *Egyption* and later *Gitano* in Spanish, *Gifty* in Greek and *Gypsy*, also spelled *Gipsy* and *Gypsey*, in English. In Hungarian Gypsies used to be referred as *Fáraó népek*, which means the Pharaoh's People. Only recent extensive anthropological, historical and especially linguistic research has satisfactorily proved that Gypsies were the last wave of the great Indo-European migration from central and north-western India. Individual tribes and clans entered Europe via North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula (hence the myth about their Egyptian origin) and via Turkey and Eastern Europe.

Although chased on from place to place or at least outcast to the outskirts of villages and towns, many Gypsies and their whole clans gradually became recognised and demanded as musicians, blacksmiths, tinkers, clairvoyants, basket and lace weavers, clay bricks manufacturers, etc. On the other hand, they also earned their reputation of thieves, liars, loafers and generally untrustworthy and unpredictable eternal strangers.

There are perhaps twelve million of Gypsies scattered all around the world today. Although dispersed and missing mutual contacts or any central government, Gypsies still speak dialects of their ancient language, tend to keep their own way of life and remain peculiar.

So as other eastern and south-eastern European countries, also Slovakia is noted for its large Gypsy population. The exact number is missing, since many Gypsies themselves tend to deny their ethnic origin, but as some researchers put it, Slovakia is home to relatively largest Gypsy population in the world. Along with the fall of the communist regime and disintegration of the information barriers, a flood of previously heavily masked problems has broken through.

In the research author approaches, in as much as possible scientific and unbiased way, a few challenging aims. One of them is to recognise the peculiarity of the Gypsy groups living in the territory of today's Slovak Republic on the background of European history and to define their past as well as contemporary place among the Gypsies elsewhere in the world. Attention is paid to the differences and pertaining similarities in language, social and family organisation, migration, religion, economic organisation, art, general life style, status, etc. Next, the research attempts to report the alarming extent of deterioration in the social and cultural life of the Slovak Gypsies, mainly resulting from the insensitive communist policy of forced assimilation, involving phenomena such as poor living conditions in illegal satellite village settlements, dependence on social security system since unemployment often locally reaches 100%, widespread illiteracy and mental deficiency, frequent intermarriage, general loss of traditional customs and skills, alcoholism and drug abuse, aggressive illegal loaning, prostitution, theft and crime in general. Another important aim of the research paper is to identify the most salient relations between the white majority and the Gypsy minority in Slovakia, including racism, xenophobia and counteraction, to explore the origins and possible future consequences, and to review the true feasible solutions of this complex social and cultural problem. The current migration of Slovak Gypsies to foreign lands and resulting implications for these relations are emphasised. Author tries to show that it is justified to regard the Slovak Gypsies as an „ailing“ culture instead of a „damaged“ one. Because ailment implies a temporary state, something that can be healed, repaired, or regenerated. Because once anything starts to be regarded as damaged, it is dead.

The research is drawn upon author's personal observation and interaction with the Gypsy population in his native Slovakia as well as with the Slovak Gypsy asylum seekers in Belgium, upon his professional journalist experience, involvement in an European Union project for Slovak Gypsies as well as upon numerous written sources, e.g. Slovak, Czech and foreign books, magazine and newspaper articles, anthropological studies, Internet sites, etc.

## 2. HISTORY AND BASIC TERMS

### 2.1 Gypsy People

Gypsies are Caucasoid people living in modern times world-wide, principally in Europe. Classical history has been interested, with more or less success, in the long peregrination of the Gypsies. All the researchers have found a lack of documented evidence in their intention of constructing their theories. Many of the projects are no more than castles in the air that would not resist a deep analysis. Most of the conclusions reached by Romany researchers about the history of Roma people are reduced to mere hypothesis. Nevertheless, even this has allowed researchers to achieve a certain degree of consensus on some aspects of the history of the Roma.

#### 2.1.1 Children of the Wind

The origin of Gypsies used to be mysterious ever since they turned up on the continent some ten centuries ago. Because they arrived in Europe from the East, they were thought to be from Turkey or Nubia or Egypt, or any number of vaguely acknowledged non-European places, feared as Tartar spies, welcomed Christ's messengers, etc. The most widespread theory was the one that claimed they had come from Egypt. That explains the root of their names in many different languages: *Aegyptius* in Latin, *Egyptien* and *Gyptien* in French, *Egyption* and later *Gitano* in Spanish, *Gifty* in Greek and Gypsy, also spelled *Gipsy* and *Gypsey*, in English. In Hungarian Gypsies used to be referred as *Fáraó népek*, which means the Pharaoh's People. In some places, this Egyptian identity was taken entirely seriously. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, James the Fifth of Scotland concluded a treaty with a local Romany leader pledging the support of his armies to help recover the Little Egypt (an old name for Epirus, on the Greek-Albanian coast) for them. [6]

Another belief, marked by the French term *Bohemiens*, claimed that Gypsies were original inhabitants of today's Czech Republic. Gypsies were given also other names - *Zigeuner* (in German, Dutch), *Cigán* (in Slovak), *Cikán* (in Czech), *Tsigane* or *Tzigane* (in French), *Zingari* (in Italian) and *Romany* or *Romani*, *Rommany* (probably of Egyptian origin).

In the absence of written records, relying solely on the vague information contained in their songs and legends, even Gypsies themselves believed these stories about their own origin. However, the true history was rather different...

#### 2.1.2 Out of the Indian Cradle

*„I feel a kinship with the Roma People. I have always admired their love of adventure, their closeness to nature and above all, their fortitude and resilience“*, declared former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 29, 1983, while inaugurating the second International Romany Festival in Chandigarh, India. [13]

It was not until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that scholars in Europe began to realise that the Romany language, in fact, came from India. Basic words, such as some numerals and kinship terms, and names for body parts, actions, and so on, were demonstrably Indian. So - they concluded - if the language were originally Indian, its speakers very likely must be as well. Following extensive anthropological, historical and especially linguistic research has satisfactorily proved that Gypsies indeed were the last wave of the great Indo-European migration from the north-west of the Hindu-stani subcontinent, that includes the regions of the Punjab and the Sinth. Individual tribes and clans entered Europe via North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula (hence the myth about their Egyptian origin) and via Turkey and Eastern Europe.

No one knows exactly why the original Roma began their great wandering from India to Europe and beyond, but they have dispersed world-wide, despite and due to the persecution and oppression through the centuries. One very well possible history follows.

At the very beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, India came under attack by the Muslim general Mahmud of Ghazni, who was trying to push Islam eastwards into India, which was mainly Hindu territory. The Indian rulers had been assembling troops to hold back the Muslim army for several centuries already, deliberately drawing their warriors from various populations who were not Aryan. The Aryans had moved into India many centuries before, and had pushed the original population down into the south, or else had absorbed them into the lowest strata of their own society, which began to separate into different social levels or castes, called *varnas* (colours) in Sanskrit.

The Aryans regarded Aryan life as being more precious than non-Aryan life, and would not risk losing it in battle. So the troops that were assembled to fight the armies of Mahmud of Ghazni were all taken from non-Aryan populations, and made honorary members of the Kshattriya, or warrior caste, and allowed to wear their battle-dress and emblems. They were taken from many different ethnic groups who spoke many different languages and dialects. Some were Lo-

hars and Gujjars, some were Tandas, some were Rajputs, non-Indian peoples who had come to live in India some centuries before, and some may also have been Siddhis, Africans from the East African coast who fought as mercenaries for both the Hindus and the Muslims. This composite army moved out of India through the mountain passes and west into Persia, battling with Muslim forces all along the eastern limit of Islam. While this is to an extent speculative, it is based upon sound linguistic and historical evidence, and provides the best-supported scenario to date. Because Islam was not only making inroads into India to the east, but was also being spread westwards into Europe, this conflict carried the Indian troops - the early Roma - further and further in that direction, until they eventually crossed over into south-eastern Europe about the year 1300. [6]

From the very beginning, then, the Romany population has been made up of various different peoples who have come together for different reasons. As the ethnically and linguistically mixed occupational population from India moved further and further away (beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century), so it began to acquire its own ethnic identity, and it was at this time that the Romany take shape. However, the languages didn't stop moving north-westwards words and grammar from absorbed new members immigrants, coming from married, were mixed in people designated Dom o them continued their same thing happened in Byzantine Empire, and in Europe. In some small groups of Roma resulted in such groups and losing their Romany perhaps such an example. outsiders who have been course of time, have



from its land of origin (beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century), so it began to identity, and it was at this language also began to mixture of peoples and there, for as the warriors through Persia, they took Persian and no doubt too. The Indian different tribes, got Persia and there formed a Rom. Then, a large part of travel to Europe. The Armenia and in the has continued to happen instances, the mingling of with other peoples has been absorbed into them identity; the Jenisch are In others, it has been the absorbed, and who, in the become one with the

Romany group. [6] These men worked as soldiers and farmers, they also worked as craftsmen and artists. Famines, the invasions of the Huns, Arabs or of the Mongolians in the XIII century, when those today called Roma left their homes when the Mongolian armies arrived and finally conquered the territory, as well as the wars and the disorders, and the hope of finding some better living conditions in other lands caused various groups of Roma little by little to travel in pursuit of the Sun, crossing the Bosphorus and arriving in Europe.

The Roma entered Europe and its history a few long centuries after moving out of their homeland. Greece and Armenia were important bridges in this passage from the East to the European continent. In the middle of the XIV century, Romany shantytowns were found in nearly all the islands of the Mediterranean and in continental Greece. According to some authors, the first European territory where the Roma arrived was Corfu at the beginning of the XIV. century. Roma were either kept in slavery in the Balkans (in territory that is today Romania), or else were able to move on and up into the rest of the continent, reaching little by little every northern and western country by about 1500. In the course of time, as a result of having interacted with various European populations, and being fragmented into widely-separated groups, Roma have emerged as a collection of distinct ethnic groups within the larger whole. Depending on the customs, the geographical area that they occupied and the dialectal variant of their own language, large groups of Roma were formed and they have survived until the present time: Kalé, Lovari, Sinti, Kalderash and Manouche. [6] [12]

## 2.2 Slovakia

Slovakia, officially Slovak Republic, in Slovak language „Slovensko“ or „Slovenská republika“, is a landlocked central-European country engulfed by the Tatra Mountains of the Carpathian range in the north and fertile plains in the south. The country is bordered by its former federal partner - the Czech Republic - to the west, Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south, and Austria to the south-west. It has an area of 49,035 square kilometres. Population in 1998 was 5,425,000. The capital, Bratislava, located on both sides of the Danube river at the south-west border of the country, is the largest city counting half a million inhabitants. Košice follows second with about half of that. Official language is Slovak. There is no official religion, but Roman Catholic Church is the most widespread there. The republic has one legislative house. Chief of state is President (currently Rudolf Schuster) and head of the government is Prime Minister (Mikuláš Dzurinda). Economy of Slovakia relies on heavy industry, agriculture and tourism. Major import

partners are Czech Republic, Russian Federation and Germany. Major exports partners are Czech Republic 35.3% and Germany. Monetary unit is Slovak crown (*Slovenská koruna, Sk*), roughly equivalent to the Belgian franc.

### 2.2.1 A Concise History of Slovakia

The antecedents of a distinct Slovak culture date from the mission sent to Moravia in AD 863 by the Byzantine emperor Michael III at the request of the Moravian prince Rostislav; the Great Moravian Empire then encompassed at least part of the territory of present-day Slovakia. Byzantine influence was short-lived, however, disappearing from the region after the invasions by nomadic Magyar tribes toward the end of the ninth century. The South Slavs were separated from the Slavs living north of the Danube River, and, as the territory of Slovakia came under Magyar control, it became known as Upper Hungary, also within the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire. [2]



In 1918, Slovaks co-founded a common state with the Czechs, the Republic of Czechoslovakia. With a brief intermezzo, when Slovakia stood alone as a German puppet nationalist state during World War II, this lasted until 1939. After World War II, however, it was a totalitarian communist regime controlled by the Soviet superpower, and since the Prague Spring in 1968 also occupied by its military forces. Following the overthrow of the communist regime in 1989, known as the Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia reconstituted itself as a democratic country again. Within the next three years, increasingly nationalistic groups in Slovakia, fed by confusion and instability escorting the transition from centralised to market economy, gained enough power in the Slovak parliament to split the federation (officially on

January 1st, 1993) and established the first sovereign and stand-alone Slovak Republic ever. Slovakia was left with bad reputation, with heavy industry once rolling out tanks for the Warsaw Pact but suddenly without market, and with a unprogressive government of the prime minister Vladimír Mečiar. Bizarre power scandals of this authoritarian leader and his party, attempts to shackle the free media, wild privatisation and ever-present nationalism affecting rights of the minorities was the main reason why Slovakia could long not be considered for membership in the European Union and NATO.

### 2.2.2 Slovak Population, Minorities, Languages and Religions

In 1998 there were 5,425,000 people living in Slovakia. The population increase is not high. It is expected that by 2010 there will be only around two hundred thousand people more. Around sixty percent of the people live in cities. Population density is 111 per square kilometre.

Historically, emigration to the Czech Lands and other more urbanised areas of Europe and to the United States kept Slovakia's growth rate low. Industrialisation during the communist period, and the accompanying mobilisation of women in the labour force, had a similar effect, with the result that the average age of the population has been steadily rising. What will be the long-term effect of the 1993 splitting on Slovakia's demography remains a subject of speculation. [2]

The population is predominantly Slovak. Hungarians, concentrated in the southern border districts, form the largest minority with almost 11%. Czechs (1.1%), Germans (0.1%) and Poles (0.1%) are found throughout the country, while Ruthenians (Rusyns) and Ukrainians (about 0.3% each) are concentrated in the east and north-east. There is a sizeable and relatively mobile population of Gypsies (Carpathian and Vlach Romany), who are found mainly in the eastern part of the country. [2] Although official statistics report that the Gypsy population forms only 1.6% of the inhabitants of Slovakia, many researchers believe Gypsies are in fact the second largest minority in the country, reaching as much as ten percent of the total population of Slovakia.

There are more than half a million Slovaks living in the U.S., over 100,000 in Hungary (1990) and about the same number in the countries of former Yugoslavia, between thirty and forty thousand in Poland and around the same population also in Romania, between ten and twenty thousand Slovaks live in Canada and a bit less in Ukraine. [1]

The majority of the population of the Slovak Republic speaks Slovak as their first language, but widespread fluency in Czech is a legacy of the period of federation. Members of the West Slavic language group, these closely related and mutually inherently intelligible languages use the Roman, not the Cyrillic alphabet (in contrary to neighbouring Ukraine

and other countries as Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, etc.). Hungarian, Polish, German, Ukrainian, Russian and Gypsy (Romanian) are among the other languages spoken in Slovakia.

Four decades of official atheism ended in 1989, and the widespread persistence of religious affiliation quickly manifested itself in both the sectarian and political spheres. There is no official religion in Slovakia, but Roman Catholic Church is the most widespread one (around 60%). Protestants represent around 7.9%, of which Slovak Evangelical 6.2%, Reformed Christian 1.6%; Greek Catholic 3.4%; Eastern Orthodox 0.7% (mainly in the Ruthenian districts). Other religions amount to 18.0%. Around 9.7% of the population are non-religious or atheist. [2]

## **2.3 History of the Slovak Gypsies**

It goes without further stressing that the modern history of Slovak Gypsies is to a great extent history of the Gypsies in Czechoslovakia. Many facts related to Slovak Gypsies apply automatically to Czech Gypsies as well and vice versa.

Gypsies living in the territory of today's Slovakia, probably mostly nomadic, started to settle down already some two or three hundred years ago. It was a decision of Empress Maria Theresia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and enforced by her son, Jozef II, in order to break a vicious circle of the preceding situation, when Gypsies were denied the right to travel, yet they were forbidden to settle down. The new laws included establishing Gypsy settlements, provide work to Gypsy men and school education to their children. Along with that continued use of Gypsy language was prohibited and Gypsies were to be renamed into New-farmers. [27]

Early in this century, the Roma in Slovakia, as elsewhere in Europe, formed an ethnic community, living on the social periphery of the mainstream population. State policy nearly always focused on the Romany population not as a distinct ethnic minority, but rather perceived it as a particularly anti-social and criminal group. This attitude was reflected in the policy of collecting special police evidence - fingerprint collections of members of Romany groups (1925), a law about wandering Roma (1927), and so on.

During the Second World War, approximately 6 to 7 thousand Roma from Bohemia and Moravia died in a special concentration camp at Auschwitz. The Slovak State copied the racist legislation of the German Reich, establishing special labour camps for the Roma, who were forbidden to travel with public transport, were allowed admission to towns and communities only on limited days and hours, had their settlement units separated from public roads, and so on. After the occupation of Slovakia by the German army, mass killings of Roma occurred in many places.

After World War II, the state policy was oriented toward one of assimilation of the Roma. Law No. 74, 1958, „On the permanent settlement of nomadic and semi-nomadic people“, forcibly limited the movement of that part of the Roma (perhaps 5% -10%) who still travelled on a regular basis. In the same year, the highest organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia passed a resolution, the aim of which was to be „the final assimilation of the Gypsy population“. The so-called „Gypsy question“ was reduced to a „problem of a socially-backward section of the population“. The solution to the high number of children in Roma families took the form of financial incentives for Roma women to undergo sterilisation. State arrangements were also oriented to solving the problem of housing by the liquidation of backward Romany settlements and resettlement of the Roma to urban settings. Although Romany cultural and ethnic identity was denied, organs of the state administration in communities and towns gave annual accounts of the population. This evidence was collected without the knowledge of the Roma, who were categorised according to the criteria of the social services. Similarly, when there was a census, people were not able to proclaim their Romany ethnic identity, but census officers nevertheless marked the forms without the respondents' knowledge to indicate that they were in fact Roma.

The Velvet Revolution in 1989 opened floodgates to a huge stream of previously heavily masked problems and the high level of urgency they required. After decades of the ignorant communist regime and strong information barriers, the Roma problems started to be dealt with again. In April 1991, the Government of the Slovak Republic accepted a demand for equalisation of Roma with the other ethnic minorities in Slovakia. The Declaration of Basic Human Rights and Freedoms accepted by the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1991, also secured the Roma's right to freely decide their own ethnic affiliation. Individual ministries were developing initiatives for the Romany minority, securing their rights in the fields of culture and education.

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia has created new problems for the Romany minority in both newly formed countries. Since 1992, Czech society has been increasingly apprehensive of the mass migration of Roma from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. This fear persists despite a sociological study completed in Summer 1992, which found that no concentrated migrations to the Czech part of the country had appeared until that time among the Slovak Roma. [8]

## 2.4 Clarification of Terms

The Gypsy people have been known by many names, including *Cigán* in Slovak, *Cikán* in Czech, *Zigeuner* in German and Dutch, *Zingarello* in Italian, *Tsigane*, *Tzigane*, *Zingaro*. These names are rooted in Greek word *thinganein* - to touch, which was used in the name *a-thingans* - the untouchable [27]. Other names include *Bohémien* in French, *Gitano/a* in Spanish, and many others. English has several different synonyms for Gypsies. Some are more common and others are better preferred. Let us have a look at their origin and general use.

*Gypsy* (*Gypsey*, *Gipsy*), plural *Gypsies*. Sometimes not capitalised. The term Gypsy has been traced back to circa 1627. It comes from *Gypcyan* (Old English), *Gyptien*, *Egyptian*, *Gypsy* (French), *Aegyptius* (Latin). (*Like a right gypsy, hath, at fast and loose, Beguiled me to the very heart of loss. - Shakespeare.*) The term Gipsy is a much less frequent, chiefly British variant of Gypsy. In some dictionaries, it is missing. Used as an intransitive verb, *Gypsy* or *Gypsying* means to play the Gypsy; to picnic in the woods.

*Bohemians* used to be one of the French names given to Gypsies. This reflected the widespread belief that Gypsies were original inhabitants of the Czech lands.

*Romany* (*Rommany*) (plural *Romanies*) used as a noun means either a Gypsy or the language spoken among themselves by the Gypsies. Used as an adjective, *Romany* (*Rommany*, *Romani*, *Gypsy*, *Gipsy*) describes something of or relating to the Gypsies or their language or culture (e.g. *Romany folk songs*). [16]

Many Gypsies (these include the older European nations such as the Kalderasha, and others, such as the German Roma) have always referred to themselves by their tribal names, or by generic names as Rom or Roma, meaning „married man”, „husband”, „male Gypsy” or „people”. It comes from Sanskrit *domba*, *doma*, low caste male musician (usage tracked back to 1841). (Words Rom, Roma, Romany, and *Romaniya* should not be confused with the country of Romania, or the city of Rome.) These names have separate, distinct etymological origins and are not related. The use of Rom, Roma, Romany, or the double „r” spelling, is nowadays preferred in official communications and legal documents. In response to the recommendations put forth by Roma associations, the Council of Europe has approved the use of *Rroma* or *Gypsies* in its official documents (CLRAE Recommendation 11 - June 1995). The trend is to eliminate the use of derogatory, pejorative and offensive names, such as Gypsies, and to be given proper respect by the use of the self-appellation of Roma, or *Rroma*. [2] [6] [15]

Author of this paper firmly believes that use of terms that are free from ill connotations is a rather poor remedy for the Gypsy-related problems. What is needed is an attitude change of all parties concerned, reachable by open debate, high-quality studies and a good will. Change of name alone is useless, because without solving the underlying questions the new word simply receives the same old meaning. This can be well documented by the evolution in author’s native Slovakia. After the fall of the communist regime terms Roma and Romany (*Rómovia*, *rómsky*) were promoted as a replacement for the old term Gypsies and Gypsy (*Cigáni*, *cigánsky*). This has happened nation-wide in all public places and media and the new terms became well rooted even in the people’s everyday vocabulary. However, after ten years it is evident that Roma and Romany adopted the very same pejorative connotation as the former Gypsy... (Besides, there was one similar attempt in the history - in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Empress Maria Theresia tried to rename Gypsies into New-farmers. See History of the Slovak Gypsies, chapter 2.3.)

And, after all, many Roma tribes do not call themselves Roma and use the word to refer to other tribes (such as the Romanichal, Gitanos, Kalé, Sinti, Manush, and others, but refer to other groups as Roma). To add more confusion, all Roma are Gypsies, but not all Gypsies are Roma.

In the frame of this work, author will therefore not limit himself to use of one specific term. He will be using primarily the most common English term Gypsy (and still accepted by everyone [6]) as noun (plural Gypsies) and adjective, then Roma (referring to all Roma, regardless of tribe and location) as a synonym for Gypsies, Rom for one Gypsy person, and Romany as an adjective. Other derivations will be used as in some paragraphs inspired by or adopted from sources. Since all of them refer to the nation or ethnic group, they have to be capitalised. [6]

All non-Gypsies of respective countries will sometimes be described by a Gypsy term *gadjo* (plural *gadje*), although it has also a pejorative connotation meaning of bumpkin, yokel or barbarian. *Gadjo*, *gadje* or *gadjikane* when used as an adjective. [2]



### 3. WORLD AND THE SLOVAK GYPSIES

There is no universal culture per se, but there are attributes believed to be common to all Gypsies: loyalty to family (extended and clan), belief in *Del* (God) and *beng* (the Devil), belief in predestiny; *Romaniya*, standards and norms, varying in degree from tribe to tribe, and adaptability to changing conditions. Particularities that make their situations quite different depend on the countries in which they live. In this chapter author summarises his research on differences and similarities between Slovak Gypsies and their cousins elsewhere in the world. Attention will be paid to languages, legends and music, religions and traditions, nomadic and sedentary ways of life, crafts, kinship systems, social control systems, living standards, health and welfare, housing, education systems, criminal behaviours, relations with the majority, migration, and other aspects. Some chapters are more informative than other ones, leaving room for intended PhD research. Description of the common cultural attributes is based chiefly on source [6].

#### 3.1 Populations and Varieties

The Roma people are Indian because of their origins, and European and transnational due to their projection. They have been made up of many different groups of people from the very beginning, and have absorbed outsiders throughout their history. They were in Persia by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in south-eastern Europe by the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and in Western Europe by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gypsies had spread throughout North and South America and to Australia. [2]

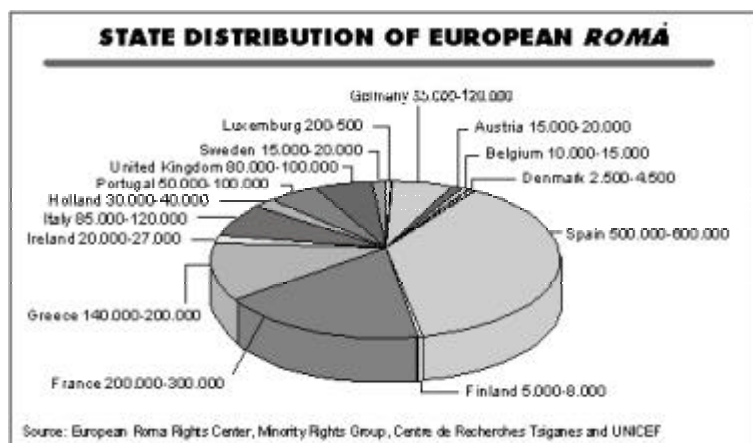
The migratory nature of the Gypsies, their absence in official census returns, and their popular classification with other nomadic groups makes the estimating of the total numbers of Gypsies a formidable task. Estimates of the total Gypsy population range from 2,000,000 to 5,000,000. A significant statistical picture cannot be gained from the sporadic reporting by Gypsiologists in different countries.

All available sources stress how difficult it is to quantify the number of Gypsies in the world. The current censuses are not very reliable because of the traditional Gypsy nomadism that in spite of being decreasing, especially in some countries, still lasts. Also, many Roma themselves do not admit to their true ethnic origins for economic and social reasons. With much caution, therefore, it is supposed that there are approximately twelve million Gypsies living outside India around the world. [6] [12] Out of that, the European groups count perhaps 10 million people. Most of them live in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, concretely eight million, while the rest of them, almost two million, live in the European Union.

Romania is the country with the largest, three million Gypsy population, which corresponds to the 9,15% of the total population. [12]

However, comparatively there might be even more Gypsies living in Slovakia, who form the second largest minority group in Slovakia. In 1991, when the Roma of former Czechoslovakia obtained the right to freely proclaim themselves as members of a distinct minority in the census, only 80,627 Roma in Slovakia (1.52% of the citizens of Slovakia) officially declared themselves as such. According to estimates of the urban and communal offices of the state administration from 1989, as many as 253,943 Roma lived in Slovakia, thus constituting 4.8% of the population. Since these statistics did not include Roma who have a standard of living comparable to that of the majority population, Roma political and cultural activists estimate that the number of Roma in Slovakia is even higher, citing a figure of 350,000 to 500,000 in Slovakia today. [8] [3]

Large number of Roma lives also in the Czech republic (officially only 0.3% [2], but reaching half a million as well [23]), Hungary (officially only 3% [2] but probably many more), Poland, former Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. In southern Spain, Gypsies (*Gitanos*) used to be the largest minority. Gradually many of them assimilated into the mainstream of Spanish society, but others continue to lead their traditional nomadic way of life. Anyway, among the countries of the European Union, Spain has the largest minority of Gypsies (around 600,000). France with about half of that follows, then Greece, United Kingdom, Italy and Portugal.



The Romany population has been a composite one from the very beginning, with different ethnic groups brought together during their initial great migration from India. The Romany population and the Romany people came into being outside of India, though the various ethnic elements began inside India. This is supported linguistically and increasingly more based on history. For the extensive amount of Persian and Byzantine Greek influence upon the Romany language, members of the migration out of India stayed in these areas long enough for this to occur, and they no doubt brought members of those populations into the evolving Romany population. The fragmentation of the Romany population occurred on a major scale after their arrival into Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Once in Europe, their particular ability to adjust to outside groups continued, and in some places, the Romany element was dominant enough to assimilate outsiders. In other places, the Romany element was too small to maintain its discrete identity and it was lost, while contributing to the group into which they were absorbed. The Romany population has grown differently in different places, to the point that one group may deny the legitimacy of another group. However, all groups maintain to a greater or lesser degree the barrier between who is Roma and who is not. Thus, there are populations of Romany who have incorporated a substantial foreign genetic element from outside of India, but who remain in terms of their own self-perception Roma, and who speak *Romanes*. Despite what some groups may believe, there is no one group that can call themselves the one, „true“ Roma. What may be accepted as „true-Roma“ by one group may be *gadje* to another. Romany culture is diverse, with many traditions and customs, and all tribes around the world have their own individual beliefs and tenets.

Gypsies recognise tribal divisions among themselves with some sense of territoriality emphasised by certain cultural and dialectal differences. Some Gypsiologists have delineated three main tribal groups: (1) the Kalderash (smiths who came from the Balkans and then from central Europe and are the most numerous); (2) the Gitanos (French Gitanos, mostly in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and south France, strong in the arts of entertainment); (3) the Manush (French Manouches, also known as Sinti, mostly in France, Alsace, and Germany, often travelling showmen and circus people). Each of these main divisions was further divided into two or more subgroups distinguished by occupational specialisation or territorial origin, or both. [2] Other researchers argue for four nations of Roma: the Kalderash, the Machavaya, the Lovari, and the Churari. Other groups include the Romanichal, the Gitanoes (Calé), the Sinti, the Rudari, the Manush, the Boyash, the Ungaritz, the Luri, the Bashaldé, the Romungro, and the Xoraxai. The first European descriptions of the Roma upon their entering Europe emphasised their dark skin and black hair. Through integration with Europeans over the centuries, Roma today can also be found with light skin and hair. [6]

In Slovakia there are chiefly two groups of Gypsies. Most populous are the Carpathian Romany (Bashaldo, Romungro - Hungarian Slovak Gypsies), with ethnic groups Sárrika Romá (northern and eastern Slovakia, Slovak Gypsies) and Ungrike Romá (southern Slovakia, Hungarian Slovak Gypsies). Much less populous are distinct Vlach Romany (Vlachs or Walachs, Volokhs, Valach, Olachs, appearing in the ninth century was originally the name given to the inhabitants of present-day Romania by their neighbours. [2]) of the Lovari language group. Carpathian and Vlach tend not to interact socially with each other. [1]

There has never been on record any one authority, either congress or a king, accepted by all Gypsies, although „international“ congresses of Gypsies have been held in Munich, Moscow, Bucharest, and Sofia (1906), at Rowne in Poland (1936) and many other places since then. [2] A spoked-wheel image, representing a sixteen-spoked chakra, was adopted at the First World Romany Congress in London in 1971 as the international Romany symbol. The chakra is a link to the Indian origins of the Gypsies (the 24-spoked Ashok Chakra is in the centre of the national flag of India, the Tiranga) and represents movement and the original Creation. The green and blue flag with a red chakra in the centre was adopted as the Romany flag, as well as the motto „Opré Roma“ (Roma Arise). The song „Gelem, gelem“, also known as „Djelem, djelem“ and „Opré Roma“, was selected as the Romany anthem. April 8 was proclaimed International Romany Day. Among the chief goals of World Romany Congresses (four of them to date) are the standardisation of the Romany language, reparations from World War II, improvements in civil rights and education, preserving Romany culture, and international recognition of the Roma as a national minority of Indian origin. Among the chief Roma organisations, the International Romany Union has consultative status to the United Nations Social and Economic Council. [6]



### 3.2 Languages

Romany or Gypsy is a language related to the North Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages, spoken on all five continents by Gypsies. The main concentrations of Romany speakers are in Eastern Europe. The Romany language, like Gypsies as a minority people, seldom has received any legal recognition. It is likely, based on the evidence of comparative linguistics, that Romany separated from related North Indian languages in about AD 1000. Modern Gypsy dialects all over the world have been classified according to their European originals: Greek, Romanian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, German, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Scandinavian, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Welsh, Spanish, etc. [2] Based on language, it is possible to divide Romany population into three groups. These are the Domari of the Middle East and Eastern Europe (the Dom), the Lomavren of Central Europe (the Lom), and the Romany of Western Europe (the Rom). There is no

universal written Romany language in use by all Roma. However, the codification of a constructed, standardised dialect is currently in progress by members of the Linguistic Commission of the International Romany Union. [6]

It is very important to realise that there was never anything as a single, original Gypsy language. Even at the time of the original migration from India Gypsies most probably spoke several dialects. These dialects further developed in isolation as clans and extended families separated and interacted with different host societies' languages. It is in its vocabulary that Romany best reflects the wanderings of its speakers. The dialectal differences originated during the Gypsies' stay in the regions where these languages were spoken. While living in these regions they accepted many loanwords from the native languages and sometimes phonetic and even several grammatical features. The main foreign sources (apart from the original Indian stock) are Iranian (*doshman* "enemy," from Persian *doshman*), Armenian, Greek (*drom* "way"), Romanian (*bolta* "shop," from *bolta*), Hungarian (*bino* "sin," from *bun*), and the Slavic languages (*glas* "voice," *rebniko* "pond," *grob* "tomb," *dosta* "enough," *ale* "but"). Indo-Aryan words include *bokh* "hunger," from Hindi *bhukh*; *bal* "hair," from Sanskrit *bala*; *gelo* "gone," the past participle of *za* "go" (compare Bengali *jawa*, *gelo*); and *rat* "blood," from Prakrit *ratta*. [2]

Slovak Carpathian Romany and their ethnic groups speak several dialects that developed along with local Slovak dialects. Carpathian Romany language is not intelligible with Vlach Romany or Angloromany. Slovak Vlach *Romanies* speak Lovari and Kalderash dialects. The Lovari understands Kalderash. [1] The Carpathian Gypsies lived a sedentary life already in the time of the Habsburg Empire, and their language was used as a communication means only in a limited geographic area. The radius of such a region was roughly given by distance that could be walked in a day or two in order to reach festivals, marriages and other gatherings used for meetings and searching for partners for children.

There exists a high-quality standardised dictionary and grammar, based on Slovak Gypsy dialects. It is not to the full benefit of the majority of Gypsies, though, because of their traditional marginal position in the society and related poor education. Traditional Gypsy professions and ways of subsistence did not require (and sadly, they often hardly do) more than grammar school (compulsory) education. In the 1970 census it was revealed that 70% of the older generation is illiterate. Those Gypsies who managed to acquire higher education did so in Slovak language and assimilated with the majority of the population most of the time. Comparing the language of old and young Gypsies, it is possible to see how many Romany words are disappearing from common usage. Although, not all words escape the language in the same way. For example, while at some places uncle is called by ancient *kako*, but from Gypsy *šošoj* (rabbit) became Slovak-based *zajacos*, at other places uncle is called by Slovak-derived word *ujcu*, but rabbit runs around called *šošoj*... [23]

It is only obvious that the Gypsy language, without support (illiteracy, weak support of standardised Romany), cut off the real life (forced sedentary life, unemployment, hostile relations with the majority) degraded and continues to degrade at an alarming pace, accepting the local (Slovak) words and grammar, losing specific and therefore beautiful words, phrases and metaphors. Such a brute mixture of Slovak and local Gypsy, spiced up by the rudest Slovak words that are used without hesitation, is the language that a Gypsy child learns from its parents. The situation could partly be solved by much wider usage of Romany language at schools, in books and other publications, radio and TV, festivals, etc.

### 3.3 Customs and Beliefs

Integration and assimilation into *gadjikane* society and culture due to settlement has diluted many Romany cultural values and traditions. The Gypsy ability to adapt to new environments in order to survive has been responsible for the loss of many customs forgotten with time. [6] This ability has been so powerful, that Gypsies are considered to be one of the vehicles through which other folk beliefs and practices have been disseminated and, in areas where they are settled (e.g., Romania), Gypsies have been positive guardians of national customs, dances, and the like, which were disappearing among the peasantry in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [2]

*Marimé*, the pollution code, is one of the most inherent element of the Gypsy culture and society. It refers both to a state of pollution as well as to the sentence of expulsion imposed for violation of purity rules or any disruptive behaviour. *Marimé* pervades every part of traditional Roma life. The majority of Roma adhere to the concept of *marimé*, known also as *moxadó*, *melali*, *mageradó*, *mokadi*, *kulaló*, *limaló*, *prastló*, *palecido*, *pekelimé*, *gonimé* or *bolimé*. [6] This code works even in cases when Gypsies do not realise its existence, since they continue to practise certain actions in the same way. Since this is the case of the Slovak Gypsies, we will refer and return to this several times throughout the following chapters.

*Romaniya* is a set of standards that enforces the beliefs most Roma adhere to. This system of acceptable behaviour and beliefs is central to Roma society. The beliefs of the Roma are varied from country to country and tribe to tribe, but many beliefs are common to Roma everywhere, varying only in the degree in which they are observed or practised. The Roma have always enforced a cultural and social separation from *gadjikane* societies to maintain social and cultural

strength. They do not want to be part of societies that would involve compromise of their basic beliefs. It is *Romaniya* that makes such separation possible. [6]

Customs and traditions of the Slovak Gypsies have been greatly reduced along with degradation of their living conditions, mainly as a consequence of the communist policy of forced assimilation and suppression of everything ethnic. Customs and beliefs, so as language and songs, etc., can survive only by reiteration. If that is forbidden, culture starts dying, especially where it is not supported by artefacts and written records. In fact, it is surprising that something of the Gypsy culture has been left after those forty years. That survived mostly because of their separation from the majority by both spatial and psychological distance.

### 3.3.1 Birth and Children

Children ensure continuation of the family line and add to the respect of the family. Large families are therefore common among the Roma. Strict rules come into effect at the time of pregnancy before the actual birth of a Roma child. Most of these rules are based on the belief that a woman is *marimé* during pregnancy and for a period of time after the birth of the infant until its baptism. She must be isolated as much as possible from the community and she is cared for only by other women in the community. Though she continues to live at home, her husband can spend only short periods of time with her during the pregnancy. Traditionally, the birth cannot take place in the family's usual home, whether it be a tent, trailer, or house because it would then become impure. Because of this, an increasing number of Roma women have preferred to leave their encampments and homes to give birth in a hospital, in spite of their disdain for non-Roma ways. There are any number of rites that might precede the actual birth. Sometimes all the knots in the expectant mother's clothing will be undone or cut. At other times, the expectant mother's hair will be loosened if it has been pinned or tied with a ribbon.

A new mother is allowed to touch only essential objects during what amounts to quarantine. The objects she does touch, such as cooking and eating utensils or sheets, become impure and must be later destroyed. For some tribes, it is two or three months before the new mother will be able to approach her husband or perform household duties without the use of gloves. The husband will often be prohibited from going out between sunset and sunrise so that he may keep away from evil spirits, called *tsinivari*, which might attack the infant during the night. In order to recognise it by its father, in some Roma tribes the child is wrapped in swaddling on which a few drops of paternal blood are placed. In other cases, the child is covered by a piece of clothing that belongs to the father. It is traditional in other tribes for the mother to put the infant on the ground. The father picks up the infant and places a red string around its neck, thereby acknowledging that the child is his. The actual baptism takes place any time from a few weeks to a few months after birth. During this interim period, the mother and child are both isolated from the community. The baby's name cannot be pronounced, it cannot be photographed, and sometimes the baby's face is not even permitted to be shown in public. All impurities are washed away by immersion in water. This is most frequently practised by washing it in running water, an act that is separate from any subsequent baptism. In some cases, amulets or talismans are used to protect the baby from evil spirits. Finally, after the purification by water, the infant formally becomes a human being and can then be called by a name. This name, however, is only one of three that the child will carry through his or her life.

The first name given remains forever a secret. Tradition has it that this name is whispered by the mother, the only one who knows it at the time of birth, and it is never used. The purpose of this secret name is to confuse the supernatural spirits by keeping the real identity of the child from them. The second name is a Roma name, the one used among the Roma themselves. The third name is given at a second baptism that takes place according to the dominant religion of the country in which the child is born. Roma parents might be called unusually permissive raising their children, according to non-Roma standards. The child has a special place in the family, adored and cherished by his or her parents. It is the responsibility of everyone in the family unit to help raise the child. He or she learns whatever skills can be acquired from the mother or father, first by imitating them, and, finally, by helping the parents whenever possible. [6]

Described birth and child raising practises are largely missing or are deformed among the contemporary Slovak Gypsies. Good example is the crooked use of names, which are often imitating actors from commercial movies and soaps, like Rambo, Vandame (Van Damme) and Brusly (Bruce Lee). Nevertheless, the concept of *marimé* is still unconsciously used. Most children are indeed born in hospitals, but not consciously because of danger of pollution of their own homes. The higher level of freedom has among Slovak Gypsies grown into common negligence and disinterest, frequently resulting into juvenile delinquency, social mental retardation and children's placement in special schools and detention homes.

### 3.3.2 Marriage

Engagements and marriages are great and joyous events for the Roma, signifying the extension and continuation of the family. Marriage signifies a change in position of the married couple in Roma society as full and productive members of the community. Roma living a traditional way of life follow strict rules of sexual behaviour. He or she is expected to

marry someone within their particular tribe and most Roma conform by marrying within their group. Even with respect to other Roma, permissible marriage choices may be restricted. This is a way of maintaining tribal and social purity. If a Roma male marries a *gadjo*, his community may eventually accept her, provided that she adopts the Romany way of life. But it is a worse violation of the *marimé* code for a Roma female to marry a *gadjo*, because Roma women are the guarantors for the survival of the population. In the case of a mixed marriage, many tribes consider the children Roma only if the father is Roma. Next, Roma expect females to be virgins when they marry and to remain faithful to their husbands until death. Traditionally, marriages for Roma have occurred early, after age nine but usually before age fourteen. This is most of the time forbidden by the host societies, though.

Many Roma tribes still maintain the institution of bride price (*darro* or *dowry*), a payment made by the family of the groom to the family of the bride. It compensates them for the loss of a daughter and guarantees that she will be treated well. For many Roma tribes it is the parents, and not the young people, who arrange the marriage. According to these tribes, it is an essential and important duty of the parents to find a bride suitable for their son. The prospective brides are judged on their merits, such as health, stamina, strength, dispositions, manners, and domestic skills. The character of the girl's family, as well as their prestige in the community, is also taken into account. In these cases, no courtship is involved. It is possible that the prospective couple will hardly know each other before they marry. There are prolonged discussions between the parents, particularly over the amount of the bride price. At these meetings, the discussions can become quite serious. Sometimes it is necessary to call in friends as witnesses to the bride's good qualities. When an agreement is reached, and the bride price is accepted, the meeting ends with the father of the future bride drinking a symbolic glass of wine. Following the formal agreement of terms, there is often a banquet, complete with music, singing, and dancing. The bride-to-be and her family often feign great sorrow at having to leave each other. Frequently, a few days after the agreement has been made, a ceremony called a *pliashka*, or *plotchka*, is held. This event is attended by both friends and relatives of the couple. The groom-to-be's father takes the necklace of coins and puts it around the future bride's neck, and warmly embraces his future daughter-in-law, or *bori*. The necklace makes it clear to all that the girl is now engaged and not available as a bride to any other man. The groom-to-be's father drinks from the bottle and passes it around to the guests. Because of integration into non-Roma societies, many young couples have opposed arranged engagements and marriages and have eloped. Elopement consists simply of the couple leaving together for a period of time. When they return they are chastised and sometimes pay a nominal fine. They usually are accepted as a married couple in time.

The wedding itself, called the *abiav*, is largely a symbolic act, with no religious significance. Though Roma conform to local laws and customs in the countries in which they marry, the non-Roma religious or civil ceremonies are formalities for them. The mere fact that two people have agreed to live together and share their lives together constitutes marriage, and no formal ritual is required. This does not mean that they do not take marriage seriously. Marriages among Roma are serious commitments, and there are strict obligations on both sides. If a girl is found guilty of adultery, she must be taken back by her parents, who, in addition, must return the bride price to the husband's father. Infidelity in marriage historically has had serious consequences for the wife, including corporal punishment or a sentence of *marimé*. If the girl's father feels she has been mistreated by her husband or her in-laws, he has the right to take her away. In many cases, these complaints are heard before the *kris*, before a final settlement is made. There are traditional but simple wedding ceremonies performed. In some marriages, the bride and groom will join hands in front of the chief of a tribe, or an elder of that tribe, and promise to be true to each other. A few Roma wedding rites are centred on bread. In one rite, the bride and groom each take a piece of bread and place a drop of their blood on the bread. They then exchange and eat each other's bread. In another ritual, the young couple sits down surrounded by relatives and friends. A small amount of salt and bread is then placed on the knees of the bride. The groom takes some of the bread, puts salt on it, and eats it. The bride does the same. The union of salt and bread symbolises a harmonious future together for the groom and bride. The informal, joyous festivities celebrating the marriage can go on for several days. Wedding gifts almost always consist of money. Some families may save much of their money to present as gifts at weddings. When the celebration has ended, it is time for the groom to take his bride to his home. The bride's family kisses the girl and they weep as they unbraid her hair, a symbol for her new marital status. Her new mother-in-law helps the bride knot her *diklo*, or head-scarf, a sign that she is a married woman. She is never seen again without this *diklo* in public.

The celebrations ended, a new life begins for the couple. They now take their places as full members of the community. The major change for the man is that other married men now socially accept him. Changes for the woman are more radical, for it is she who leaves her family, gathers her personal belongings, and moves in with her husband's family. She is guided by her new mother-in-law and expected to take an active role in the household. Not until the birth of their first child, and sometimes not until the birth of several children, will the couple move into their own home. Not until they are parents, too, will they be able to refer to each other as husband and wife. Before then, they use only their first names with each other or in speaking about each other. [6]

"Gypsy marriage" used to be a term bringing about image of large and free festivities also in Slovakia, but it is very rare in the present time - largely because of scarce finances and degraded culture. The habit of marrying someone within their own tribe, due to lack of travel (little means) and thus separation from other Gypsies and because of prejudices also from the majority, has among Slovak Gypsies often overgrown into intermarriage in small groups, causing frequent

genetic defects. The sexual morale is often free of rules and many Gypsy girls are getting pregnant as soon as they reach puberty. (Of course, this is a phenomenon observed also in other disadvantaged social groups. The percentages and comparisons are not known or available.) Physical dominance of male Gypsies is commonly paraded by beating their wives and children. Author of this work has observed similar behaviour pertaining even in much better living conditions, among the Slovak Gypsy asylum seekers in Belgium. What remains, clearly because of the underlying code of *marimé*, is disdain for a Gypsy female to marry a *gadjo*, because women are the guarantors for the survival of the population, and because such women mostly leave their communities. Even in cases when the father is Roma and the mixed couple lives in the Gypsy community, it is not obvious that their children will be considered to be Gypsies. Based on author's experience with the same group of immigrants in Belgium, even children of the pure Gypsy couples are eternally teasing and fighting children of the mixed couple. This is a beautiful example of strong element surviving in the Gypsy culture.

### 3.3.3 Death

All Roma tribes have customs and rituals regarding death. The belief in the supernatural is fundamental, common to all Roma. Spirits surround them all of the time. These must all be carefully guarded against, or combated by the use of spells and charms. For Roma, death is a senseless, unnatural occurrence that should anger those who die. At the approach of death, Roma are concerned not only with the pain and heartbreak of the final separation from a loved one. They are also worried about the possible revenge the dead, or *muló*, might seek against those who remain in the world of the living.

There are many superstitious omens of death, the most common of which is the cry of the owl. A more certain sign of death is serious illness. When Roma feel that one of their group is about to die, word is urgently sent to all relatives, no matter how far away they might be. All relatives who can possibly do so appear at the bedside of the person who is reaching the end of his life. It is necessary to show family solidarity, and to obtain forgiveness for any harmful act they might have committed toward the dying in the past. There must be no danger of a lingering hidden envy or secret resentment on the part of those who are about to begin a journey to the world of the dead. The dying Rom must never be left alone. This is not only out of compassion for his condition, but also for fear of possible anger. He must not die in his or her habitual place. Nomadic Roma traditionally move the deathbed in front of the tent or caravan, usually under an improvised canopy. Relatives and friends gather around the dying Rom, day and night. Other Roma in the camp take care of practical matters such as feeding the visitors and tracking down those friends or relatives who have been difficult to reach. Tears and lamentations are publicly displayed.

When death finally comes, the lamentation increases. From that time until the burial, certain traditional customs are observed. Above all, there is total absorption in the mourning, with no distractions or activities. There is no washing, shaving, or combing of the hair. No food is prepared. Only the drinking of coffee, brandy, or other liquors is permitted. Mirrors might be covered and vessels containing water emptied. Touching the body of the deceased is discouraged, for fear of *marimé*, or contamination. Because of this he or she is washed and dressed, in the finest clothes, immediately before death. If death has been unexpected and this has not been possible, a non-Roma, such as an undertaker, is usually called in to perform these tasks immediately following the death. Some tribes may plug the nostrils of the deceased with beeswax or pearls to prevent evil spirits from entering the body. An important step is the gathering together of those things that will be useful to the deceased during the journey from life to be placed in the coffin. These can include almost anything, such as clothing, tools, eating utensils, jewellery and money.

A small band is sometimes hired to play marches, going ahead of the coffin. This band is followed by the widow or widower, other mourning relatives and, if local religious customs must be followed, by a priest. As this procession enters the cemetery, the sobbing of the mourners increases. This display of sorrow reaches its peak as the coffin is lowered into the grave. The mourners generally throw coins, bank notes as well as handfuls of earth into the grave. The colour worn by mourners at Romany funerals, until recent times, has traditionally been white or red. Today, black is often adopted as the colour of mourning. White has been thought of as a symbol of purity, of protection, and of good luck. In some Eastern European tribes, the women will dress entirely in white, and the men will wear white ties and gloves and place white bands around their hats. Red, too, has symbolised protection against the evil spirits of the dead and has often been worn at Romany funerals. Roma feel that the colour red brings good luck, probably because of the ancient belief that blood is the source of vitality and life. Red blouses and skirts are common apparel for women at funerals among some tribes, and men often wear red kerchiefs around their necks. Red is also a dominant colour in many Romany funeral decorations. There is inevitably a large crowd at a Romany funeral. It is an occasion for friends and family to unite, to wish the departed a good journey as he or she enters a new life. Newspaper accounts sometimes describe the elaborate funerals held for an „important“ Rom. It must be remembered that a huge funeral is the rule and not the exception in Roma society, and all Roma are entitled to enormous funerals.

Following the burial, all material ties with the dead must be carefully destroyed. Whatever can be burned, such as clothing and linens, will be turned into ashes. Articles such as plates, cups, glasses, or jewellery that belonged to the dead

will be broken or mutilated. Sometimes animals that belonged to the dead must be killed. Only the horse is usually excluded from this rule. The deceased's automobile, even trailer, may be burned or destroyed. This removes any possibility of *marimé* from the deceased. Some tribes take this a step further and believe that the deceased's spirit will need their possessions in the afterlife. Since this obviously imposes great financial hardship on the surviving family, it has become more and more usual to sell these objects rather than destroy them. They are never sold to Roma, and they should not be sold as to profit enormously from the death of a Rom. No Roma would consider risking *marimé*, or contamination by accepting or buying them. There should be no trace of the deceased in the Romany camp or household. Even the use of his or her name is avoided, except when absolutely necessary. Another tradition with some tribes following the funeral is a dinner called a *pomana*. It is an enormous meal, usually the first one eaten by the mourners since the death of their friend or relative. In some tribes, the deceased may be represented at these meals, by another person of the same age of the deceased and dressed in a similar way. These *pomana* are held at various intervals, traditionally nine days, six weeks, six months, and, finally, one year after the death. At each of these *pomana*, certain relatives, beginning with the most distant ones, announce their intention to end their period of mourning. Last to do so, after one year, is the deceased's immediate family. [6]

According to traditional Romany beliefs, life for the dead continues on another level. However, there is a great fear among the survivors that the dead might return in some supernatural form to haunt the living. It is for this reason that the name of the dead should not be mentioned, that the body should not be touched, and that all objects that belonged to the dead must be destroyed. The survivors must be protected in every way from the evil *marimé* spirits that the dead can emit. To avoid this, stones or thorn bushes are sometimes placed around the grave. The Roma believe that the soul of the dead might be reincarnated in another man or animal. Most feared of all is the possible reappearance of the dead as a *muló* or „living dead.“ Unless strict precautions are taken, this *muló* might escape from the body and seek revenge on those who had harmed him when living or had caused his death. The mere sight of a *muló*, who can appear as a wolf, terrorises Roma. It is a certain sign of bad luck. A belief in the supernatural obviously plays a significant role in many aspects of Romany life. However, of all their rites, the customs and rituals connected with death are more filled with fear and superstition than any others.

There are little reliable information available about peculiarity of Slovak Romany death and burial rituals, but it is justified to assume general loss of traditions that is observed in other spheres of their culture. This could be one of the challenges of the presumed PhD research.

### 3.3.4 Religions, Superstitions and Taboos

The Roma cannot be said to have a religion of their own. They have usually adopted the faiths of the countries in which they live. Among the Roma can be found Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and Muslims. Many prefer to carry out religious rituals in their own homes or in the context of folk observances. The best known Romany religious festivals are the annual pilgrimages to Saintes Maries de la Mer on the Mediterranean coast of France and Sainte Anne de Beaupre in Quebec, Canada. In the former, the Roma pay homage to Sara the Black on the 24-26 of May. In Quebec, the Roma pay homage to Saint Anne on July 26. These annual religious festivals serve as social gatherings for the Roma.

Though they have, for practical purposes, adopted the religions of those with whom they have come into contact, formal religion is often supplemented by faith in the supernatural, in omens, curses called *amria*, and healing rituals. Gypsies who practice fortune telling do so only to profit by the *gadjos*, but never among themselves. The fortune teller is always a woman, called a *drabardi*. The concept of fortune telling contains several independent elements that are misleadingly grouped together. One element is foretelling the future, called *drabaripé* or *drabarimos*. Another element relates to healing powers, which the Roma do practice among them. Both elements are based on a belief in the supernatural. Good luck charms, amulets, and talismans are common among Roma. They are carried to prevent misfortune or heal sickness. The female healer who prescribes these traditional cures or preventatives is called a *drabarni* or *drabengi*. Some Roma carry bread in their pockets as protection against bad luck, or *bibaxt*, and supernatural spirits or ghosts, called *muló*. Horseshoes are considered good luck by some Roma just as they are by non-Roma. Since Roma feel that illness is an unnatural condition, called *prikaza*, there are many supernatural ways in which they believe disease can be prevented or cured. One method of lowering a fever has been to shake a young tree. In this way the fever is transferred from the sick person's body to the tree. Another method to bring down fever has been to drink powdered portions of certain animals, dissolved in spirits, to the accompaniment of a chant. Some beliefs include carrying a mole's foot as a cure for rheumatism, and carrying a hedgehog's foot to prevent a toothache. Any number of herbs, called *drab*, are used for the prevention or cure of various diseases. Herbalism may be practised by both sexes. Some of these herbs, called *sastarimas-kodrabaró*, actually have medicinal value in addition to their supernatural qualities.

Most of Roma society relies heavily on distinctions between behaviour that is pure, *vujo* or *wuzho*, and polluted, or *marimé*. *Marimé* has a dual meaning to the Roma. It refers both to a state of pollution or defilement as well as to the sentence of expulsion imposed for violation of purity rules or any behaviour disruptive to the Roma community. Pollu-

tion and rejection are thus closely associated with one another. Pollution taboos, and their names, vary from group to group and often among smaller Romany units. Nevertheless, Roma define themselves in part by their adherence to these cleanliness rituals. There may be class distinctions among some Roma, based on how strictly individuals or families maintain distinctions between purity and impurity. The *marimé* concept applied to personal hygiene means „dirty“ or „polluted.“ Much of it stems from the division of a woman's body into two parts, above the waist and below the waist. A woman is clean from the waist up and „polluted“ from the waist down. There is no shame, *lashav*, connected with the upper part of the body. The lower part of the body is, however, an object of shame, *baro lashav*, because it is associated with menstruation. The fact that blood flows without injury seems to be the proof of a bodily impurity. This concept of *marimé* as applied to women is one explanation in many tribes the Roma women wear long skirts and the fact that the bottom of those skirts must not touch a man other than the Roma woman's husband. Traditionally, a woman in a house must not pass in front of a man, or even between two men. She must go around them in order to avoid „infecting“ them. At meals, the men must be served from the rear for the same reason. If a Roma woman is not wearing the traditional long skirt, she must cover her legs with a blanket or coat when sitting. Many of the traditional laws of hygiene deal with water. For example, Roma must wash only in running water. A shower would be acceptable, but a bath would not be, for the person would be sitting or lying in dirty, stagnant water. Dishes cannot be rinsed in the same sink or basin that is used for washing personal clothing. The kitchen sink is used only for washing dishes, and therefore it cannot ever be used for washing one's hands. In addition, women's clothes and men's clothes cannot be washed together, because of the impurities of the women's bodies. Certain Roma tribes have set specific and very rigid rules for the drawing of water from a river or stream. The water from the farthest point upstream, therefore the purest, is used for drinking and cooking. Working their way downstream, the water is used for washing dishes and bathing. Further, down the stream water is used for washing or nourishing horses. Further down washing clothes is appropriate, and at the farthest point downstream, washing the clothes of pregnant or menstruating women. In order to make certain that there will be no impurities, separate pails are always used for the different uses of water. Some traditional rules might make sense to the non-Roma. The surfaces of tables used for eating are kept spotless. Handkerchiefs for blowing the nose are frowned upon. They merely preserve the dirt of the nose. For this reason Roma prefer to blow their noses in disposable material. In any case, after blowing the nose or sneezing, one must wash before eating. To some, the *marimé* code of pollution may seem unfair to women. However, *marimé* also gives women great power among Roma, the threat of pollution is so great. Pre-pubescent girls and older women are placed in a different category from other women, because they do not menstruate. This allows them more freedom and they are allowed to socially interact with men with fewer restrictions. There are remedies or punishments for a person who has become infected, or *marimé*. Those present can forgive minor offences, clearly unintentional ones, at the time the offence is committed. Ones that are more serious must be dealt with by the community and, in some cases, by the *kris*. [6]

Fortune telling nor healing are not noted among the Slovak Gypsies. Other customs and omens are probably surviving, but they need more research. As for *marimé*, one of its two constituents, the metaphoric pollution, is still underlying the daily life of the Gypsies, but the second one is deformed in a catastrophic way. Today's Gypsies of Slovakia are, paradoxically, called as examples of dirty people and so are their households. One of the reasons certainly is the fact that the Gypsy settlements are mostly built illegally on state or private owned parcels and therefore they are not supplied water, which also brings about problems with washing (no electricity, expensive washing powders). Financial scarceness means also less frequent purchase of clothes and shoes, etc. Majority often looks down on Gypsies as the dirty and smelling ones, therefore. At schools, where children have to be close for prolonged time periods, Gypsy boys and girls are frequently ostracised because of bad smell and supposed fleas.

### 3.3.5 Body Law, Clothing and Nutrition

The stereotype of the Roma woman with the long, colourful skirt, the heavy earrings and often a flower in her hair has some basis in fact. Traditionally, exposure of a woman's legs is a grave offence, so long full skirts must be worn. It is probable that long skirts were once thought of as protection against sexual advances. Besides, they also cover the lower part of the body, which is considered impure. These skirts are generally of bright colours, often consisting of many layers. Except for colour, a woman does not have a varied wardrobe. Among many tribes, if a woman is married she must display that fact by keeping her head covered by a *diklo*, or headscarf. Women usually allow their hair to grow long. Their hair may then be braided or rolled into a bun on the back of the head. Roma women usually wear jewellery, not only for its beauty, but also for its intrinsic value. They feel most secure carrying their valuables on their own persons. Traditionally, acquired wealth has been converted into jewellery or gold coins called *galbi*, the latter sometimes worn on clothing as adornments, or woven into the hair. As for men, there is really no characteristic clothing. Since the head is regarded as the body's focal point, many Roma men draw attention to it by wearing large hats and wide mous-





taches. For festive occasions, they will wear a good suit and show a preference for bright colours. Most of them own one suit at a time and wear it until it is frayed. A brightly coloured neck scarf may be worn on special occasions. Generally, however, their clothing is indistinguishable from that of the *gadje* among whom they live or travel.

Traditionally the eating habits of Roma have been conditioned by their nomadic way of life. Their diet has consisted largely of what was readily available. This included wild fruits, berries, leafy plants, molluscs, and small mammals. A favourite European Roma dish has traditionally been roasted hedgehog, although this delicacy is gradually falling from favour among many Roma. It has rich and succulent meat with a pork-like flavour, which is also enjoyed by some non-Roma Europeans. Ideally, this animal is flavoured with garlic and placed skin and all above burning hot coals or stones. In this way, it cooks in its own juices. When the roasting is completed, the animal's prickles are shaved or picked off and the skin is peeled back. The meat is served, sometimes wrapped in aromatic leaves. Chicken and other fowl can also be cooked this way. On these special occasions beer, wine and other spirits are substituted for water at the meal. As the Roma have gradually come into greater contact with people of the cities, their eating habits have adapted more and more to those of the non-Roma.

*Marimé* taboos extend to animals as well, from the edibility of certain types of meat to pet ownership. *Romaniya* prohibits cruelty to animals and they may only be killed for food. The German Sinti consider eating horseflesh a serious offence, as do other tribes. The exclusion of horsemeat has more to do with respect than to *marimé*, the horse has been so important to the Roma's mobility and survival in the past. Dogs and cats are considered polluted because of their unclean living habits. Roma consider cats particularly unclean because they lick their paws after burying their feces. The critical concern, as with dogs licking themselves, is that the uncleanness of the external world may defile the purity of the inner self if it is permitted to enter the body through the mouth. Cats are also a sign of impending death to many tribes. If a cat sets foot in a house, trailer or automobile, a purification ceremony may be required. Dogs are also unclean, but to a lesser extent. Dogs are tolerated outside the house because of their value as watchdogs. Owls are considered portents of death, just as with many non-Roma groups. In some tribes, the owl's cry is considered very bad luck, or *bibaxt*. For this reason, owls are avoided as food or pets. [6]

### 3.3.6 Kinship Organisation and Control

The archetypal Gypsy family consists of a married couple, their unmarried children, and at least one married son, his wife and their children. Upon marriage, a young Gypsy couple typically lives with the husband's parents while the young wife learns the ways of her husband's group. Ideally, by the time an older son is ready to move away with his family, a younger son will have married and joined the household with his new wife.

Bands are made up of *vitsas*, which are name groups of extended families with common descent either patrilineal or matrilineal, as many as 200 strong. A large *vitsa* may have its own chief and council. *Vitsa* membership can be claimed if offspring result through marrying into the *vitsa*. Loyalty and economic co-operation are expected at the household rather than the *vitsa* level. For co-operation, a man probably relies on an action-set composed of a circle of meaningful kinsmen with whom he is physically close and not, at the time, in dispute. If Gypsy kings are a romantic popular fiction, the existence of political authorities among the Gypsies is an established fact. Those boasting of noble titles such as „duke“ or „count“ in their early historical dealings with local nationals were probably no more than chieftains of bands, who moved in groups of anything from 10 to a few hundred households. These chieftains (*voivodes*) are elected for life from among outstanding families of the group, and the office is not heritable. Their power and authority vary according to the size of the band, its traditions and its relationships with other bands within a tribe. The *voivode* acted as treasurer for the whole band, decided the pattern of its migration and became its spokesperson to local municipal authorities. He governed through a council of elders that also consulted with the *phuri dai*, a senior woman in the band. The *phuri dai*'s influence was strong, particularly in regard to the fate of the women and children, and seemed to rest much on the evident earning power and organisation of the women as a group within the band.

Strongest among the Gypsy institutions of social control was the *Romany kris*, connoting both the body of customary law and values of justice as well as the ritual and formation of the tribunal of the band. Basic to the Gypsy code were the all-embracing concepts of fidelity, cohesiveness and reciprocity within the recognised political unit. The ultimate negative sanction of the *kris* tribunal, which dealt with all disputes and breaches of the Gypsy code, was excommunication from the band. However, a sentence of ostracism might exclude the individual from participation in certain band activities and punish him with menial tasks. In some cases, rehabilitation was granted by the elders and followed by a feast of reconciliation. [2] These laws have never been written down or codified. They have been passed along for generations by word of mouth, but this fact makes the decisions nonetheless binding. The Roma interpret laws according to contemporary custom. Former interpretations of laws may be gradually revised as the needs of the community evolve. The exclusive reliance on oral transmission has led to a high degree of flexibility. Nevertheless, there is a shared feeling that the law is clearly defined. Few ever challenge this notion. This strict adherence to the law in part accounts for the continued cohesion of the Roma in spite of their persecution and forced migration.

Each chief handles all day-to-day conflicts within his population. When conflict emerges between Roma of different vitsi or kumpaniyi, a *divano* may assemble. A *divano* is an informal proceeding where the chiefs of the various clans try to mediate a dispute. When the Roma cannot settle a controversy amicably in a *divano*, a *kris* Romany may become necessary. In former times, the *kris* usually mediated three kinds of cases: property losses, matters of honour, and moral or religious issues, including disregard of *marimé* taboos. If the matter to be settled is a serious one, such as theft, defaults in payments of debts, adultery, acts of physical violence, serious *marimé* violations, or complicated disputes between two parties, a court is convened. This court is the most important moral force in Roma life. The *krisnitori*, or judge, is surrounded by the members of the *kris* council, who act as associate judges. Generally, five or more men from both sides, usually the elders, form the council. The members of the court are the most respected and wisest men available at the time. Women are never included. Of these members, the eldest is generally chosen to preside at the hearings.

There are no jails or executioners in a Roma community. Perhaps the most severe punishment for a Roma is *marimé*, or banishment, from his own community. This banishment is achieved by declaring the offender *marimé*, a term that means socially rejected in its legal sense. It is considered a sentence of social death. *Marimé* stigmatises all wrongdoers as polluted and justifies their expulsion from the community. The offender cannot have any social contact with other members of the tribe. The simple pleasures of Romany life, eating together and camaraderie, are forbidden, and the guilty party is condemned to live in the world of the non-Roma. No marriages are arranged for those stigmatised as *marimé*, and without marriage in Roma society one's economic and social life is over. When they die, no one will bury them, and they will not have a funeral. In many cases, not only the offender, but his or her own family as well, is declared *marimé*. This harsh punishment is a great deterrent to crime within the Roma community. It can last for days or years. It involves permanent loss of status and respect even when the guilty party has been reinstated. Permanent *marimé* is rare and used only for serious crimes such as murder. In all cases of *marimé*, enforcement depends primarily on a superstitious fear of the consequences of violating the *marimé* rules. The individual who violates a *marimé* prohibition has succumbed to powers of evil and destruction that are so frightening that even his own family shuns him for fear of contamination [6]

Although there is no institutionalised *kris* among the Slovak Gypsies, there is certainly a separate system of rules that is still more or less self-containing. Most of the problems occurring between the Gypsies are arbitrated within the settlements, without calling for the attention of the Slovak state jurisdiction. Punishments are imposed within the settlements as well. If there is a Gypsy culprit in a conflict with the *gadjo* world, a lot of solidarity takes place in the Gypsy settlement. Although the person is known, Gypsies would not betray him to the police. It happens that such a person, because of harming a *gadjo* (stealing and minor offences mostly), grows into a sort of hero in the eyes of his group. In some severe cases, when the culprit was an important person in the Gypsy community, a less important person is handed over to serve the punishment. This is certainly another manifestation of underlying code of pollution in case of contact with the non-Gypsies, and high cohesiveness of the ethnic group. Both these principles prove healthy roots of the culture. However, what seems not to function is the banishment from the community. This and other details are open to further research.

### 3.4 Crafts, Skills and Art

Traditionally, Gypsies have pursued occupations that allowed them to maintain an itinerant life on the perimeters of settled society. The men were livestock traders, animal trainers and exhibitors, tinkers (smiths and utensil repairmen), and musicians; the women told fortunes, sold potions, begged, and worked as entertainers. Before the advent of veterinary medicine, many farmers looked to Gypsy livestock dealers for advice on herd health and husbandry. The Gypsy tinker saved damaged pots, pans and metal utensils for repair. Many of the names of the different Romany tribes are based on traditional occupations they used to practice, but they are no longer a reliable guide to the activities of particular families. For a collective economic effort, Roma may form a purely functional association, whose members do not necessarily belong to the same clan or even the same dialect group.

Also nowadays, Gypsies prefer trades where they can maintain minimal prolonged contact with the *gadje* and safeguard their independence. The men generally work on short-term jobs that do not require them to stay in one place for any length of time. Because of this, agriculture, which would have necessitated permanent residence, had never interested them until recent times, when Roma began to take on occasional summer jobs as itinerant farm workers. They have been able to find such jobs since they will accept work that many *gadje* will not do. Modern Gypsy life reflects the progress of the *gadje* world. They travel in cars, trucks and trailers, and livestock trading has given way to the sale of used cars and trailers. Their love for horses has been transferred to a love for cars, and they are often skilled at engine and body repair. Although mass production of stainless steel pots and pans has rendered the tinker obsolete, some urban Gypsies have found employment as car mechanics and auto body repairmen. Some of them are still working in travelling circuses and amusement parks, as animal trainers and handlers (horses, bears [29]), concession operators, or performing music, metalworking and dealing in scrap metal. Individually, many Roma are peddlers, especially in Europe. Because the movements and travels are often uncertain for the nomadic Roma, it is difficult to build up a steady clientele in any one place. For this reason, they are forced to try to sell their wares to passersbys, or by going from house to

house. Some sell goods they have bought cheaply, others sell what they make themselves, although in the twentieth century a number of Romany crafts have suffered from a devastating competition with mass-produced articles. The articles they sell are generally of minor value, such as baskets, brooms, rakes and cooking utensils. In gaining a livelihood, the women play their full part. It is they who often sell their wares from door to door and who do the fortune telling. Fortune telling, among the Vlach-speaking Roma in the U.S. known as „reading and advising“, is still considerably widespread. [2] [6]

If someone is so hungry that he can hear his stomach contractions, in Slovak it is still usual to say that Gypsies are playing music in his belly, or that Gypsies are forging nails in his belly. Could there be a better confirmation of the two most traditional Gypsy occupations? [40] However, because of the 40 years long communist assimilation policy, the pace of industrialisation, no understanding for different culture and its spiritual heritage, traditional Gypsy skills degraded and largely disappeared. The exception might be music, but that also became a feature not common to the majority of the Gypsy population. The same applies to Gypsy theatre. These two, directly reflecting the inner life of an individual and his/her social or local group, could be very useful for regeneration of the Slovak Gypsy culture.

Next we will have a look at some of the strongholds of traditional Gypsy skills and art - metalworking, music, dance and theatre, fortune telling, storytelling and legends. One should also mention graphic art. Although Gypsies have not pursued a tradition of painting techniques that has been widespread in Europe. Instead, they showed their talent in rich painted and carved decorations of their wagons and craft products from iron, terracotta and wood.

### 3.4.1 Metalworking

*Metalwork* is one area in which Roma have traditionally excelled. They have been known as metalworkers from the beginning of their history. The art of the forge is an ancient one and the Roma seem to have originally learned this art while in India. They have made nails, tools, arms and cooking equipment. They have been skilled at plating objects with tin, or embossing and engraving jewellery. In Hungary and Romania, they have been gold washers, collecting gold deposits from river bottoms. The Roma have been experts in all forms of metalwork, whether as tinsmiths, copper-smiths or silversmiths. Roma have not only been master metalworkers, but they have also shown great ingenuity in devising relatively light equipment, such as forges and hammers. These tools are necessary to their work and are specifically designed to be easily transported. Knife grinding, or blade sharpening, is a common occupation for many Roma in Europe, and Roma can be frequently seen sharpening scissors and knives with their portable whet-stone wheels on street corners. Today, the traditional art of metalworking has been transferred to jewellery design, metal container repair, automobile body repair, and welding.

### 3.4.2 Music, Dance and Theatre

Roma are also noted as entertainers, especially as musicians and dancers. They have made genuine contributions to the non-Roma world. Roma soloists and orchestras have entertained non-Roma since they first came to Europe. Documents show that they were favoured as court musicians in Hungary in the fifteenth century, and throughout Europe for several centuries since then. The instruments traditionally preferred by Roma musicians have been guitar, lute, percussion instruments such as cymbal and drums, cello, and violin. Though their orchestras have included clarinet, the use of other brass and wind instruments has increased in recent times. [6]

The Roma skill at improvisation is well known. In Russia, troops of Romany singers attained popularity under the Czarist regimes for their improvisations of Russian song and music. In Hungary and Romania, Romany orchestras, with their virtuoso violinists and cymbal players, developed a style that has come to be taken as the hallmark of Romany music. Much of what outsiders get to hear is in fact European music with a Romany interpretation. Hungarian Gypsy music and Spanish Gypsy music is not pure Gypsy music as such. Both are brilliant and inventive adaptations of the local music. Flamenco, one of the most famous examples, is the music and dance of the Andalusian Gypsies, or Flamencos. Its roots are in Gypsy, Andalusian, Arabic, and possibly Spanish Jewish folk song and, according to some scholars, in Byzantine and Indian religious chant. It developed from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward as Gypsies, Arabs, Jews and socially outcast Christians mingled on the fringes of society. The essence of flamenco is *cante*, or song, often accompanied by guitar music and improvised dance. In flamenco dance, the men's steps are intricate, with toe and heel clicking (*zapateados*); women's dancing traditionally relies on the grace of hands and body, rather than on footwork. Particularly in the *baile grande*, or profound dance, the arm, hand and foot movements closely resemble those of classical Hindu dance. Gypsies



began to dance professionally in cafés in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the word flamenco was first applied to their music and dance at this time. From Andalusia this style spread across the Iberian Peninsula and then to Spanish America. Although earlier *cantes* had been sung without guitar - as some varieties still are - in the cafés the guitar became prominent. [2]

Another viable part of Gypsy culture, although still not widespread to its full potential, is theatre. One of the best-known ones in the world is Theatre Romen from Moscow. [3] Good example of a high-quality professional theatre is also Romathan, which is one of the most important Gypsy cultural bodies in contemporary Slovakia. With its own and adopted plays it also regularly successfully performs abroad. It was established in May 1992 and based in Košice in East Slovakia, i.e. in the area with the highest population of Gypsies. Romathan is a company of talented Romany singers, dancers and actors from all over the republic that were chosen from festivals and by audition. Today there are about 80 members. The aim of the Theatre Romathan is to serve as a scholarly documentary centre to gather and preserve old Romany culture, to develop contemporary Romany culture, to grant space for contemporary Romany authors. They would like to co-operate with Romany artists from the whole world, to represent and propagate Romany culture in the world and so contribute to understanding between *Romanies* and non-*Romanies*. In the near future, they would like to use a portable stage construction or a caravan in order to be able to come with culture and arts directly to even to those Romany communities where the surfaced roads end and where *Romanies* must walk several kilometres for fresh water. Last but not least, the Theatre-school Romathan has patronage for a Secondary Arts School for talented Romany children and educates and instructs its own members. [5] Romathan is certainly a body that could play an essential role in a national rebirth of the Slovak Gypsies. One must note, however, that its actors do not share the same way of life as most of the Slovak Gypsies. That, because of lasting disgust at anything that is related to the white majority and therefore *marimé*, raises real danger of the art not being recognised by their own people. A complex co-operation from the part of the education, social and media system could help.

### 3.4.3 Fortune Telling

The occupation for which the Gypsies have always been most famous is the woman's activity of fortune telling. It has appealed to the Roma, because it gave them an aura of mystery and of magic. Since it was the one means of close contact with the *gadjikane* world, fortune-tellers were useful in learning of the social, political, and economic climate of a region they were visiting. Their clients often took them into their confidence, revealing facets of local conditions the Roma would otherwise be unable to judge. Finally, of course, fortune telling was a relatively simple way of earning money. Gypsies are known to read tealeaves, see visions in crystal balls, analyse the future from reading cards, and from interpreting the significance of numbers. They have practised palmistry, judging a person's fate, character and aptitudes from the shape of hands and fingers and the designs of lines in the hand. Though they claim that their great powers of prediction come from supernatural sources, the real skill of fortune-tellers lies in their remarkable abilities in judging human character and in manipulating human desires. Fortune-teller woman knows that most people remember what comes true and forget what does not. She knows, too, that she is capable of adding an exotic, exciting element to the life of the *gadje*. To please their believing clients, they most often predict a favourable future. There will often be mysterious warnings of perils that might well be avoided by preventatives provided. As a rule, Roma never practice their skills as fortune-tellers on other Roma. [6]

### 3.4.4 Storytelling, Legends, Poems and Literature

As far as we know, Gypsies never made written records in the history. Their rich heritage of legends, fairy tales, poems and songs, was passed on only orally. Subject to relatively fast alterations, these works were inevitably stripped off all the geographic and chronological details, and therefore it has been impossible to locate and trace back their origins, even for Gypsies. Instead, they often contain a general nostalgic attitude of eternal wanderers seeking for their lost homeland.

Storytelling used to be the tradition that carried the tales from one generation to another. Gypsies liked to tell stories and being good at it, they received support from their audiences. Credibility of the stories was of little importance. What counted was the level of interest they were able to induce. Without doubt, this was also the way in what the beliefs of their Egyptian origins spread around. Elsewhere in time and space this priority often brought about disdain of the majority people, who considered Gypsies to be liars and cheaters.

Survival of this heritage is a vital condition for preservation of the Gypsy culture. The same what we wrote about Gypsy language, applies also to their legends. Without support or at least recognising by the majority of the host population, Gypsies will continue to lose this tradition. As for the Slovak Gypsies, the situation is even more alarming. Losing the traditional ways of subsistence, in bad living conditions, and pushed to the margins of the society Gypsies often decline to apathy deepened by alcoholism and resulting to various forms of crime. In such environment, there is little room for tales and legends about the proud nation they used to be. Freely exposed to raw video culture children learn incomparably more about Rambo and Predator, violence and sex, than about wizards and good fairies. [35] Even though official

dictionary and grammar exists, as well as some Gypsy literature, it is of little use due to widespread under-literacy or illiteracy.

### 3.5 Living Standard

The Romany population in the whole world tends to suffer disproportionately from higher rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, crime and disease. When discussing „the Roma problem“, most references focus on the part of the Romany population living in very poor rural and urban conditions. The number of Roma living in unbearable conditions in rural communities and devastated central city zones is agglomerating and represents a potentially very serious societal, social and economic problem.

Many Slovak Gypsies are today living illegal village satellite settlements, dependent on social security system since unemployment is often total, frequent intermarriage is common along with mental deficiency, alcoholism and drug abuse, aggressive illegal loaning, prostitution, theft and crime in general. Their living standard is dangerously low not only in comparison with the host country majority, but also in comparison with any theoretical standard.

#### 3.5.1 Nomadism

Nomadism is a way of life of peoples who do not live continually in the same place but move cyclically or periodically. It is distinguished from migration, which is non-cyclic and involves a total change of habitat. Nomadism does not imply unrestricted and undirected wandering; rather, it is based on temporary centres whose stability depends on the availability of food supply and the technology for exploiting it. The term nomad encompasses three general types: nomadic hunters and gatherers, pastoral nomads, and tinker or trader nomads. The latter groups may also make and sell simple products or get hired out as labourers. The diverse groups that are loosely termed Gypsies are the best-known example of this type of nomadism.



Nomadism has declined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for economic and political reasons, including the spread of systematic agriculture, the growth of industry, and the policies of governments that view nomadism as incompatible with modern life. Wandering, or *lungo drom*, has been one of the typical features of the Gypsy life. Used as a verb, Gypsy or Gypsying means to wander, play the Gypsy or picnic in the woods. However, this exotic stereotype has often disguised the fact that fewer and fewer may have remained truly migratory. However, it is clear that nomadism by the Gypsies has been largely insular in character. All nomadic Gypsies migrate at least seasonally along patterned routes that - if not stopped - ignore national boundaries. They also follow along a chain, as it were, of kin or tribal links. [2]

Most of the Gypsies that still travel do so only part-time and use cars, trailers and camper instead of horses and wagons. They need to pay the fuel and most of the camping sites. For these reasons, many Roma retain their mobility and keep open all possibilities for travel while maintaining houses during cold winter months and when work is scarce. [6]

As we have mentioned in other chapters, Slovak Roma do not practice nomadic life anymore. The Slovak and Hungarian Slovak groups have been sedentary due to various limitations already for two or three centuries. The Vlach group has been travelling until the time of the communist regime that banned it for good. Because work possibilities and travelling used to be two sides of the same coin, this has certainly contributed to degradation of the Gypsy traditions, skills and language.

#### 3.5.2 Housing

Gypsies that do not travel (not only in Slovakia) live typically 2-3 kilometres outside of a village in camps of settlements with only a few dirty houses without facilities, in cellars, or in cardboard or wooden shacks.

Housing is one of the most immediate problems of the Slovak Gypsies. Besides appalling conditions they live in, the occupied grounds belong either to the adjacent town or private owners. That was not a big issue question at the totalitarian regime, when communists seized all private property, but now owners claim back the grounds that Gypsies never bought from them. Consequently, there is usually no water, sewage, gas and electricity supply, because nobody will finance connection of a illegal site.

In the past, there were quite a few attempts to provide better dwellings for the Gypsies in Slovakia. However, these were often met with very little interest. In many cases, Gypsies have openly refused to move into new blocks of flats or

houses. In other cases, new flats were totally damaged, burned by campfires in the rooms, with broken doors and windows, metal parts sold to recycling companies etc. Reasons are still widely discussed. Some claim flats or any closed spaces too strange for the Gypsies. Others create theories about vital importance of spatial organisation analogous to the one of the present shacks, or that it is unacceptable to live on higher than ground floors for the Gypsies. What contributed was probably feeling that it was something they got without any effort, so they did not have to take care of it. All of these probably play a role, but author of this work believes that the main reason is the pertaining fear of contacting the *gadjo* majority and receiving something from it.

This situation has naturally also further consequences in poor health condition of the Slovak Gypsies, low life expectancy, bad conditions for children and their education, etc. Environmental issues are important, too. Some of the camps, such as the one near Rudnany in Eastern Slovakia, were built on dumping grounds or other areas containing materials such as mercury and arsenic. Besides, shacks like those are incomparably more vulnerable to natural disasters than proper houses. One example for all follows. Heavy rains on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1998 brought about the worst floods in Slovak history, changing otherwise quiet rivers in eastern Slovakia into a lethal force. The tragic results were 63 dead, over 3,000 people evacuated from their homes, and two thousand houses destroyed. The floods hit the Gypsy settlement near the community of Jarovnice the hardest, and the highest number of casualties occurred here. The otherwise harmless rain-swollen Malá Svinka brook claimed at least 44 children and 16 adults. Jarovnice is one of the largest and the most backward of the Romany settlements in Slovakia. Almost four thousand Roma live in unbearable living conditions in Jarovnice, most of them without work and illiterate. They received more attention from the unique art work of the Romany children of Jarovnice, which has won several top prizes at international competitions of children's art and has been exhibited in many European countries. But even this international success failed to attract a broader government's interest in the Roma in the settlements of eastern Slovakia. [7]

### 3.5.3 Health

Living in typically bad conditions (hygiene, warmth, running water), and in combination with unhealthy way of life (irregular sleep, alcohol, cigarettes, etc.), Gypsies are physically more vulnerable than other groups of inhabitants. Poor health condition and short life expectancy are common results. Moreover, there is a lot of concern about the mental health state of many Gypsies, especially of the children that are growing up in such conditions. Gypsy children are generally considered as educationally neglected - they are left unattended and often also without basic needs for life. Lagging behind in the mental development is one of the most visible sign of that. This lagging behind is clearly socially conditioned and sometimes it is regarded as pseudo-oligophrenia. It should get proper attention, because as shown by longitudinal researches, this sort of mental retardation tends to come close to the normal state in good social conditions. Educational negligence conditions also somatic retardation, for bad hygiene habits and way of life lower the general immunity of the body and raises the predisposition to illnesses, with all negative consequences. Such illnesses most often include kidney, lungs and urocyt diseases and rachitis.

Development of intellect is conditioned by development of senses that mediate information. Such knowledge reflects in imagination and leads to abstract thinking. This process is conditioned by sufficient amount of positive impulses from the environment. A Gypsy child grows up in an environment that contains very little positive impulses. Its senses are not purposefully cultivated and their sensibility is so low, because perception is not connected with practical activity. The level of psychomotorics does not match the age and is injured by retardation. Gypsy child does not draw or clip shapes at home, nor it does play with toys. These special features cause that special schools for underdeveloped children care mostly for Gypsy children that were misplaced there because of socially conditioned mental retardation. Alarming is the fact that the number of Gypsy children in such schools is higher than their number in general grammar schools. [27]

### 3.5.4 Subsistence

Generally, Roma occupations are divided by sex. Men are the artisans while women offer services, such as fortune telling, and selling what the men produce. It is the women who bring in the money, and the women who are largely responsible for managing it. [6] More about contemporary subsistence elsewhere is described in chapter 3.4 (Crafts, Skills and Art). Here we will concentrate on subsistence of the contemporary Slovak Gypsies.

The Slovak and Hungarian groups of Gypsies in Slovakia have been sedentary for a long time already. Before the communist regime they still possessed a number of roles in the society, though. Along with playing music and blacksmith services they used to produce unbaked bricks, dig wells, break stones for the roads, clean cesspools, helping peasants at farms and on fields, fixing stoves, collected old clouts or forest fruit, mediated sale of tiny goods, etc. [23]

This has ended with the dawn of the communist regime in 1948, with large-scale industrialisation and intense pressure on assimilation (see chapter 2.3, History of the Slovak Gypsies). Present-time Gypsies are widely lacking their traditional skills. The only exception is perhaps playing music, since it is still possible to see Gypsy musicians playing in

restaurants and some concerts. However, even music is not common to the majority of the Gypsies, who live in miserable conditions. Even an ownership of an instrument is hardly possible there. Most of the Gypsies who work are hired only for seasonal or other short periods as unskilled labour. Large portion of the Slovak Gypsy population is unemployed, which means they are dependent on social allowances. In the period of the communist regime in former Czechoslovakia, when Gypsy problems tended to be hidden from view (see chapter 2.3, History of the Slovak Gypsies), they were receiving considerable amounts of money based on the number of children in the families. Since this led to purposeful increase of deliveries and the population in the settlements started to be overcrowded, this unhealthy tendency was made less advantageous after the Velvet Revolution. Whether working or not, families do not see much of the income. If it is not swallowed by the loan sharks (see 3.5.5 Criminality), it is spent on unpractical goods as video and sound recorders and alcohol. Majority of the Slovak inhabitants at many places were telling the author that every time the social allowance is paid, and two consequent days as well, they better do not stay out on the street, fearing drunk Gypsies that might get violent. (Of course, this is an overstated and stereotypical formulation.)

There is a widespread notion of unreliability and laziness of Gypsies (not only in Slovakia). Again, it is possible to see something else in the background: *marimé*. Gypsy apathy for work (although sure seasoned by ingrained bad habits) is an integral part of their life. Gypsies consider it a shame, often resulting into alienation from their community, if they have good relations with the *gadjo* world. There could be thousands examples for that. Let's mention an indirect experience of the author during his volunteer work for the European Commission supported "Roms Rakusy Program" for Slovak Gypsies [37]. The intention was to install a sawmill and establish a little business where Gypsies would work, earn money and use the products, wooden plates and beams, to build architect pre-designed houses to replace their shacks. However, this project, so as many other ones, collapsed generally speaking on relations between the involved Gypsies, who were either uninterested, or interested, but living in the near city (which is a *gadjo* behaviour, although they were speaking Gypsy, were coming from there and knew most of the people in there), and thus not being accepted by the villagers.

### 3.5.5 Criminality

What is mentioned in chapter 3.5.3 about the living condition of children and the consequences, largely applies to adults as well. This, in combination with marginal position in the society, unemployment, hopelessness, alcoholism and illegal loaning etc. results in the common fact, that Gypsies very often take up criminal role in the societies and that they form a significant portion of the detained delinquents. However, as in the case of children placed in special schools, Gypsy crimes have often roots that are more innocent. Sexual intercourse between juvenile persons is one example, where one set of rules clashes with another without one of them being the better one. It is well known that Gypsies mature earlier than other European ethnic groups. Besides, Gypsy marriages occurred traditionally much earlier, after age nine but usually before age fourteen. However, this is not acceptable by the majority. There are too many young men in prisons for sexual abuse, although they often did not do anything against the law of their ethnic group. Next, Gypsies are known to be very lively and flashy, so there's no wonder they are the first ones to start a fistfight if they feel injustice. One more example is cutting wood for stoves and campfires. This has become especially serious in the region of the High Tatras and Slovak Paradise national parks. It is estimated that every Gypsy settlement that lives nearby cuts and burns as much 600 m<sup>3</sup> of high-quality protected trees per thousand people. This happens largely during the winter, because of heating. Again, the reasons are very understandable and it is hardly possible to despise the Gypsies for that. And again, other actions and first of all understanding is the real problem here.

However, along with degradation of the Gypsy culture, there are also very real criminal patterns, that include, pocket-picking, theft, robberies, prostitution, attacks, and even murders. These can be considered as true diseases of the culture, because they continue to be haunting even after resettlement into better living and subsistence conditions. This can be documented by author's experiences from the environment of the Slovak Gypsy refugees in Belgium, who were suspected from stealing, beating children and wives with belts, and running prostitution groups. Particularly alarming is the criminal behaviour of juveniles. Author of this work happened to cover an incident, where six-years old boy killed another, a seven-year boy, by stabbing him to his neck, in a game inspired by movie character Rambo. [37] Peculiar form of crime is the illegal money lending that currently proliferates in many Gypsy settlements in Slovakia. Typically there is a loan-shark who helps out families and individuals by lending them money, but asks incredible interest, often as high as several hundred percent of the original loan. This leads to a state where debtors are giving all their incomes (most of the time social allowances) to their "benefactor" and live constantly without money under his pressure. It is very likely that buying themselves out by committing various crimes is a wide-spread consequent phenomenon. Author of this work was told in one of the most populous Gypsy settlements that certain loan shark, feared and therefore inaccessible, had over a short time accumulated more than a million Slovak crowns (about that much Belgian francs) in this way. This becomes a serious statement after one realises that average salary in Slovakia is about six thousand crowns and that social allowances are still much less than that.

### 3.5.6 Education

Although many other minorities wish to be recognised and integrated by the *gadjikane* society, Gypsies are suspicious and afraid of being corrupted by *gadjikane* influences. The fear is that contact with non-Roma will lead to the disintegration of traditionally strong family and community ties. The belief is that this will result in juvenile delinquency. Many Roma also fear that public admission of being Roma in *gadjikane* society will single them out for discrimination and persecution. Among the Roma, activists see the gains made by other minority groups and want to share in these gains. They ask for the respect of the non-Roma world and for equal job opportunities. The first step must be education. However, before education is possible, *gadje* will have to overcome their long hostility toward and misunderstanding of the Roma, and Roma parents will have to overcome their fear of corruption by non-Roma. [6]

The Slovak constitution, carrying on the former federal system, guarantees free education at the primary and secondary levels for all citizens. Nine years of the grammar school are compulsory. Education includes at least one major foreign language. General secondary schools offer preparation for university study. Vocational secondary schools offer training in some technical and clerical fields and the service industries. [2]

According to the official statistics, 100% of Slovak population is literate. [2] In practice, however, there is huge difference between passing compulsory grammar school only (which is often the case of Gypsies) and literacy. Such Gypsies might be able to read, but it does not mean they do read fluently and that they practise it. As we have seen in the chapter about health (3.5.3), that makes the environment of a Gypsy child poor with positive influences. Gypsy children do not browse through parents' books, they are not read stories, they do not have a chance to look at and colour pictures in children books, because all of these are missing items in Gypsy households. Children that go to school can not discuss their new knowledge at home and in general they are not supported in gaining that knowledge and going to school at all. This, again, is probably caused by distrust on the side of the Gypsies towards the *gadjo* majority, and the fear that their children would part with the traditional Gypsy life if they excelled at a *gadjo* school. The only solution here is a sensitive approach and support of purely Gypsy schools with Gypsy teachers.

The above partly explains why Gypsy children are very often the problematic ones at schools. Next, coming from a different environment they form a separate group in the collective of the other children. They sense they lost the freedom they had in the Gypsy settlement and that they are manipulated by people who are considered as untrustworthy by their parents. As such, it is regarded differently by the other pupils, who moreover also have prejudices about Gypsies they learned from their *gadjo* parents. One very important reason is that Gypsy children, not having attended the kindergarten, can speak only the language they picked up in their settlements - Gypsy mixed with Slovak. Purely Gypsy schools and preparatory "zero" years of schools could help, but their establishing is very limited at the time. Next, Gypsy children are leaving for the school often without breakfast, because mothers still sleep or do not care, thus they are hungry, tired, with problems, they have no interest to participate in the education process. (There is no regularity in the backward Gypsy families. Children often witness arguments and fights of the adults, and often also some their sexual activities.) Another often-regarded issue is so-called laziness. As mentioned in the chapter about storytelling (3.4.4), Gypsies traditionally liked to tell stories and that this fact in combination with impurity acquired at contact with the *gadjo* world resulted into the notion that they are liars and untrustworthy people. Alas, the verb *Gypsy* is a synonym for telling lies in Slovak language. And perhaps this is the ground of frequent fabrication of stories and reasons that cause nightmares to grammar school teachers (and also immigration officers). Understanding of these background reasons could once again help to break an old stereotype.

### 3.6 Relations Between the Gypsies and the Majority

All unsettled tribes who live among settled peoples always seem to become convenient scapegoats. In this chapter, we shall have a look at the most salient relations between the majority and the Gypsies in various countries, and in Slovakia, both in the past and today. Special attention will be paid to growing racism and xenophobia in the majority group, and to the counteraction on the part of the Gypsies.

We can recognise a lot of the mutual relations in the meanings and connotations of the common phrases and words related to Gypsies. According to a contemporary Concise Dictionary of Slovak Language, the word *Gypsy* has these additional meanings (apart from the Gypsy person and language): liar, wanderer, someone who looks like a Gypsy because of his dark complexion or affection, animal of a dark or black colour (horse, dog), *Gypsy life* is a wandering one, *Gypsy blood* means intemperate nature of someone, *Gypsy roasted meat* is one that is roasted into a dark colour. *Gypsy* used as a verb unambiguously means to lie. [40] It is also common to say about someone that he is dirty as a Gypsy. It is interesting to see the synonyms presented by major English dictionaries: social gypsy, restless vagabond, idle stroller, wanderer, ramper, outlandish, uncultivated, medicaster, Rosicrucian, man of straw, conjuror, juggler, motley fool, pantaloons, gypsy; jack-pudding, jack in the green, nomad, Arab, Wandering Jew, Hadji, in later times often applied to an adventurer in art or literature, of irregular, unconventional habits, questionable tastes, or free morals. (*She was of a wild, roving nature, inherited from father and mother, who were both Bohemians by taste and circumstances.* -



*Thackeray*.) Peculiar explanation of the term Gypsy is supplied by respected Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary: *1. One of a vagabond race, whose tribes, coming originally from India, entered Europe in 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century, and are now scattered over Turkey, Russia, Hungary, Spain, England, etc., living by theft, fortune telling, horse-jockeying, tinkering, etc. Cf. Bohemian, Romany.* [16] We should note here that not all of the common meanings are negative. The best example is usage of Gypsy for someone who is affectionate, or cuddling. But also wandering nature, intemperate nature, and dark colour of a person or animal did not have pejorative and certainly not racist meaning originally.

The Gypsies own supposed disposition to wander has been forcibly furthered by exile or deportation. Only 80 years after their first appearance in Western Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they fell under the penalty of banishment in almost all the nations of Western Europe as strange people whose precedence was little known about, who wore striking clothes and spoke an incomprehensible language. In the XIV century there were Romanian Roma that were slaves of the king, the church or the landowners. Until the XIX century, they would not be free of this ominous yoke. Some Roma were brutally castrated so that they could work as coachmen for the rich ladies without any risk to their husbands. In Western Europe, things were not better. The Spanish monarchs elaborated complete legislation against Roma. Racism was extended with the colonisation of other countries by the European powers. In the top period of expansion and discovery of the world, Europe formulated scientific suppositions that were promulgating the difference between people and, above all, the superiority of some of them. This superiority was legalising the exploitation of individuals considered inferior. [12]

The XX century brought more calamities for the Roma. In 1934 the Nazi regime decided which Roma would be sterilised with injections or castrated, in camps such as Dachau or Sachsenhausen. In January 1940 the first massacre of the Romany Holocaust took place: 250 children were used as guinea pigs for scientific experiments in the concentration camp of Buchenwald. On the first of August 1944, during the early hours, 4,000 Roma were gassed and incinerated in Auschwitz-Birkenau, on a night that is remembered as the *Zigeunernacht*. Some researchers have calculated that towards the end of the II World War between 70% and 80% of the Romany population was annihilated by the Nazis. [12] In July 1999 Gypsies have been admitted to be the second largest group that has right for financial indemnification from the Swiss banks, because of suppression in the time of the Nazi regime. Lawyers representing the Holocaust victims of all the world at the empowered Federal Court of the USA say that as many as several thousand Roma from Slovakia could get a share from the 1.25 billion dollars provided by the Swiss banks. [3]

The recent wars in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Kosovo, caused the most important movement of masses since the end of the II World War. The ethnic cleansing carried out mainly by the Serbian army instigated, apart from other atrocities, a huge refugee exodus to all of Europe. Chronicles of the war have told us of the injustices committed against people from Kosovo, Bosnia, the Croats, and even against the Serbs. But the Roma have not deserved the attention of the western mass media, although they were also suffering the consequences of the war. [12]

The cyclical economic crisis suffered since 1973 has in western societies contributed to the creation of a high rate of unemployment that we could already consider chronic. This has instigated situations of rejection to any immigrant who wants to gain access to employment market and it has helped the recent organisation of openly racist political parties. The Front National in France, the Republikaner in Germany and Vlaams Blok in Belgium are some examples of the political ideologies based on intolerance that have been appearing in some parts of Europe. Something that has made the fight against racism and xenophobia difficult has been the disparity of judicial and penal approaches that exist in the different countries of the European Union. Therefore, there have been very low number of convictions of many people who are accused of committing violent acts against minorities, which has produced, sometimes, a certain sensation of impunity. In public order conflicts, the police frequently treat as delinquents those people who, due to their physical appearance, could look like Roma. At the same time, being Rom is a suspicious element for many police when they are carrying out their investigations. [12] French laws in modern times forbade them campsites and subjected them to police supervision, yet the Gypsies were taxed and drafted for military service like ordinary citizens. Spain and Wales are two countries often cited as examples where the Gypsies have become settled, if not wholly assimilated. Anti-Roma attitudes also exist in the Americas to one extent or another. Misrepresentations of the Romany people in the popular press, books, films and television have contributed to negative stereotypes and characterisations. Special Gypsy units in some local police forces exist to warn the *gadje* population of Gypsy activities.

The phenomenon of the skin-heads, the birth of one more of the city gangs, has acquired a huge importance, specially when, in many cases, they have joined together with fanatic groups of football supporters. It has been proven that there are permanent international connections between them, always with the support of extreme right-wing groups, even when they are not part of the same structure. The introduction of new technologies in the field of communication - Internet, satellite, optical fibre— has meant the end of frontiers for information. The access to any point in the world, practically at the same moment, represents a new concept in the organisation of people. Unfortunately, one of its undesired effects has been the traffic, through these nets, of racist and xenophobic slogans that have been introduced by right-wing groups. [12]

The socialist countries of Eastern Europe attempted programs of enforced settlement to end Gypsy migration. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 Roma have been blamed, even from official instances, for many of the evils that affect the States of the former Soviet area. An state of uncertainty has arisen - a state of nervousness, of indefinitude, of insubstantiality - in which old rules are no longer valid, everything is changing, and the new rules do not yet exist. Discrimination against Roma in employment, education, health care, administrative and other services is observed in most societies, and hate speech against them deepens the negative anti-Roma stereotypes that are typical of European public opinion.

At the time of the Roma Exodus to Canada in 1997, many Czech citizens were happy to see the Roma going away. Some local government officials have issued inflammatory declarations encouraging, and promising to provide incentives for, Roma to leave the country. The mayor of the Mariánské hory district in the northern Moravian town of Ostrava, reportedly suggested that Roma who move to Canada would receive payment for two-thirds the cost of their flights, on the condition that they abandon their flats and return their licenses of tenancy. The mayor described this suggestion as a friendly gesture to „help“ Roma who do not want to live here. The mayor is further reported to have said that, in Ostrava, there are two groups - Roma and whites - who cannot live together, and that the local administration should not refrain from helping one group - Roma - find a solution. Press reports indicate that similar policies were pursued in the western Bohemian town of Tachov. [11] In a 1996 poll cited in the U.S. State Department's human rights report, 35 percent of Czechs favoured „concentrating and isolating the Roma“ and 45 percent supported „moving the Roma out of the Czech Republic if possible.“ Voicing stereotypes common throughout Europe, Czechs claimed that Roma, with their traditionally large families and mostly unemployed, were a drain on the social service budget and people's taxes, and lived better than some Czechs with jobs. They regarded Roma as dishonest and often criminal. While some Roma have become successful entrepreneurs, the community as a whole suffers from an estimated 70 percent unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and health problems. Many live in segregated housing, like the makeshift dormitories on the outskirts of Ostrava, where Roma families will each be given one room and share a washroom. Police are posted to make sure they do not steal construction materials or vandalise the site. A waiter at a beer hall in Ostrava, said the restaurant would not serve large groups of Roma. „The problem is when 10 or 15 of them turn up,“ he said. „They're noisy, they often fight, and as a rule all the other guests leave. So we say we're sorry.“ Roma say the beer hall's policy is nothing new - most restaurants and bars in Ostrava refuse to serve them. [12] Another example of these decrees was the so-called Jirkov Decree of December 3, 1992, which empowered that municipality to dislocate persons from their residences without a judicial order or other legal action or court decision primarily because of violations of norms and regulations for hygiene. This would surely have facilitated and simplified the process of getting rid of the „unadaptable ones“, predominantly the Roma. Jirkov's representatives were asked for the text of their decree by their colleagues from several other northern Czech towns (e.g. Ústí nad Labem, Chomutov, Most, etc.). These events inspired the proposal of an extraordinary anti-immigration bill in the Czech Parliament, which in many aspects went further than the local decree of Jirkov; e.g. it instructed citizens to contact a registration office if they wished to accommodate in their flats persons without permanent residences of their own, while police officers and other qualified persons would have been entitled to enter homes and inspect them. Luckily, ultimately the bill was not passed in the Czech Parliament, but had been discussed; this fact alone clearly expresses the negative attitude toward the Roma. [8] To mention yet another case, the town of Ústí nad Labem made headlines around the world in May 1998 when it announced that a wall was to be built in the one quarter of the city to separate two residential areas, one inhabited by ethnic Czechs, the other by ethnic Roma. Foreign reporters evoked horror on the international level by comparing the wall in Ústí to the Berlin wall and concluding that Czechs were incapable of living with Roma in the same place and solving their problems by normal, peaceful means. [9] To top it all off, a high official of the city district shocked and outraged foreign reporters when he compared Roma to the American Indians and shouted: „What human rights are you talking about? They (Roma) have the right to work, but they don't work. They have the right to vote, but they don't vote. They have the right to pay their rent, but they don't pay it“. Then he asked: „Gentlemen, did you consult the Indians when you set up their reservations?“ [9] The authorities say that the wall is being built to separate regular tax-paying and rent-paying citizens from a group of boisterous and disorderly freeloaders whose unsupervised children only disturb the neighbourhood with their noise and chaotic playing, and also because people are horrified by the „tons“ of garbage outside the buildings. [9]

Racially motivated attacks on Gypsies in Slovakia and the neighbouring Czech Republic have also been on the rise in recent years, but official indifference, high unemployment and poor education are making their plight even harder. A Czech non-governmental organisation has documented 1250 racially motivated attacks on Roma, especially attacks by racist skinheads, in the period 1991-1997. Of these, at least nine Roma died as a direct result of attack, and a group of skinheads killed a Turkish man they mistook for a Gypsy. The views of skinheads are supported by a palpable racism in the wider society. A study documented twenty-four restaurants in which Roma were explicitly refused service. There are, additionally, widespread credible allegations of discrimination in the criminal justice system, in such areas as: length and likelihood of pre-trial detention, likelihood of guilty verdicts, length of sentence, and length of time of court proceedings when hearing cases in which Roma have been victims. In Slovakia, a Romany man was beaten to death by skinheads in his home in the central Slovak town of Banská Bystrica. In mid-Summer, at least two municipalities near the town of Medzilaborce in north-eastern Slovakia passed ordinances banning Roma from settling within town limits. The Roma affected had evidently been evicted from housing following their dismissal from a local co-operative farm in 1990, and have been repeatedly expelled from places in which they had attempted to settle since. Violence against Gyp-

sies was seldom an issue in Slovakia under the previous, populist government of Prime Minister Vladimír Meciar. Negligence on the governmental level is particularly harmful. Olga Keltošová, former Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in the Meciar's government, had told a public gathering in London that Roma „simply do not want to work“ and went on to imply that Roma were thieves who stole state benefits intended for their children. [10] An implicitly anti-Roma statement made by former Slovak Prime Minister Meciar at a meeting with local representatives in Spišské Podhradie in also complicated the affair. He talked about socially unadaptable persons, but everybody knew he meant the Roma. [8] The tension between Roma and Slovaks was also increased by the reports in the Slovak media on the situation after floods in Jarovnice (see Housing, chapter 3.5.2). In the flooded communities, the mayors' co-ordinated aid and soldiers helped to clear away the damage. Approximately 600 Roma from Jarovnice lost their homes and now live in military tents and eat military rations. Humanitarian aid, in particular drinking water, preserved foodstuffs, sanitary products, fabric, shoes and children's toys were brought in by a number of Slovak as well as Czech foundations. The Roma, according to the press and television, only reluctantly and unwillingly helped in clearing away the damage and were waiting apathetically for help from the state. According to the media, the Roma not only didn't want to work, but they were drinking their state benefits away at the pub, burning or selling the clothing they received from humanitarian aid, and when they realised that those who lost their property and roof over their heads would receive financial compensation from the state, they started to destroy what still remained of their homes. The other inhabitants accused the authorities of concentrating aid only on the Roma. [7] In Spišské Podhradie, a small town in Eastern Slovakia with a high concentration of Roma, the mayor signed a decree in July 1993 which explicitly denied the Roma and other „suspicious“ persons of certain basic rights. Allegedly, an attempt to reduce Romany criminality, this decree contradicted not only the Slovak Constitution but also international civil rights standards. Although the National Council condemned and abolished the decree the next week, before it could go into effect (two weeks were necessary), the government took comparable measures: the police presence in Spišské Podhradie was increased. Many other mayors had agreed with the original decree and had wished to use it, had it not been found unconstitutional. [8] Similarly, on August 7, 1993, in a televised interview, the mayor of the town of Kežmarok stated that city police would be empowered to require Roma to show identification documents at any time in any place. He was asked, „What measures would be used, hypothetically, if someone's documents were not in conformity with the law?“ He answered, „for example, permission [would be granted the police] to detain suspected Roma criminals for 2-3 days for examination; if the Roma were given welfare, they should do some work for public purposes, etc.“. [8] An incident, when actors of the world-famous Romathan theatre were not allowed to enter the major hotel in their city, Košice, echoed in media in June 1999. It appeared that security guards at the gate received instructions not to let Gypsies to enter the building. The actors have brought the case on the first pages of the newspapers, to the TV, and to the European Court. This is positive, because it speaks for all the nameless Gypsies who daily encounter the same at other public places, and who do not know anything about these powerful ways of protection and appeal... The new Prime Minister, Mr. Mikuláš Dzurinda, pledged last year a „new deal“ for the Gypsy community as part of efforts to improve Slovakia's human rights record. The Slovak Foreign Ministry reassures that individual cases of harassment were investigated and prosecuted, and that they are doing their best to protect the Gypsy community from it.

However, we should look at the problem also from the other side. For Gypsies often do want to remain separated and even good intentions of the non-Roma are rigorously refused. Although the Roma have largely adapted to living surrounded by foreign cultures, their social organisation fosters the separation of Roma from non-Roma. This separation places Roma at a greater disadvantage than other, less separatist ethnic groups. While other ethnic groups have been denied equal rights in the past, the Roma have tended to stay apart by choice. Many Roma are slowly integrating and participating in the mainstream of European and American culture without compromising their identity. The advent of mass media has made it increasingly difficult for the Roma to maintain a separate cultural identity. Television follows them even if they migrate. The traditional closely-knit Romany family provides some measure of immunity from these *gadje* influences. In this context, we should realise that the Romany law has an impact on how the Roma approach conflicts with the *gadjikane* legal system. *Romaniya* has no equivalent to the concept of conflict of laws. Roma law is self-contained and cannot incorporate rules of a foreign legal system. The *gadjikane* legal system is equally insular as far as *Romaniya* is concerned. But unlike the *gadje*, who knows nothing about *Romaniya*, Roma are necessarily aware of *gadjikane* law. The Roma believe they should approach and respond to the *gadje* with caution, especially if the *gadje* profess good intentions, or claim to serve the best interest of the Roma. Roma are also cautious with *gadjikane* notions of due process, civil rights, and neutrality of law. Furthermore, not only do the Roma consider non-Roma *marimé*, they also believe that Roma names and rituals lose their magical effectiveness if uttered to *gadje*. To the Roma, the purity of their law plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and integrity. Although the Romany people do not formally gather to pursue an objective, their need to survive as a distinct and isolated group provides them with a common purpose. Roma law ensures that the host country's legal systems and cultures minimally influence Roma life. Although *Romaniya* has sacred aspects that direct Roma to lead their lives properly by attaining a state of purity and preventing contamination, it does not advocate imposing its values on non-Roma. Its main purpose is to achieve a state of balance, or *kintala*, that pleases the spirits of the ancestors, or *mulé*. Conversion of the *gadje* would not make much sense because they and their ancestors are outside the Roma world. Although they need and depend on contacts with their host countries as a source of their livelihood, the Roma do not want to be part of these societies in any sense that would involve compromise of their basic beliefs. If there is any semblance of compromise, it may be in the Roma willingness

to adapt to the requirements of their surroundings. Many Roma fear that over time integration could lead to assimilation, and the eventual disappearance of *Romaniya*. [6]

Because of that, the picture of the Gypsies about themselves inescapably contains a notion of injustice, a notion that everybody is doing wrong to them. That is justified, of course. However, as one of the basic elements of their national identity, it is dangerous. It leads to resignation, rancour, defiance and hostility. It is not possible to live from it. It is not positive. The injustice is real, but identity based on it is a false one. [29]

### 3.7 Migration

Few are those who realise that migration is an inherently natural and very important activity of all of the humankind. Naturally, it was always opposed by peoples who inhabited respective areas before and thus viewed the incoming ones as invaders, or at least with suspicion and abstention. That is a normal social self-protective instinct. In theory, leaving one's country belongs to the basic human rights today. Whoever thoughts s/he can find better life in another country has the right to go and try it out. However, migration today has been made nearly impossible by existence of national countries with fragile economic and social systems that need to be jealously protected. Especially immigration is one of the fiercest contemporary problems.

Following the beginning of the Gypsy wandering, let us have a broader look at great ancient migrations in our continent, Eurasia (Western conceptual division of the largest landmass into „Europe“ and „Asia“ has only minor significance in relation to the historic patterns of human occupation of the continent.), which gave birth not only to Gypsies, but also to all Europeans (Slav and Germanic tribes arrived to Europe not more than a millennium earlier, for example). Then we will look at the migrations of contemporary Gypsies and at the growing exodus of the Slovak ones.

#### 3.7.1 Ancient Migrations in Eurasia

Fossil evidence indicates that Asia has been under human occupation for at least one million years and possibly longer. The first humans in Asia are believed to have descended from groups of the extinct species *Homo erectus* that migrated to the continent from Africa. There are many debates as to whether modern Asian peoples evolved from these first inhabitants or represent the descendants of later migrations of anatomically modern peoples out of Africa. It is also not clear when and where the modern races emerged, but the continent is now populated by three major groups: the Asiatic geographic race, the largest and most widespread of the three, in North, Central, East, and Southeast Asia; the Indian geographic race, the next most populous group, in South Asia; and the European geographic race, in Southwest and West Asia. In addition, the Polynesian and Melanesian geographic races are represented on the far south-eastern island fringe of the continent, and there are now significant populations of European Russians living in Siberia and Central Asia.

The two primary prehistoric centres from which migrations of modern human populations over the continent took place were Southwest Asia and a region comprising the Mongolian plateaux and North China. From prehistoric to historic times, possibly beginning as early as 30,000 years ago, movements from Southwest Asia continued toward Europe and into Central Asia; significant movements into India also took place. There were probably small divergent migrational movements in other directions that became swallowed up in later patterns of mixing. The Greeks were one of the late Indo-European groups moving westward, about 2000 BC, as were the Aryans, who moved east to invade northern India from 1600 to 1500 BC. Asiatic migrational movements have always trended primarily toward Southeast Asia. Important Asiatic migrations, however, also occurred in a westward direction through Central Asia toward the European peninsula. Such movements must have begun as early as 10,000 years ago, but they continued into the early centuries AD as Mongols pushed Turkic peoples westward, setting off additional displacements of such peoples as the Finns and the Magyars. These westward Asiatic movements also produced, over a period of time, much mixing of early European and Asiatic peoples in Central and West Asia. Northern Eurasia continued to be inhabited chiefly by thinly distributed residual elements of very early eastern Asian peoples, although some fairly late northward movements of Turkic peoples did take place.

The original habitat of the Slavs was Asia, from which they migrated, in the 3rd or 2nd millennium BC to populate parts of eastern Europe. Subsequently, these European lands of the Slavs were crossed or settled by many peoples forced by economic conditions to migrate. In the middle of the first millennium BC, Celtic tribes settled along the upper Oder River, and Germanic tribes settled on the lower Vistula and lower Oder rivers, usually without displacing the Slavs there. Finally, the movement westward of the Germans in the 5th and 6th centuries AD started the great migration of the Slavs, who proceeded in the Germans wake westward into the country between the Oder and the Elbe-Saale line, southward into today's Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Balkans, and northward along the upper Dnieper River.

There have been many small-stream movements away from the main trends, and these have often complicated the ethnic picture of particular regions. At least one prehistoric European movement penetrated East Asia and is represented today by the remnant indigenous inhabitants of Japan known as the Ainu. A counter-movement out of India by a nomadic ethnic stock about AD 1000 contributed the Gypsy strain now widespread in Europe. [2]

### 3.7.2 Contemporary Migrations

Although it has been noted that migrations are very natural to humankind, particular groups have differing tendencies to travel. Some of them are traditionally sedentary and will better face their fate and keep their lands and houses, other are more free from property and ready to move wherever it seems appropriate (perhaps there is a link between this nomadic traditions and attraction to migration?) Gypsies are the latter case. Apart from the initial dispersion from India about a thousand years ago (which also occurred in waves), there have been a few other great migrations, or diaspora, in Roman history. Second great migration, known as the *Aresajipe*, was from south-west Asia into Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Third migration was from Europe to the Americas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries after the abolition of Roman slavery in Europe in 1856-1864. Another migration wave came in the 60s, when many Gypsies emigrated from late Yugoslavia and Romania to Germany and the U.S.A. Future history might show us that another great migration is happening now, since the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe and after the recent Balkan wars. Many Gypsies are stateless, refugees, political asylum seekers and repatriated.

The migration wave, when several hundreds of Czech Gypsies have left for Canada in 1997, became known as the Roma Exodus. When a Czech private TV Nova aired a documentary on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1997, depicting Canada as a land where Roma can leave poverty and discrimination behind, many started selling their belongings and bought plane tickets. Czech citizens needed no visa for Canada, so Roma simply applied for residence or refugee status once they reached the country. Canadian embassy switchboards were jammed with calls, and plane tickets booked through October. Many Czech citizens were happy to see the Roma going away. In a 1996 poll cited in the U.S. State Department's human rights report, 35 percent of Czechs favoured „concentrating and isolating the Roma“ and 45 percent supported „moving the Roma out of the Czech Republic if possible.“ Voicing stereotypes common throughout Europe, Czechs claimed that Roma, with their traditionally large families, were a drain on the social service budget and lived better than Czechs with jobs. They regarded Roma as dishonest and often criminal. The late premier Václav Klaus urged Roma to stay home and demanded that a government advisory body come up with concrete proposals on subjects including education, employment, housing and discrimination against Roma. [12] Not much did that change though and the Czech Roma Exodus was finally stopped on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1997, only by re-introduction of visa obligations for all Czech citizens travelling to Canada.

After a similar stream of Czech Gypsies towards British shores in the same year, a number of silent discriminatory measures were taken in order to prevent Roma from entering the country and applying for an asylum. [29]

Gypsies are not the only ones who migrate these days, though. Good example of this claim are the Germans in Romania. Following Hungarians, they used to be the largest minority in Romania. After opening the borders and due to the repatriation immigration policy of Germany their number drastically decreased. This migration did not invoke bold headlines, though, because are much less visible. Another sorts of migration are those that follow wars, collapsed economy systems and international conflicts (see recent examples of Rwanda, Sudan, Kosovo) or natural catastrophes, like the renewed volcanic activity on the island of Montserrat that resulted in a feverish evacuation of most of the inhabitants.

### 3.7.3 Exodus of the Slovak Gypsies

As we have noted in the beginning of this research paper, Gypsies represent very large minority in Slovakia, amounting perhaps to ten percent of the population. Living situation of this ethnic group, deprived of chances to develop its own way, has never been glorious. Many of them tried to break their way through the vicious circle and go to live and work elsewhere. In the modern times, there was a wide resettling of Slovak Gypsies in the Czech part of the former federative republic. This happened after World War II in order to fill the void left by deported Germans. Most Roma living in the Czech lands are descendants of these immigrants. Czech Republic was reluctant to award them with Czech citizenship when Czechoslovakia split in 1993, to the disgust of human right organisations. [12] Other cases of emigration from Slovakia follow.

#### 3.7.3.1 United Kingdom, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1998

During the first seven months of the year 1095 Gypsies from Slovakia applied for asylum in United Kingdom. Gypsies reasoned sustained their applications by physical attacks in their country. In the next year 1256 Slovaks of the Gypsy ethnic group applied for asylum. Out of these, 472 were the initial applicants, the rest were their relatives. Roma applying for asylum became the focus of alarmist and often racist articles in the British media, including organs noted for



Application for an asylum is typically a spontaneous and individual act. Generally it is submitted by people who were exposed to a personal trauma, because their human rights were severely breached, when they became victims of attacks threatening their health, safety or integrity. It is apparent that the exodus of the Slovak Roma is not the case, for hundreds of Roma could not and did not become victims of attacks on very different locations of Slovakia and in the same time period. Strong allegations have appeared that the exodus has been organised by certain groups of enterprisers, who profited on fully booked aeroplanes for several months, or by political groups, that are interested not to approach Slovakia's integration into the European Union. A Czech Airlines source confirmed that flights to Helsinki were bought up by Czech people, who meet the Slovak Gypsies at the airport, sell them the tickets and go buying new ones. Strikingly, many illiterate or without interest in reading and politics, Roma have been heading chiefly for countries that have good asylum conditions and where the asylum procedure takes several months. Moreover, the case has culminated just in the days when Finland took over presidency over European Union. Whether these allegations are true or not, it is sure that the EU immigration system could be improved in such a way that such "ethnic tourism" would not inflict innocent citizens of the source countries.

The home country can not check who goes where and for what reason, and bow some groups down, because freedom to travel is one of the basic human rights. And the respective target country is liable to provide care for all asylum seekers, even if the result is certain in advance. For example in Finland, an asylum procedure can take as long as a whole year. The applicants have free food and lodging, and they receive 1,500 Finnish marks (around twelve thousand Belgian francs) as pocket money per month. Although that is not much (certainly in Finland), many Roma manage to profit on such a trip, without regard to whether they will get an asylum or not. This is very clearly the case of Gypsies, who have been deported from United Kingdom, and now try their luck in another country.

And what was the reaction of the non-Gypsy Slovaks? Anger at worsened image of the country in Europe and more despising of Gypsies for not co-operating. Besides, it was a perfect material for the Slovak National Party (now in small minority in the government but formerly in coalition with Meciar's party), who claimed to be happy to see that the Gypsies, as a burden for economy, were leaving. It is especially sad that even many people that are not usually adhering to this party shared the same naive opinion. On the other hand, the current migration waves do have positive effects as well, since they wake up people's interest for solving the problems and press authorities and the government to focus on the Gypsies. Slovak president Rudolf Schuster and his Czech colleague Václav Havel swiftly agreed on common policy of dealing with the Gypsy-related problems that are very similar in both countries. Slovak government offered to co-operate with foreign experts to clarify the situation of Gypsies in Slovakia, set up a special co-ordination committee and commissions to work on possible solutions, and offered to send the government planes Finland to repatriate the refused Gypsies. As for the overall effect of these emigration waves, however, it is hard to tell whether it will be negative or positive.

Finland (population 5 million people), has an own Gypsy minority that counts not more than 10,000 people. Three thousand Roma left for Sweden until the first half of the '90s. They live practically in the same way as their cousins in other European countries - on a lower educational level, and in worse social conditions than an average Finnish citizen. Also the problems are similar. The Gypsies are complaining about discrimination when looking for work and dwelling, negative approach of the media, and about racial intolerance because of their cultural and social singularities. The Helsinki Human Rights Federation criticises a special police register for Gypsies used at criminal investigations. Twenty-eight percent of Finnish Roma have complained about cases when they were not admitted to some public places. [3]

#### **3.7.3.4 Norway, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999**

Shortly before finishing this research paper, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Kingdom, following the example of Finland, announced that all Slovak citizens travelling to this country will be required visas from that day on. This regulation was substantiated by fear of high number of Slovak Gypsy economic refugees. Fifty-seven of them had demanded asylum in Norway by that day... [3]

#### **3.7.3.5 Denmark and Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, Austria, Ireland?**

Around 90 Slovak Gypsies demanded political asylum in Denmark last year (seven of them received it). This year the number climbed to 215. The main reasons given are race discrimination, but also political persecution, chase and other ones. While last year 11 Slovak Roma asked for asylum in Sweden, this year there are 124 applications. Both countries consider introduction of visas for Slovaks. In the third week of July, eleven Slovak Gypsies asked for asylum in Vienna, Austria, which is as close as 60 km from Slovak capital, Bratislava. In the Netherlands there were 44 applications and seven in Ireland (all figures as of 13<sup>th</sup> August 1999). It became obvious that large groups tend to move more or less together, for during the last three days of July 1999, eighty-five Slovak Gypsies arrived to Swiss Zürich. They were being sent back immediately, since they did not have money for their stay in Switzerland. It was arranged that airline companies have to check solvency (100 Swiss francs a day) and return tickets of the passengers before they enter the

planes. If the companies fail to do so, they are liable to pay the return tickets themselves. There are justified fears that the Shengen Treaty countries as a group will proceed to imposition of visa obligations for Slovak citizens.

### 3.7.3.6 All Shengen Treaty Signatories?

No, let's hope not...

## 4. „DIAGNOSIS“

First of all it has to be understood that all Gypsy-related problems in Slovakia as we know them are inseparable from the *relations* of the Roma living in the country, and the Slovak majority. Let's imagine - if Gypsies lived somewhere on their own, isolated, not knowing any other culture or state, their typical problems would be totally different, there would be no racism against them, no locked borders, all these troubles would not exist. This is, however, pure and largely useless speculation: all human past is a story of never-ending moving, meeting, joining and splitting. This visualisation is useful only to realise that when we look at the Gypsy-related problems, we do not see problems of the Gypsies as such, but problems rooted in *relations* between Gypsies and the non-Gypsies (although connected to both of these parties in unique ways).

This also implies that in fact there is nobody to be blamed for these problems (relations). They are just a natural outcome of the meeting of two cultures and the conditions. However, vast majority of people likes to search for culprits. And they like to see themselves as saviours or victims. They tend to believe short and catchy slogans more than explanations. They want answers rather than questions. They prefer to keep repeating the actions that have proven to be working, instead of trying something new. They tend to believe that they are always a little bit better people and culture - name it - than someone else. Alas, that is us, humans. But we should not be surprised, therefore, by nationalism, xenophobia, antagonism, closed borders, persecution, forced assimilation, etc...

What we have to admit, though, is that although these problems are a natural result of a meeting of the two cultures, one of them - Gypsies - is in minority. We could suppose that in case of a meeting of two cultures equal in population, communication possibilities, resources, etc., the only possible result would be a compromise. But when the forces are unequal, one of the parties is in danger of losing itself. And here we come to what happened to Slovak Gypsies. Because of their minor role in the long, fierce and unfair competition, they are the ones who are losing. Slovak Gypsies are ailing as a culture, nation, ethnic minority. We have seen it everywhere throughout this work. Their old habits, traditions, beliefs, skills, ways of subsistence, family and group arrangements are largely forgotten, with barely more than disorder as replacement.

Here it is important to realise, that since the Gypsy competition with the Slovak majority has been unequal, we tend to stand on the side of the Gypsies as the harmed ones, regardless how much we try not to favour one party. Therefore, it is vital to have a look at the other side as well. For example the self-image of the Gypsies is partly also responsible for the segregation. Although justified in recognising their frequent discrimination by the majority, Gypsies pose themselves in a position of the eternally humiliated and harmed. That is only natural and right as long as it is part of the picture. However, this counter-attitude of the Gypsies is recognisable in almost all Gypsy-related problems, thus forming one of the basic elements of their national identity. That is dangerous, because it results in resignation, rancour, defiance and hostility. It is not possible to live from such negative values. The injustice is real, but identity based on it is a false one. In this sense, the Gypsy culture should be termed valetudinarian more than ailing.

A superficial spectator could judge Slovak Gypsies an irreparably damaged or even dead culture. However, this is not true. The main aim of this research was to prove author's belief that despite the disappearance of many of the outer signs of culture, there still is a strong current of Gypsy blood underneath, that the most important and all-pervasive elements of the Gypsy culture are surviving, that their roots are healthy. And throughout the paper one really finds proofs that his initial anticipation was correct. These proofs were sought - and found - in the problems itself. It might sound paradoxically, but it is understandable. Based on the definition of the Gypsy-related problems from the beginning of this chapter, all problems mean difference in culture, i.e. in this case *existence* of certain cultural elements in Gypsies.

When properly analysed, even the deepest-rooted Gypsy stereotypes and related problems can be dismantled into smaller elements that are understandable and therefore potentially possible to solve. The most important surviving element of the Gypsy culture behind these elements, the pulsating vein, has been located to be *marimé*, or the pollution code. This was illustrated at most of the problematic phenomena. We have seen that what is believed to be lying is in fact rooted in the traditional volubility of the Gypsies and *marimé* represented by the non-Roma, which means that it is meritorious, or at least not wrong, to cheat the *gadjos*. This feature of the Gypsy culture, positive among them and negative from the point of view of the major culture, is just another preservative element of the Gypsy culture, a living part



of their culture. The widespread notion of unreliability and laziness of Gypsies has the same roots, since Gypsies consider it a shame, often resulting into alienation from their community, if they have good relations with the *gadjo* world, for example at work. Intermarriage, although detrimental today and causing more problems instead of fulfilling its original preservative function, is another example of surviving underlying culture elements. It is very difficult to accept white women in the settlement and it is an unjustifiable offence for a Gypsy woman to leave her group and live in the *gadjo* world. Size of families is another element. While non-Gypsies with good living conditions fear economical and time strains and tend to have less and less children, for Roma it is all-important to have a big family that raises their respect, safety and prospects of the future. Other examples include some forms of "crime", sexual "immorality", "lack of supervision" of children and their formal education, etc.

In the system of *marimé* it is possible to see more general concept, a clash of different values. All cultures have their own sets of values that make them unique. Although values vary among individuals and groups within one culture, they are quite uniform if compared with a set of values of another culture. By way of an example, let's consider the value of literacy. It was not important in the traditional Gypsy culture and it is of little importance for Gypsies today. Gypsies could imagine life without having to be able to read and write. On the side of the non-Roma, however, literacy is one of the basic prerequisites for playing part in their contemporary world. If questioned in the respective cultures separately, it is possible to say whether literacy has (high) or hasn't (has low) value. When comparing the two cultures, a clash of values appears. Because for none of these two cultures literacy can both be a value (important) and not to be a value (or be not important). The other way round, illiteracy prevents the cultural and intellectual values of the *gadjo* world from infiltrating and undermining traditional Gypsy ethnic identity. Thus, it would be possible to say that in a way illiteracy is a value for Gypsies and not a value for non-Gypsies. (Obviously, this example has been simplified. The reality is much more complicated, since values are never black and white, there are not only two cultures with well-defined values, values differ from person to person within the cultures, they change, are being exchanged and transferred, etc.) Another example of differing values is migration - so natural for temperate Gypsies, but unacceptable by contemporary fragile state systems. Yet another example is the *Romaniya*: all-powerful for Roma, but meaning nothing at all for the Slovak majority.

So what could be the cure? First of all detail research in order to understand the true complex reasons of the problems and eliminate ill stereotypes. Second, change of attitude of the non-Roma towards Gypsies and vice-versa. This is not reachable in a short time and by way of some simple actions. A complex approach has to be designed, with urgent education and public campaign measures at all levels of the society. Gypsies should be able to attend schools where Romany is spoken. Social workers should be able to speak Gypsy and Gypsies themselves should come to work as social workers, increasingly. State and government authorities together with Gypsy participants have to work hard on gaining trust of the Gypsies, with stress on preserving their culture elements and values, be clear on punishment of any racial assaults or discrimination. Their approach should be more regional than central. Gypsies should have possibilities to perpetuate their traditions and customs by *performing* them to revive the culture - Gypsy music, theatre, markets, traditional workshops, exhibitions and museums of Gypsy culture, etc. There should be Gypsy-spoken radio stations giving chance to musicians and story-tellers, and TV channels broadcasting in Gypsy language that would focus on presenting extraordinary Gypsies at home and abroad, films from Gypsy history, etc. All that in order to revive the culture by showing its strong and unique elements and encouraging their following and perpetuation. And third, appropriate social benefits changes should take place, and radical but very sensitive housing and hygiene policies should be put into operation. Once in operation, art and other culture elements would start to reflect positively in the social sphere as well as the economic one, and vice versa. Of course, it is not possible to re-create a Gypsy culture as it is known from historical books, and that is not desirable. The ultimate aim could be a true multicultural society in Slovakia, where non-Gypsies and Gypsies would live in economic harmony, mutual respect and learning the cultural riches of the other. But here we are too far away in the domain of the future and other researchers.

Forced integration and assimilation into the non-Roma society, especially in combination with bad economic and living conditions, have always threatened the preservation of the Gypsy culture. Detail search for the remaining elements by dismantling the present obstacles and understanding them is a vital prerequisite for any further attempts to regenerate the presently ailing Gypsy culture. It is author's best hope that his research presented on the preceding pages has somewhat contributed to this challenge.

**Tomáš J. Fülöpp**  
13<sup>th</sup> August 1999, Leuven

✉ Naamsevest 38, Leuven 3000, Belgium, ☎/fax +32 - (0)16 - 23 02 54  
💻 [Tomi@scientist.com](mailto:Tomi@scientist.com), <http://www.earthcorp.com/TJFulopp>

## 5. INDEX OF SOURCES

- [1] <http://www.sil.org/> = *SIL International (Summer Institute of Linguistics)*
- [2] <http://www.eb.com/> = *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*
- [3] <http://www.sme.sk> = *SME, a Slovak nationwide daily*
- [4] <http://www.excite.com/travel/countries/slovakia/?page=overview>
- [5] <http://www.uvm.sk/sport/divadla/romathan.html> = *Romathan Theatre, Košice, Slovakia*
- [6] <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/patrin.htm> = *The Patrin Web Journal: Romani Culture and History*
- [7] *The Patrin Web Journal and Markéta Kašánková of Radio Prague's Internet Team, Czech Republic*
- [8] *East And Central Europe Program - Bulletin Issue #15; Klára Orgovánová*
- [9] *Amaro gendalos - June 1998; Jarmila Balážová*
- [10] *The European Roma Rights Centre - 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1997*
- [11] *The European Roma Rights Centre - 17<sup>th</sup> April 1999*
- [12] <http://www.unionromani.org> = *Union Romani, Barcelona, Spain*
- [13] <http://www.romani.org/>
- [14] *The Patrin Web Journal and Ian F. Hancock*
- [15] *Rromani Youths: The Pathways of Juvenile Justice; ed. Angela Patrignani & Renaud Villé; UNICRI (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute), December 1997*
- [16] <http://www.dictionary.com>
- [17] <http://www.radio.cz/romove/>
- [18] <http://www.gypsy.net/>
- [19] <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/7502/1human.html>
- [20] <http://www.errc.com/>
- [21] <http://www.romnews.com/>
- [22] <http://www.uia.org/data.htm>
- [23] *Romsko-ceský a cesko-romský kapesní slovník (Romany-Czech and Czech-Romany Pocket Dictionary); Milena Hübschmannová, Hana Šebková and Anna Žigová; Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, Praha, Czech Republic 1991*
- [24] *Rómsky jazyk (Romany Language); lectures from the Pedagogic University of Nitra, Slovakia, 1995*
- [25] *První Cikáni v Evropě a na území CSR (First Gypsies in Europe and in the Czech Republic)*
- [26] *Cultural Manifestation of Romanies in Central and Eastern Europe: Romanies in Slovakia; Anna Koptová and Arne B. Mann, Romathan Theatre Košice - Institute for Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Bratislava, Slovakia, 1994*
- [27] *Pedagogika mentálne postihnutých (psychopédia); I. Bajo and Š. Vašek, Sapientia, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1994*
- [28] *La misère des Roms; Le Vif / L'express 9.4.1999, Belgium*
- [29] *S Romy žít budeme - jde o to jak (We Will Live With Roma - Question is How); Pavel Ríčan; Portál, Praha, Czech Republic, 1998*
- [29] *Pohrbi me vestoje (Bury Me Standing); Isabel Fonseca; Slovart, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1998*
- [30] *Tussen school en wagen: Onderwijs aan Voyageurs, Manoesjen en Roms; Vlaams Centrum Woonwagenwerk, Leuven, Belgium, 1997*
- [31] *Beleidsplan 1997-2002; Vlaams Overleg Woonwagenwerk; Leuven, Belgium, 1997*
- [32] <http://fred.vlaanderen.be> / 5.12 - *Ethnisch-culturele minderheden*
- [33] *Tradícia rómskych remesiel (Tradition of Romany Crafts); Michal Bársony; WSA, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1993*
- [34] *Rómovia, Cigáni, kocovníci (Roma, Gypsies, Travellers); Jean-Pierre Liégeois; Council of Europe - Academia Istropolitana, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1995*
- [35] *Nepotrestaná vražda; Tomáš J. Fülöpp; MReport 30+31 / Reflex, Bratislava / Praha, Slovak / Czech Republics, 1993*
- [36] *From Challenging Culture to Challenged Culture; Johan Leman, Leuven University Press, Belgium, 1987*
- [37] *Progress Reports of the Roms Rakusy Program = Alternative housing and micro-enterprise for Gypsies in Slovakia, Co-financed by the European Commission during 1996-8, MTA asbl, Brussels, Belgium*
- [38] <http://www.antiracisme.be> = *Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism*
- [39] *Obrazový Opravník Obecne Oblíbených Omylu (Picture Corrector of Commonly Favourite Errors); Ludvík Soucek; Český klub, Praha, Czech Republic, 1997*
- [40] *Krátký slovník slovenského jazyka (Concise Dictionary of Slovak Language); VEDA - Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1997*
- [41] *Various articles from Time Magazine International, Domino Fórum, Reflex, Moment, Kankán, Práca, 100+1 ZZ, Veto, De Morgen, De Standaard, etc.*
- [42] *Lexikón symbolov (Lexicon of Symbols); Hans Biedermann; Obzor, Bratislava 1992*