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Escaping Gypsyness:

Work, Power and Identity in the Marginalization of Roma

PhD. Thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vykonal samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

Podpis:

Escaping Gypsyness: Work, Power and Identity in the Marginalization of Roma

Abstract:

Based on an ethnographic fieldwork among Roma in Tercov this dissertation explores questions of identity and poverty. It is argued that Gypsyness and poverty constantly mingle in both how the Roma cope with their social marginalization and how they are perceived. In consequence the Roma adopt strategies of survival whereby they attempt to escape identification as Gypsies. The facets of Gypsyness are explored on three levels. In Part 1 attention is paid to the internal cleavage that separates the Roma in Tercov in two fractions. The cleavage is analyzed on the microscopic level which reveals that one of the fractions is efficient in imposing the view of the other as more Gypsy like and thus establishes itself as immune to Gypsy perception. In Part 2 Gypsyness is explored in the realm of employment. Here the mutual complementarity of Gypsyness and poverty is recast in the discourse of deservingness which efficiently transforms social categories into cultural schemata and creates in the negative sense the exclusion of the Roma from the "moral community". In Part 3 and 4 are presented examples of how the Roma in Tercov temporarily outwit dominant representations and gain the upper hand in the local social interaction.

Unikat cikánství: práce, moc a identity v marginalizaci Romů

Abstrakt:

Na základě dlouhodobého etnografického výzkumu mezi Romy v Tercově tato dizertační práce zkoumá otázky identity a chudoby. Konstantní prolínání cikánství a chudoby se projevuje jak ve způsobech, jimiž se Romové vypořádávají se sociální marginalizací, tak v dominantních představách o nich. V důsledku toho si Romové osvojují různé strategie přežití, jejichž prostřednictvím unikají takové identifikaci. Podoby cikánství jsou přitom zkoumány na třech úrovních. V první části je pozornost věnována vnitřnímu členění Romů v Tercově na dvě frakce. Toto dělení je zkoumáno na mikroúrovni, která odhaluje, že jedné z frakcí se úspěšně daří uvrhnout obraz cikánství na druhou frakci tak, aby se sama vymanila z tohoto hegemonního uchopení. Ve druhé části je cikánství zkoumáno v oblasti zaměstnanosti. Vzájemné doplňování cikánství a chudoby se zde projevuje v diskurzu záslužnosti, který efektivně přetavuje sociální kategorie na kulturní schémata, a tím zakládá vyloučení Romů z „morálního souručenství". V třetí a čtvrté části jsou prezentovány příklady dočasně úspěšných praktik Romů při překonávání dominantních reprezentací a nastolování takových sociálních vztahů na lokální úrovni, ve kterých mají Romové navrch.

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Introduction

This essay may have started with the words of Sarah F. Green: "This is a story about marginality of both place and people, and how their marginality is continuously reconstructed while somehow also staying the same" (Green 2005: 1). The place is part of the story, but not as much as people are, very particular people indeed for that even though their marginality is so evident they take it into consideration only intermittently and sometimes do not even accede to the fact. It is my intention to render such a constellation somehow more understandable: despite finding themselves frequently hopeless, Roma in Tercov most of the times feel happy.

This is from the point of view of the actor, as it were. From a distance, marginality is a type of non-attachment, it "implies a difficult and ambivalent relevance to the heart of things" (Green 2005: 1). Can we then take heed of such a non-attachment? How does one cultivate difficulty or ambivalence? The peculiarity of a reflection on marginality lies in my view in this observation: while it seems apparent to the observer, confessing it is often humiliating to the extent that those deemed marginal make big effort to conceal it through various strategies of passing. The history of marginality then becomes a history of its denial. But such an attitude necessarily installs marginality as an objective fact for which we only have to find a convincingly revealing account. If marginality is a relative category, if it really conveys what it suggests – distance from the centre (imagined or imposed, as an aspect of hegemony or counter-hegemonic resistance) – then there must be as much accounts of marginality as there are measures of distance and indeed as there are conceptions of relatedness to the centre. The idea of objective margins at which difference is constituted emanates from the understanding of social space as containing vectors inscribing the movements within; at the same time this

movement is seen as inherently centrifugal in that it creates the margins from the centre, never the other way around. So far, most of the accounts of the marginality of the Roma in the Czech Republic drew on this view: their 'exclusion', 'deprivation', or 'traditonality' is produced by an observing eye unquestionably located in the centre. My intention is not to provide the opposite view, a view from the other bank, so to say, but rather to take the assumptions of this view to test and investigate their fecundity for the understanding of very particular decisions, practices and values observed.

In my research design I held to the framework of a reflexive social science. The "immersion into the particularity of an empirical, historically situated and dated reality (…) which is eventually established as an instance of possibilities" (Bourdieu 1998: 10) constantly requires from the student to test his tools of enquiry in terms of their appropriateness for the questions asked. This allowed a major redefinition of my original research project as soon as I got acquainted with my field. My original project had operated with a set of assumptions I had to reassess consequently. The intention was to look at how the Roma who had been the object of systematic proletarization during socialism cope with the post-socialist changes and how in the absence of the coercive political and legal framework they imagine and realize their survival. There were some scattered reports that informed about the new niches the Roma successfully opened. Rather than questioning identity as such I was presupposing identity changes embedded in the new framework of social relations. Since in 2000 when I conceived my project there was already abundant evidence about the large-scale unemployment of the Roma, about their social exclusion in education and housing, I was looking for a potentially less determining environment than that of urban decay stricken by all forms of social pathology which dominated the contemporary discourse about the new Gypsy question. Moreover, the Czech literature on Roma seemed to ignore groups living in the rural context.

And objectively, these Roma represented only a minority (8%) of the Roma on the Czech territory.

The material presented here represents only a segment of the overall material gathered during my fieldwork. Its central theme is *escaping Gypsyness*. It does not obviously refer to an emic conception; neither does it represent a consistent attitude of the Roma in Tercov. It is rather thought as a strategic device of my own analysis. Escaping allows me to put side by side the context and the action in different arenas while retaining a unified style of exposition and tone: to move from as much detailed description of what is observed, through patterned organization of the observations to the identification of the main problems. This strategic device however meets with the empirical material in that it also points to how decisions and preferences for action are generated. Escaping Gypsyness characterizes the Roma in Tercov as on the run. Wherever they go they have to confront yet another form of Gypsyness as it is expressed by people and institutions. This gives rise to a surprising phenomenon of Roma being repeatedly hunted down by an identity they wish to escape.

My central concern is to illustrate a space where the social logic is not absent but it is denied any relevance by an overall resignation to significance. It does not mean that Roma in Tercov do not strive for recognition, that they do not hold an art of living and a vision derived from it. I wish simply to point to the fact that at some point of marginalization it becomes urgent not to participate in the endless and pitiless competition over distinction but to escape the demands of the game by contouring its rules. Arguably this is also a way how to play the game, this time with the "weapons of the weak". Therefore, although "the principles of vision" appear in this text and I try to give them pattern, context and meaning, the quite restricted social lives which most of the Roma in Tercov lead cause that the architecture of this text does not concur with the prevalent structure of ethnographies of various Roma/Gypsy

groups. To my big surprise I haven't witnessed throughout all my fieldwork any marriage and only one funeral; religious beliefs did not represent any preoccupation and came to the fore only as individual curiosities; music was rather a colour to social life than a unique way of expression; itinerary crafts and fortunetelling were absent whatsoever. Still, I address the conditions of matrimonial arrangement and the subsistence activities.

This preliminary outline of my research project quite deconstructs the anthropological perspective as such. If we adhere to its most powerful and widely diffused aspiration which consists in the capacity to explain how it feels to appertain to a given group and how eagerly given people struggle to sustain their collective being then my research project commits a serious sin in turning away from optimistic self-representations as the source of communal ethos. It is necessary to emphasize that this is not a deliberate choice of the author. Nor is it, in my view, the outcome of theory volition. The fact is that in Tercov the Roma did not perpetuate an identity talk in the sense of an elaborate discourse about their common relatedness to the rest of the world and it was my biggest surprise in the field. Nonetheless, it is not the task of the anthropologist to imagine the ideal people of his research. I wish to inquire into this peculiar constellation whereby Roma are caught between a historically developed guardedness and wariness vis-à-vis external attempts to lump them under a generic category of Gypsies, vagabonds, social outcasts etc. and the necessity to respond to a very particular social situation at the margins of society. These responses then not so paradoxically, appear to outsiders as the attributes of their lifestyle. These are two different and indeed antithetical dynamics that need to be sketched and exemplified.

The dynamics could be labelled as those of identity and poverty. I want to argue that the discourse on Roma and on poverty feed each other to the extent that in the Czech Republic it

is barely impossible to dissociate one from the other. This is also the expression of the change that took place after 1990 in relation to Romani politics: besides important efforts to establish and promote Romani identity on an ethnic principle, a myriad of actions of various social actors took part at the continuous reshaping of the 'Gypsy question'. In consequence we may consider it as the testing ground of ideas about identity, citizenship and social solidarity. I wish to counterbalance this mingling of poverty and identity by looking at some of the features of living at the margin of society. In this I disclose poverty on different grounds.

First and foremost I look at poverty as the object of contestation on several levels: the State, the helping sector and the poor, as it were. These themes crop up continuously in the text but sometimes they are also addressed with more persistence. Hence Part 2 deals with the body of knowledge on deprivation but also with how the deprived venture into work and repeatedly fail to fulfil their aspirations. This should convey that deprivation is not a state of the mind but a social circumstance people continuously try to find solution for, try to comprehend and outwit. Part 3 then takes as the starting point the economic openings more suited to the economic reality of the long-term unemployed. However, even if they operate in the perceptions of the poor Roma as more suitable due to the allegedly more comprehensive social environment of other Roma, I show that as long as they are embedded in such networks the Roma from Tercov can not really profit from them. Quite on the contrary such openings often lead to reaffirmation of their marginality, this time within the larger population of Roma in Krumlov. Part 4 offers a more optimistic picture since it evolves uniquely within the immediate context of the village where the Roma can perform social relations on more equal terms. This is also the Part where I dwell on the resourcefulness of people in a more systematic way.

Questions of identity are raised in the opening Part. Here I am professing a new model for the description-cum-analysis of Romani sociability. I am aware of the historical limitations of this model; however I believe it is suitable for a quite representative aggregate of historical formations, specifically for groups of Roma who were subjected to long and intensive politics of assimilation in Central and Eastern Europe. In this model I am inspired by the 'empirical paradigm' of Norbert Elias as well as by his concept of Established/Outsiders which I modify according to the case under investigation. It is this part which informs also my consequent style of exposition. The central concern of the exposition is in the painstaking and consistent reference to a particular group, anchored in its reality temporarily, socially and spatially. Throughout the text I avoid the use of the term 'culture'. The reason is at once my hesitation as to weather the inflated term has any relevance whatsoever, but also strategic in that I wish to stick to a different level of conceptualization that reflects more the order of things as it was observed and documented during my fieldwork. The chief descriptive and analytical context I am interested in is the local power context, however reductionist this may seem. Should differences and more precisely differentiation in its processual nature be the leading theme, it is in my view best understood as an aspect of figuration in line with the thinking of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. Such an outline brings along the main themes that appear, although not always explicitly: marginalization, its encumbering in time and the coping strategies that the marginalized envisage as a way how to alleviate their current situation without necessarily these being efficient in the long term.

The Field

In the first Part I also often have recourse to extensive personal narratives. It is intended as an invitation to the main personalities of the story. The attention I pay to them and they paid to

me reveals the intensity of acquaintanceships and consequently the variability of the social environment in which the research was undertaken. As everyone who had ever undertaken a long-term ethnographic fieldwork can confirm we are never received with the same enthusiasm by all the people in our immediate fieldwork environs. During my fieldwork in Tercov I often endured quandaries as the result of endeavouring into this hardly prescribed way of inquiry. Ethnographic research puts us in situations and moments for which it is difficult to find a pattern or a common denominator. We are always entangled in friendly relations, affections and antipathies; we can never be absolutely sure, or at leas I never was, of controlling the happening of the research. This tension experienced by every anthropologist and which becomes later (often only after returning from the field site) the object of reflection has the effect that we do not believe in the objectivity of our findings. The requirement of long-term stay in the field represents to me the means by which we can assure our partners as well as ourselves of our intentions. This does not necessarily result in the understanding of what an ethnographic fieldwork is like. My research partners in Tercov believed that my intention was to write a book about their lives. This was what I gave them as an answer to their curiosity. However, especially in Tercov this was not in any sense a guarantee of easy access to everybody. Some experiences with journalists and TV crews offering similar articulation to the purposes of their presence in Tercov existed prior to my fieldwork. The long-term fieldwork does not heal previous disappointments. What it however does is that it provides both the ethnographer and the people who I dare to say are under study with a more or less sufficient time to become legible to each other. What is usually referred to in ethnographic manuals as "integration of the ethnographer in the environment under investigation" is but the gradual gaining of significance among people for whom we were until then indifferent. Gaining significance, acquiring a social position cannot be realized in the vacuum. It can be achieved only on the existing map of social relations. Therefore

integration in the fieldwork environment inevitably links us to some people and disconnects us from other depending on the terms of relations we built with them. The dynamics of integration thus becomes also the process of our apprenticeship about the movement in the field and about the vectors of social relations.

My closest associate in the field and my best friend was Šafrán. I spent with him most of the time. He could be considered my main informant although it was not in matters of cultural knowledge. Šafrán was the dream of every ethnographer: he did not need to be asked to provide you with answers. He was so verbose that some people considered him weird. I kept his 'real' nickname which captures accurately his character and renown: Šafrán translates as saffron, somebody rare and precious. I would liken him to Hrabal's famous figure of *pábitel*: constantly recounting stories in which he linked the least possible phenomena into a grand cosmology. This cosmology, his personal invention I should avow, separated people into black and the rest. The blacks where simply all the non-whites (however, Šafrán was somehow unclear concerning Asian people; his last talk implied that they were people of their own). The blacks were also the bearers of human genius across time and space. This cosmology put together the Roma, me, African-Americans, extraterrestrials, ancient Egyptians and all other people who happen not occupy the centre of the world despite their superiority. Šafrán was not my cultural interpreter precisely because his worldview was not disciplined. His value of an informant consisted in his incessant activity which was in deep contrast with the permanent economic hardship in which he lived. What made him a good informant, an excellent one in fact, was that he was always doing something. Even drinking coffee with him was full of action. Getting acquainted with him changed my fieldwork experience. Until then I was more associated with Ferko who was more a man laissez faire. He condescendingly ignored all the happenings; he preferred his sofa, listening to music and

people coming to see him. With Šafrán I discovered most of the small activities, the imponderabilia of everyday life as well as the big activities like blueberry picking, scrap collecting and adventures to the dump.

The Place

The place plays a dubious role in the characterization of my research.[1] One of the motives continually reappearing and disappearing in how it was referred to by the local people, the not so local people and the strangers was that of abandonment. At the same time the geographic seclusion of Tercov is only a recent historical development. However, it is objectively materialized in various attributes of dis/connection to the centre(s) and I present them in the first Part.

As to the choice of this particular field site and to its representativeness the decision was made rather accidentally. But at the end I think it is legitimate to claim that Tercov offered me an entry to a constellation of a rather typical social universe. Progressive acquiescence of the fact that what I was observing was not special but prosaic, that the circumstances under which people acted were occurring in many other places as well as their actions were revealed as not so localized but only tainted by the local environment. Tercov might seem as a place on its own, but at the same time I tried to overcome this impression by paying due attention to the ways how it is inhabited by its population. This reflection appears, quite untypically, towards the end of my essay as I move to the analysis of the quite limited interaction in the village not only between the Roma and non-Roma but also between various groups of Czechs.

[1] In following essay I present only some of the evidence gathered during my fieldwork which took place between November 2001 and September 2003. During this two year period I spent altogether 13 months in the field in Tercov. Since then till 2006 I was returning to Tercov for about one month every year.

The Language

Michael Stewart remarks in his monograph about a Vlax Gypsy group in Hungary how he was repeatedly impelled by his interlocutors to avow his attachment to *romanes*, the Gypsy way of life. This was not in the form of paying tribute to a moral code, but primarily in the performance of this way of life. The sense of complicity (Marcus 1997), the ultimate figure in ethnographic writing that encompasses the complexity of the passage from congruent situations in the field to patterned exposition in writing, was therefore achieved by sharing or by participation at collective activities. Most importantly, Vlax Roma adhered very much to their way of expressing the idioms of belonging in songs and in speech in general. The centrality of *romanes* as a language to *romanes* as a way of life creates the necessity to master the vernacular not only for the plausibility of communication between the researcher and the subjects of his research, but also as an act of integration into the group. This is especially true for instances when the language is the code which separates the insiders from outsiders, as in the case of Vlax Roma. In Tercov it was a different story in which the language competence was a frequent indicator of subtle power relations which the fieldwork often only exposed.

The language question being set in this way, my competence in "speaking" in Czech turned out to be one of the valuable tools of conducting the research. Roma resourcefully enjoyed this my capacity to their favour. I was often asked to go and talk in their name which allowed me to observe negotiations otherwise closed to third persons, like in the Department of social support. In contrast to Vlax Roma, it was the precisely the capacity of not speaking romanes that allowed me to build complicity with Roma. The power of language competence was therefore situated elsewhere than I originally expected. It was not in the communication within the group of people but precisely in the communication of these people with the outside.

1 Escaping Gypsyness

1.1 ‘Don’t lump us all together’!

Anthropologists studying Roma/Gypsy groups often prefer to draw on vernacular expressions instead of social configurations *in situ*. One example of this relates to the question of internal and external divisions and the processes through which these divisions are established. I will deal in detail with these anthropological accounts in another chapter**.** In the following remarks, I will attempt to outline a model that would allow us to account for situations that might differ in substance – personal alliances and animosities, family quarrels, access to ranks and tributes, patterns of expenditure etc. – but in which at the same time we could detect a particular *modus operandi* whereby power relations structure forms of affiliation.

The reason for choosing this title, which employs one of the most frequently heard locutions when doing fieldwork among Roma in the Czech Republic, is that I wish to emphasize an attitude peculiar to Roma in Tercov: the fervent attempt to deny any imputed affiliation with other Roma, mostly those geographically or socially very close to them. This attitude, which also applies to relations among Roma in Tercov itself, obviously challenges all attempts to represent the subjects appearing in my ethnographic data as constituting a group consciously adhering to an idea of imagined community. However, my goal at this point is not to decide about the factual existence of such a group among Roma inhabitants of Tercov. My intention is more modest and problem-oriented. I would like to explore what the identifiable reasons for such an attitude are, under what conditions it arises, and how people articulating such an attitude feel about it.

This represents a twofold difficulty that needs to be addressed. First, measured against the ethos of our time, where ethnic identity is thought to be an inevitable and necessary quality, this attitude, seems unexpected and incoherent. It would also seem to contradict recent theoretical trends in anthropology. Marshall Sahlins, for example, has identified a different process of structural transformation. According to him, we are witnessing a global and self-conscious elaboration of contrastive features of people all over the world as they attempt to redraw the blurred lines between "their" and "our" cultures (Sahlins 1993: 19). Second, in light of the prevalent anthropological theoretical and conceptual agenda emphasizing the constructedness of identity and the indefinite imagination of various peoples in achieving a sense of belonging vis-à-vis other collectives, this attitude of Czech Roma is exceptional. I will address this double rupture – with the prevailing ethos and with theory – separately, so that the converging articulations will become apparent only at the end of my exposition.

During the socialist era legal, political and social scientific representations of Gypsyness oscillated between definitions of it as a social category and as a result of cultural determinism. The later disillusionment from the original optimism of the 1950's that the socialist society will help to eradicate the Gypsy backward life-style by a simple historical necessity disrupted the view of the 'Gypsy question' by less definite motives for a possible successful assimilation policy (Donert 2008: 8). The policy inconsistencies as well as the resulting representations of Roma had been marked by a repeated interfusion of life-style attributes with considerations of social aptness in the categorization of the Gypsy population. Thus the basic differentiation was set up as evaluation of the adaptability of the Gypsies for the classless society and socialist culture: in a hardly plausible symmetry the Gypsy population was categorized into three thirds of adaptable, semi-adaptable and inadaptable according to such "objective" indicators as work ethic, Czech language competence, hygienic habits,

patterns of dwelling etc. One of my concerns in this chapter is to provide ethnographic evidence regarding the enduring mis/representation of Roma after 1990. Due to recent historical developments (the change from a subversive assertion of ethnicity during communism to current mainstream ethnic politics and multiculturalism), questions of identity tend not to be articulated clearly. Whereas some ethnographic analyses of various Roma/Gypsy groups have also sought to illustrate the non-universalizing, private or hidden character of identity (see Okely 1983, Stewart 1997, Sutherland 1986, Silverman 1982, Williams 1982), I am facing a different problem, namely how to account for a situation where *identity talk* is absent. Whereas in the former various strategies of disappearance, impression management and the like seek to reinforce the sense of belonging among the Gypsies or Roma and to maintain the group cohesion while inscribing it in the surrounding social context, the absence of *identity talk* in the case of the Roma in Tercov should be seen as a refusal of any form of sociability on the ground of collective agency. By this I mean a situation where there is a perceptible hesitation to put forward a positive and all-encompassing representation of the group. Although strategies of Romani individuals to remain inconspicuous might be successful in places where their physical appearance does not differ from the rest of the population [2], this is a qualitatively different task for Roma in the Czech Republic, where it is less likely that a Rom could pass for a Czech on the basis of his or her appearance. Here, the strategy consists in attempts to cope with dominant representations that treat the social, cultural and psychological characteristics of Roma in the most essentializing manner.

Not surprisingly, there is a deep contrast between these dominant representations on the one hand and Romani self-perception on the other. Roma in Tercov emphasize this negatively through the use of different Czech metaphors repudiating homogeneity such as *"neházejte nás*

[2] For example in order to occupy an economic niche, see Gmelsch (1986).

do jednoho pytle" (don't lump us all together) or less frequently *"není cikán jako cikán"* (not every Gypsy is a Gypsy). The expressions do not refer to exactly the same thing. The former is defensive in that it demonstrates distance from imputed affiliation with the same kind. It operates by exploiting the rational and logical explanatory power of the obvious fact that negative characteristics are not equally shared by a given group. The latter statement, on the other hand, while also defensive, does contain the kernel of a positive definition of Gypsyness. In particular, the first "Gypsy" in the phrase suggests the possible acceptance of an identity freed from layers of misrepresentation.

1.1.1 Episode 1

There are qualitatively diverse situations under which these ideas surface. For example, when we were at Ferko's home watching TV, there was a news report on a large family fight in a Gypsy settlement in Slovakia. The clash erupted, it was reported, when parents intervened to defend their boys in what started out as a childish squabble. , The report however concentrated on the subsequent clash between the extended families of the two boys, which ended with several serious injuries. The sequences were interspersed with images of agitated men and women running around aimlessly. Interviews conducted in Slovak with inarticulate, squalling people, manifestly solicited to comment in Slovak on the situation, rounded off the image of Roma as being unable to reflect on happenings in their own community. The cruelty of this backward and funny world was clear "even" to the Roma in Tercov. At the same time, by linking the images of unprecedented and excessive violence among Roma with images taken at supposedly similar clashes between Czech Roma in urban zones, the reportage constructed a more urgent reference: these people also live close to us, in our cities' neighborhoods.

During the last ten years, the specter of ghettoizaton has been heavily evoked in debates about the social malaise found in areas densely populated by Roma. The report hence heavily implied that the Romani communal life-style was external to "our" culture. . It was precisely at this juncture that Hana broke out and exclaimed, albeit ironically: "Joj, look at these Bushmen (*křováci*)…!" Angry about her neglecting what I felt was an exaggerated portrayal of the situation and the imposition of false parallels I told her: "Come on, they're Roma, too!" Ferko left his comfortable position on the sofa and swept his arm in a sign of resignation over such a debate. This resigned attitude also elicited support from Ferko's children. The possible association with what was on the screen irritated Maruna, his second daughter: "Our grandparents lived like that, *bába* (grandmother) still remembers it but that was long time ago… She is now horrified when she watches pictures from the *osada* (rural Gypsy segregated settlements in Slovakia). These Gypsies (*cigáni*) really look different, they go barefoot… I would never let my children walk around naked." None of them actually uttered the phrase mentioned in this chapter's title, however they all expressed the same merciless view as Miluna, the youngest of Ferko's daughters – "I would never put my feet in their huts (*bouda*, literarily "hutch")… they live like animals there!"

This having been said, it is pertinent to point to a key aspect in the experience of belonging to Roma: that of generational differences. Whereas Ferko and Hana, as well as other people of their generation like Šafrán, retained personal experiences and memories of life in settlements in Slovakia (which they left as children with their parents at the beginning of the 1960's), the generation of their children often grew up in state-run children's shelters called *dětské domovy* (literally "children's homes").[3] For that reason the *osada* is now present in the memories of

[3] They were placed there in consequence of their parents' "failure" to assure a satisfactory family environment early on after founding their families. The history of the practice of taking Roma children away from their parents by the state is yet to be written (however see XX reporting on the actual situation). The same goes for the analysis of the institution of the *dětský domov* as a constitutive part of this practice. It is difficult to find a parallel

the following generation only as an index marking the progress their parents made and therefore as something belonging to the distant past.

1.1.2 Episode 2

Besides such examples of direct and explicit denial of commonality with highly exotic images of Gypsyness represented in the TV report, the moments that also initiated fervent reactions against association with other Roma was when the affair or the people in question were socially and geographically very close to Tercov and its Romani inhabitants. In casual talks I often heard how Roma from Vetřní, Přídolí or Bujanov (villages within a 30km radius with similar concentration of Roma in likewise dilapidated housing), suffered from poverty, how they couldn't make ends meet or how "hungry" they were. The most virulent reactions were provoked when Roma learned about slanderous rumors circulating about them among other, similarly positioned Roma or when allegedly more fortunate Roma demonstrated their superiority. This happened when two Roma from a nearby town suddenly showed up in Tercov to barter musical instruments. The two visitors arrived unexpectedly, late in the evening.

The two brothers belonged to the Giňa family, which as of 2002 had resided in the nearby town for only six years. There were no particular family ties between the Giňa family and any of the families living in Tercov. Nonetheless, they were well-known in the region for their

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to the dětský domov since it is something between an orphanage and a social care provider: its inhabitants could be either children who lost their parents or children who had been taken from their parents (in other words it combines foster care and a disciplinary function). Regarding the second function, the children involved were predominantly Roma. Some estimates even show that up to 70% of all the institutionalized children were Roma (citation XX), a fact that would seem to indicate a massive assimilationist strategy on the part of the state. As I will show later on, this practice was effectively subverted since the children often returned to their parents after reaching maturity.

musical prowess. Their group was often hired for Romani festivities (*zábava*) and audio cassettes of their music circulated from hand to hand in Tercov and similar settlements. They were received with genuine hospitality at the house of Milan, Šafrán's brother. The news of their visit spread rapidly and curious people quickly gathered to listen to them. In an attempt to find a common topic of discussion Milan started to boast about the newly founded music group in Tercov which was formed after we had successfully applied for a grant from the Open Society Fund to buy instruments. Milan mentioned that the equipment, which had been bought in a second hand store (except for the electric keyboard), was not the best but sufficient for their "strumming." He also recounted that they needed a more powerful amplifier with a built-in mixing device. The brothers avidly performed on the new instruments for about half an hour. A discussion about the musical equipment permitted them to demonstrate command and knowledge in matters of music, something which captivated most of the people present. At one point one of the brothers playing on the electric keyboard started giving advice on how to improve the equipment. He came to the conclusion that an amplifier was essential for preparing a public appearance, the ultimate goal of every group. He therefore offered to trade an amplifier and a bass guitar (which the brothers were by chance carrying with them in the car) for two large and relatively unused speakers and a lead guitar we had bought with the grant money. The two powerful speakers were supposedly not so necessary for a group at this stage of rehearsing in a cellar. The conviviality of the unexpected meeting made it difficult to resist such a propitious offer. The brothers quickly unloaded the equipment from their car and brought it up for display. It consisted of a very old, battered and worn-out amplifier of no value and of a similarly worthless, dysfunctional bass guitar without strings and with a broken neck. Although aware of the still prevailing interest in a trade, I left the place relying in my mind on the good judgment of Milan and the other musicians not to swap their newly acquired instruments for this scrap.

Half an hour later I met Šafrán's youngest son Petr on the street and he told me the deal had almost been settled. I was furious. In the meanwhile the two brothers had invited Milan and other men to a bar for a drink. I went to look at the instruments again. There, in the absence of the two brothers, I examined the instruments carefully, piece by piece. At the same time I discovered that the deal had already been made. In fact, it had been eagerly promoted by Radek, who didn't know anything about music and didn't play any instrument. As soon as I started disclosing the disadvantageous nature of the barter, Radek lost his temper and stormed off. The barter in fact had a hidden "clause": if the deal went through, Radek would sell his car to the brothers for a price nobody else was willing to pay. Radek's exaggerated reaction apparently alerted everybody else that there was something strange about the situation. Why would he give up so easily? Why didn't he defend the terms of the deal and turn against Yasar? Later in the evening I learned that the brothers were asking for me and were up for a fight but could not find me (I have to admit I anticipated this so that it was no wonder that I wasn't to be found; this was later mocked by some as cowardice). For me this was a confirmation not only of the fact that the barter did not take place but also that the brothers had no one else to appeal to and were seeking to avenge their humiliation. The next day somebody recounted to me what actually happened in my absence: the brothers had been turned out of town because they assumed that the Roma in Tercov were "stupid like other Gypsies".

The two examples above illustrate rather situational responses that nonetheless emanate from deeply embedded reflexes. Exotic representations of Gypsyness or an equally injurious perception of Gypsies stripped of the capacity to identify what is going on in the world are two figures that coalesce in how Roma think they are perceived by the *non-Roma*. The fact that the first example refers to a misrepresentation constructed by non-Gypsies whereas the

second example reveals an attempt to exploit existing symbolic domination in relations between Gypsies is not so important for the subject matter of the discussion I am after here. On the contrary, this disparateness underlines that the passionate denial of commonality is generated regardless of who actually attempts to stress it. The Giňa brothers may have acquired some authority by representing values highly valued by Roma in Tercov, like musical renown or economic success.[4] But in approaching the Roma in Tercov disingenuously, in imposing on them a derogatory/insulting image of "easy people" who could be satisfied cheaply, they were only exploiting the exotic representation that places Roma outside the pale of history. What is common to both episodes is, however, how they were dealt with in the end. The response did not consist in an active confrontation (either with my declaration that the people in the *osada* were also Roma as in the Episode 1, or with the derogatory attitude of the two brothers towards less fortunate Roma, as in Episode 2), but in an abrupt rejection clearly intended to fight off the unbearable lightness of affiliations. However spontaneous and prompt their response, it signals the rather feeble ability of Roma in Tercov to counterbalance the imposition of an inadmissible identity.

Although this lightness of affiliation may be difficult to bear, it is still quite easy to cast it off once a similarly positioned potential bearer appears within the framework of social interactions on the ground. To give a more concise account of how Gypsyness is switched on and off in social interaction we have to look into the elaborate mechanics of social distanciation at place and at its dynamics. The following example will take us to the very heart of Tercov, to the Roma inhabitants of two apartment blocks in the center of the village. Regardless of the pertinence of the examples presented so far to illustrate the variability of repudiation of Gypsyness, they stand only as a prelude to the presentation of a different set of

[4] The Giňa family is also renowned for "knowing their way around" (*umí v tom chodit*), i.e. for finding economic opportunities and niches. They will be part of the story later on when I describe the blueberry business.

data. These refer to one of the biggest puzzles I encountered during my fieldwork. In Tercov, both Roma and *non-Roma* assign significance to which of the apartment blocks a Rom belongs. Therefore we hear that somebody is from *dvojka* (Block Two) or *trojka* (Block Three). This assignation evidently weighs heavier than the banal evidence of being a Rom. In other words, affiliation with one of the blocks, the distinction derived from this , is to some extent crucial. It is not only the significance of the affiliation that I wish to elucidate here; my major concern, is the conditions, historically produced and repeatedly affirmed, that allow for such a cleavage in sociability to develop. It is even more intriguing when we realize that the cleavage is depicted in terms of human worth not too much different from racialized discourse. What does it mean, then, if one Rom curses another for being a Gypsy? What is hidden under this gesture that inescapably reminds us of blasphemy?

The absence of any "substantial difference" that could justify the discrimination of one group of Roma by another confirms that the opposition does not result from any distinctive properties but from the oppositional nature of the relationship itself. The relation between two Roma groups is not revealed through the analysis of the qualities they assign to each other, but by the analysis of the mechanics of distanciation between them. Moreover, the ethnographic evidence points more towards the fact that the strategy does not consist in the denial of Romani identity as such, but in the refutation of the social categories that have become strongly associated with Gypsyness in the course of post-war era policies (and sometimes even beyond this period). Indeed, what I find most interesting in this phenomenon is precisely the fact how ethnic identity is but one of the manipulated parameters of the relationship.

1.1.3 Episode 3

In November 2001, a Czech-based NGO *Spolu-CZ* (Together-CZ) arrived in Tercov to investigate the possibility of incorporating the local Romani community into the network of localities which Together-CZ assists in implementing grass-roots initiatives. They were invited here by the local advisor for Romani issues of the District Authority in Český KrumlovThe advisor noted that Roma in Tercov suffered from bad housing conditions and needed help in raising money for necessary repairs of two apartment blocks.

Spolu-CZ has designed its own method called "activation of local groups" as a distinctive way of identifying community problems and possible solutions. They believe that through this method it is possible not only to achieve better results in community problem solving, but as a method it also helps people to develop a grass-root critical perspective on their place in the social environment and thus mobilizes group identity by encouraging a basic appreciation of the group's own capacity to find ways for achieving desired ends. The aims of the method are neither published nor are they communicated to the people with whom *Spolu-CZ* works. They stem from the joint experience of its two chief members and founders, a couple consisting of a male Dutch anthropologist and a female Czech sociologist. The *Spolu-CZ* team has implemented these principles in a method of community problem identification and problem solving that consists of a carefully structured system of group discussions and textual visualization.

Upon their first visit to Tercov prior to my fieldwork, *Spolu-CZ* introduced itself by recounting the history of its activities. Since these activities always dealt with assisting Roma with various problems and were always funded, the first impression they left was that "they really help Gypsies" as opposed to occasional visits of other advocates of Roma, be it investigative journalists or various NGOs with whom the Roma had already had some

experience.[5] The role of *Spolu-CZ* as an unforeseen and lavish external source of aid dominated the attitudes of Roma at the beginning of the project. During the first meeting, the circumstances developed in an unexpected way when the inhabitants of Block Two insisted on representing themselves separately from the inhabitants of Block Three. Although representatives of Block Two did not specify the reasons for this arrangement, Block Three immediately embraced the separation and cohered to the explanation that each of the two blocks had different preferences. Soon after realizing that the property relations were different in legal terms in the two blocks, *Spolu-CZ* also found ground for the separation. Whereas Block Two had an owner and Roma were only tenants on a lease of undetermined length, in Block Three the inhabitants were the actual owners of the block. This was supposed to alter the distribution of funds in a significant way, since according to the internal rules of *Spolu-CZ* only Roma could benefit from the funding and not any third parties whatsoever. Thereafter the meeting sessions of the "working groups" were organized separately for the representatives of each block. As of November 2001, over a period of one year, four sessions took place. *Spolu-CZ* urged both groups to nominate for the meetings both male and female representatives and also young people. These requirements were met completely only during the first and partially during the second sessions. Afterwards, the makeup of representatives changed according to shifts in attitudes and opinions of the Roma. If *Spolu-CZ* questioned the composition, the Roma would find some excuses, usually referring to illness or work engagements of the people involved.

The first meeting was held in a classroom of the former elementary school, which had not been in use for several years. This was arranged in agreement with the head of the community council as a sign of her generosity. As soon as it became clear that the activities of *Spolu-CZ*

[5] I actually learned about the village from a newspaper article by Martin Šimáček, "Jak žijí Romové a Češi v Tercově" (How do Roma and Czechs live in Tercov), in *Lidové noviny*, 31.08.2001.

would proceed separately from any direct intervention of the community council, the head of the council ceased to be cooperative and proposed the anteroom to her office, a room of 15m² equipped with benches and stools, as a meeting place. No other alternative being available, *Spolu-CZ* had to agree and thereafter organized the meetings in this space, which were accessible to the public as well as to the eyes and ears of the head of community council.

The framework of the method had been worked out on different projects and represented the "capital" of *Spolu-CZ*, which provides training sessions for other NGOs intending to employ the method. There are two main criteria regarding the procedure of discussion groups during which participants define various problems: 1) estimation of the "feasibility" of tasks and 2) assessment of the "priority" of problems. Both criteria are closely interrelated and are generated through an ordered scheme of evaluations arising from the discussion guided by *Spolu-CZ*; the results are subsequently registered on large sheets of paper hung on the walls all around the room. Both criteria are separated into three different columns according to their estimated "feasibility" or "priority". Subsequently, they are organized in order of declining importance.[6] In the first introductory meeting (when, by the way, the intentions and eventual scope of *Spolu-CZ*'s help was not yet clear to the Roma) participation was very high and suggestions, identification of problems, plans for improvement and readiness to participate were expressed with enthusiasm. The attitude of *Spolu-CZ* was tactical here and was motivated by a preliminary perception of their clients. Since they were convinced that any untimely disclosure of the actual amount of funds available would discourage Roma from

[6] For example if people wanted to build a children's playground, its feasibility would have to be determined according to the work tasks necessary for its construction (assembling of a wooden frame, digging out of the foundation, procurement of sand and its transport). If Roma could accomplish this on their own it would most likely be marked as highly feasible. However, feasibility is subject to an eventual confirmation in terms of financing: the tasks could be easily feasible but some of them would require investment (you have to buy sand). If this exceeds or significantly distorts the budget, it would not be assessed as a priority and therefore moved down the scale of feasibility.

participating, they hesitated to answer questions concerning this issue. Since their aid project relied on the willingness of clients to contribute willfully to identifying and solving their own problems, the NGO did not want funds to be understood as remuneration but as a limit to the eventual scope of problem-solving. *Spolu-CZ* also stressed that its intention was only to contribute to solutions by demonstrating that cooperation and solidarity among group members could allow them to establish a more firm position vis-à-vis the authorities. In their words, they insisted that their role was to be the "facilitator-advisor" and not the "solver" of problems.

Since participants in the meeting were of various generations, their suggestions covered a large scale of leisure time activities and political issues. These ranged from wishes to build a U-ramp, a playground for children or organize a football team to calls for legal assistance in communication with various authorities or proposing to the community council a rehearsal room for the newly established band. Suggestions concerning renovations in both blocks arose (refurbishment of the facades and of the roof, replacement of the glazing, the front door and the conduit etc.) although not at the forefront of discussion. Differences between the two blocks on the listing of problems were virtually unrecognizable during the separate meetings. The willingness of the proprietor of Block Two to sign new contracts with the tenants that would be drawn up by the NGO and that would assure unlimited tenancy for the inhabitants allowed the equal incorporation of both blocks in the project. At the end of the session, in the afternoon, after sedulous persuasion by male representatives of the Roma, *Spolu-CZ* disclosed the sum. It was around 80.000 CZK (about 3200 Euro), to be divided in half between the two groups in two separate payments distributed consecutively in the course of the project.

I stayed with other people at the house of one of my friends until late night. We discussed the events the whole time and I left with the impression that although they saw the sum to be too

meager, it still represented some help. Also, a break in the sequence of otherwise indistinguishable days had been achieved and this proved an inspiration to many. The next morning the representatives of Block Two were scheduled for another meeting. People from *Spolu-CZ* had had already prepared the anteroom with dozens of large sheets of paper showing priorities from the previous session.. The sheets, which covered the walls all around, were written in large capital letters to avoid any distortions in handwriting. The NGO's assistant reread and explained the notes meticulously in a highly didactic way. Based on the understanding reached the previous day, the most feasible suggestions appeared to relate to leisure-time activities. The construction of a children's playground, setting up a football team etc. all seemed to require little investment and could be handled by the Roma in the short term if organized properly. The other group of suggested problems was characteristically linked to assistance in carrying out administrative tasks. The Roma, for example, requested intervention with the community council in their effort to obtain a room for band rehearsals and for organizing parties or in clarifying the conditions under which they could be assigned communal housing. They also pleaded for legal advice concerning their rights in relation to the Social security department and the Employment office. Since *Spolu-CZ* has a legal advisor, these demands would not have represented any financial difficulty. They would, however, have required thorough investigation, which would have slowed down the project's implementation. For this reason these projects were placed lower on the scale of priorities. The third group contained problems perceived for the time being as the least feasible due to their presumably heavy demands on time and money. This group related mostly to housing repairs.

After *Spolu-CZ* recapitulated the discussions from the previous day and underlined the priorities, the anteroom fell silent. Everybody stared at the sheets, trying to glean information

from the mass of notes. The moment inescapably confronted the Roma with a "map" of their problems: the materialization of the problems on the sheets and the time allotted for their solution revealed their scale and quality. Ferko, the elder of the block at whose place I stayed the previous night, raised his voice disapprovingly and complained that "the problems of greatest interest" to them would be dismissed from consideration. He disputed the alleged unfeasibility of housing repairs. Other people joined his cause and acclaimed their craft skills, their capacity "to build the house" (somebody even said, "Don't you know that every Gypsy is a mason?"). In a sudden, concerted effort, male Romani representatives attempted to subvert the order of priorities in favor of promoting the feasibility of repairs by house inhabitants. *Spolu-CZ* agreed to consider the suggestion and launched a debate about the value of particular tasks involved in housing repair. In a smooth twist, items in the third group replaced items in the first group on the working sheets; soaring house repairs now came before leisure time activities on the "map". Henceforth, the ensuing discussions and work sessions dealt almost exclusively with particular repair tasks and their execution.

On his way home from the meeting, Ferko came across Šafrán, the elder from Block Three, in front of the block when he was on his turn on the way to the meeting that had been scheduled for the other group just afterwards. Without being asked, he told him about the latest events. Standing directly in front of the front door of Block Three and speaking very loudly, he emphasized that he was addressing nut only Šafrán but also everybody leaning out of the windows: "We can take care of ourselves… I can take care of it. I'm not going to be stupid enough to spend this small amount of money on something that can't even be seen in the end. We'll put everything into the *barák* (the house, but also the apartment proper), even though Liška (the landlord) should be doing it." The appeal of this "rational choice" had an immediate effect: the word spread quickly and people roared from their windows in concert

about the advantages of investing in various housing repairs. Eventually, one could see how groups of discussing people formed around the block and began thrashing out the latest events. I was impressed that nobody really questioned this sudden change of strategy. It almost felt as if it was an option that had always been present in the air but that nobody had been willing to express. It was as if special courage was necessary to voice what was really at stake from the point of view of Roma—certainly a mistaken conclusion in view of how easily *Spolu-CZ* gave way to the radical reconfiguration of their course of operations. For didn't this reappraisal, after all, match perfectly with their concept of "activating local groups"?

At the subsequent meeting, representatives of Block Three expressed the same change of priorities and designated the *barák* as their main concern. In this still preliminary phase of the project, the listing of suggestions for housing repairs was very large but differed only in minor details for both blocks. However, both groups were able to convince *Spolu-CZ* that even the apparently most costly tasks could be realized. The Roma achieved this by negotiating various tactical compromises between their preferences and the NGO's insistence on "realism" in implementing them, thus overturning the time scale inscribed in the "feasibility-priority" logic of the method. Whereas at one point the most urgent problems of the Roma seemed to be future-oriented, at the end it was these quotidian housing problems that came to dominate the attention of the NGO. The maneuvers used by the Roma in persuading *Spolu-CZ* to revamp their plans were in some cases far-fetched. For example, fixing the facade was declared feasible and moved up on the list of priorities when the Roma put forward the idea that it would be possible to cut the overall costs to the sheer purchasing price of cement, lime, sand and few tools (9000 CZK, i.e. 360 Euro). Obviously, a scaffold would be needed to renovate a four-story building. The lease would cost 60.000 CZK/month (2400 Euro), that is 75% of the entire budget. The Roma therefore suggested they could construct the scaffold on their own

from wooden poles abundantly found in the nearby forests. This would not be in keeping with official safety regulations at building sites but *Spolu-CZ*, overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the Roma, did not anticipate this aspect at all. It is also necessary to state here that neither of the groups ever sought to deceive *Spolu-CZ* and misappropriate the funds. I am only trying to show how the Roma defended themselves against the prospect that the economic calculation involved in the "feasibility-priority method" would render "their problems" impossible to resolve or, in short, de-realize them. Indeed, to ward off possible skepticism about their handling of the project the Roma proposed to *Spolu-CZ* that an intermediary would administer the money; that intermediary was to be me.[7]

1.1.4 Images of segregation

Before launching my discussion of patterns of sociability in Tercov, I wish to point to another set of questions for investigation revealed while the Spolu-CZ project was being implemented. I might add that I was able to observe the project's implementation every step of the way. In the end, the Roma had what they wanted. The sum was divided equally between the two groups who used it in an almost identical way. The common hallways in both blocks were repainted, the main front doors replaced or fixed and facades patched (though only the parts that could be reached from the ground); both blocks were disinfected and cellars cleared of amassed junk.[8] Some money was also used to pay for fuel or other

[7] This offer was however more than an attempt to please the NGO. It also signaled shyness and timidity in fate of being responsible for the accounts, which the Roma imagined to be a task of tremendous sophistication.

[8] Two tasks had to be abandoned: the replacement of front doors to all apartments and replacement of window frames in most of them. Whereas window frames largely exceeded the budget, front doors had been already ordered. However, at the final inspection in the factory *Spolu-CZ* discovered that there were fire regulations for front doors which the ones ordered by the Roma did not meet. Afraid of being criticized as a "Western" institution that mollifies Roma with cheap and inadequate products, they immediately called off the order, which the Roma, confronting the problem of their doors being leaking, quite could not understand.

"maintenance costs". The question however remains: why did housing repairs gain such importance? Measured objectively, the available funds could never properly ameliorate the housing conditions, a fact of which both the Roma and *Spolu-CZ* were well aware and which initially caused confusion on the part of the NGO. Whereas the funds were invested in repairs to the blocks' exterior, substantive repairs would still have to be done in the interior of each apartment.[9] To sum up, the housing conditions of Roma were in a serious state. However, they chose to repair what was visible from the outside even if the funds were not sufficient for either of the repairs. The attempt to cope with the outside perception of their houses, to show that they are bothered by this appearance, seemed to represent an urgent need.[10] This might be seen as being in line with one of the most frequent representations of Roma, both in mainstream society as well as in Czech ethnographies of Roma, namely that they are inclined to pomposity and trifling display – remnants of a pre-modern life style and therefore signs of their inadequate integration into society. However, I find behind their attitude a determined effort to cope with what shapes their relations with mainstream society. This was not a deliberate choice or adjustment to available funds, but the preferred option, an attempt to reconcile with the outside world. What Roma are dealing with when they mobilize in this way is an enduring, oppressive representation of their life-style as "poor," "segregated" and "miserable." The house becomes a material representation of the relation between the Roma and the dominant order. By choosing to bedaub the surface they effectively enfeebled the ascriptive nature of identity so as to allow for inscribing their own acts.

[9] The general inspection of housing conditions I conducted during the project showed that an upgrade of all pipelines (water and sewer pipes) and electrical conduits was of immense importance as well as the replacement of boilers and the complete installation of a heating system in every apartment. According to my calculations, each apartment would have needed an average investment of 100.000 CZK (4000 Euro).

[10] This was later remedied by the head of the community council who kept her promises and allotted each block a subsidy of 7000 CZK (280 Euro) from the council budget after the completion of façade repairs. The subsidy eventually paid off the replacement of leaky gutters.

In some sense, these representations are misplaced because they are rooted in different contexts than the rural one in which the Tercov Roma happen to live. In another, the Roma are dealing with their own memory of the times past when they escaped these representations to establish their lives in Tercov. In what follows I will describe the presence of these representations in Tercov - the materialization of their grievance. The centrality of the *barák* as a bearer of distinction and marker of identity stems from a local as well as a wider social context. The local context is linked to the segregation of Roma in the village that developed recently in the course of broader social changes in property relations.

Tercov is a typical example of the socialist attempts to "urbanize" the countryside. The originally raft settlement from the end of the 18th century comprising only small peasant buildings, a mid-19th century church and few lodging, changed considerably with the implementation of socialist modernization. The buildings of the former cooperative farm dominate the village's outskirts: two giant silos and a cowshed together with the pastures surround the village on the north and east. A new "town hall" and a school building represent the coveted transformation of the countryside into a micro-image of urban modernity. The village's central road is now flanked by nine, 4-story apartment blocks in two parallel rows constructed at the beginning of the 1970's and accompanied by yet another row of three similar blocks at the entry to the village.[11] The main road cuts through the village horizontally in such a way that the upper row of blocks towers over the road.

Roma occupy the two blocks in the middle, so that the view of these two blocks with defective facades, broken glazing and damaged roofing necessarily catches the view of everyone passing by. The western Bohemian and northern Moravian suburbs where the

[11] The first blocks were constructed by the saw-mill (which was a state owned company) to accommodate and attract employees, whereas the rest was funded few years later by the state budget to implement the central policy of populating the "borderland zone".

"Gypsy ghetto" was born is transmissible to this rural context precisely through the urban-like impression this village moulds in the observer. The spatial presence of the Roma was reinforced when the community council decided in 1997 to build storage lodges to accompany every municipal apartment. These were constructed on yards facing the blocks from above. Since the council was no longer in charge of the blocks occupied by the Roma, their blocks were not covered by this project. Hence the landscape of the village is disrupted by the sudden absence of lodges in the middle of the row, resulting in an open space with yards full of filth just in front of the blocks occupied by the Roma.[12] The way people move about in this space further accentuates the area inhabited by the Roma. The Roma themselves have accepted this spatial division and most of the time keep to the area "assigned" to them. Every day and all during the day people gather on the benches between the two blocks. The parents of Romani children who seek amusement in the outdoors warn the small children not to go farther than the designated "safe area." Czechs inhabiting the buildings in the same row prefer to walk around rather than undergo a journey past barking dogs and playful children. If they drive through by car, they have to face the intent gaze or the lax unwillingness of the gathered people to move out of the way. The postman delivering the daily mail even avoids getting out of his car, as do the policemen who occasionally monitor the street.

Just as important as the constricted character of the Gypsy area in the village landscape is the disconnectedness of the village as such from the outside world. Tercov is an end-of-the-road place geographically as well as socially. The small village is about 800m above sea level in a

[12] This doesn't mean however that Roma do not find any use for the yards in front of the blocks. The plots belong to the Church which received them in restitution. Roma rent them and some of them intended to keep animals (mostly chickens) there (which some of them still do or used to do). Others built a kind of arbor on the plot for the summer. Šafrán even built a large wooden garage on the plot, in fact much larger than the ones built by the community council, where he stored his fancy car, gear and other "valuables" needed for scrap recycling. Later he was ordered by the community council to tear it down because it didn't meet official safety regulations. Thereafter he had to place most of his "valuables," like the other Roma, in the open-air plot.

unique microclimate characterized by cold and humid winters. Situated in the "borderland zone" having one of the lowest population densities in the entire Czech Republic (10 ppkm²) it neither attracted migrants nor the attention of the authorities. As a frontier area near to the West and only 6 km away from the infamous "border wire," separating the East from the West this was a place on its own. According to some rumors, usually related by urban newcomers after 1990, everybody here was either a communist or a secret police agent. It is true that most of the male population worked part-time for the frontier guard and some were very enthusiastic about it. However, I could not confirm that any strict regulations concerning possible settlement were ever applied. Nevertheless, security measures limited the accessibility of the entire region and Tercov is still marked by its previous status. Until very recently the village was accessible by one road leading from the north. This was the only connection to the next community 8 km away that provided health care once a week in the consulting room of a commuting physician. One morning (6.30am) and one afternoon (3.15pm) bus represent the vital means of communication with this community that is itself still only a point of transit on the way to the regional center. Telephone extensions to households were installed in 1995. Until then, one public phone served the majority of inhabitants.

The ratio of Romani population to Czechs in Tercov is higher than the national average. In 1991, four Romani families of approximately 25 people lived there amongst Czechs. As of 2003 the community numbers over 90 people representing 25 % of the local population of 350 inhabitants; the national average of Roma population is only 1, 5 %. Only a few Roma were actually born or grew up in Tercov, mostly from the youngest generation. The Czechs in the village perceive the apparent growth of Romani presence as a menace, with the crucial threat perceived as coming from the Roma invading other blocks and imposing their life-style on

that of the villagers. I was able to recognize one of the villagers by a phrase he kept repeating: "where a Gypsy puts his feet, misery follows." When in 1995 the sawmill sold off the blocks, the town council arranged a long-term lease of all blocks occupied by Czechs but did not arrange the same for Block Two and Block Three. This lease makes the council the effective provider of housing and it is therefore obliged to comply with regulations regarding permissible housing conditions for tenants. I was unable to find out the exact reasons why the council did not provide the same leasing arrangement for Romani buildings (the former head of the community council affirmed that "it was not necessary since the Gypsies wanted to buy the blocks for themselves"), but the outcome is obvious enough: the community council is no longer responsible for the housing conditions of one third of its inhabitants. The council's practice of debarring the expansion of Romani presence is augmented by setting up various obstacles to keep them from moving beyond the boundaries of their two blocks. The argument is repeatedly employed in the community council's refusal to respond to applications for council housing by young Romani couples. I heard from Roma about a case where the head of the council justified the refusal by considering a petition of the tenants of the respective block against any attempt to rent Roma apartments in communal housings. The obstacles are however more subtle than that. They often cynically exploit the inability of Roma to carry out administrative procedures like placing an application for council housing. This lack of competence is often overtly lampooned even as it serves to justify the refusal. Another young Romani couple handed in its application and was told to await the response from the community council. After few months of waiting, they went to the office of the head of the community council to inquire about the state of the application. She replied that after three months every application is considered to be expired and is not reviewed anymore. When they re-applied few weeks later, she pointedly placed the application at the bottom of a pile of other applications. Moreover, when the young Romani woman asked when she should come

to inquire about the application, the council head answered: "As you see, even if you come on time, there are many people applying before you." It is precisely this attitude that sabotages plans of young Romani couples to establish independent households and thus contributes to the overpopulation in the houses occupied by Roma.

The above-mentioned difference in property relations between the two blocks is the only visible economic difference between the Romani inhabitants. However, the usual social status implications of economic difference between tenants and proprietors do not really apply in this case. Block Two is owned by Liška, who lives in one household with Hana, the sister of Šafrán, the elder of Block Three. Tenants pay Liška rents that in total level what he would have received in social benefits were he not a property owner not entitled for social benefits (8 x 350 = 2800 CZK, i.e. 110 Euro).[13] The story of just how he became the owner is unconventional. Liška is Czech and therefore profits from some social contacts denied to Roma. When the then state-owned company Lesy, which built the saw-mill in Tercov and provided housing for its employees in the blocks, started to evaluate its assets in 1995, it offered the blocks occupied by Roma for sale. This was intended to free the company from investing in their maintenance. Because the blocks occupied by Roma were already in a bad technical state and literally of no value, the company offered the property to its residents at a very low price.[14] In Block Three the occupiers signed the contracts and bought their apartments on credit. This was not however an individual ownership but a collective one in which each household was in possession of a share corresponding to the size of its apartment. The credit was in most of the cases never repaid. In fact, the company – happy to be no longer

[13] Although the rent was calculated exactly according to this logic, as a matter of fact it is about the same of what is the usual rent in this category of housing.

[14] The prices of the apartments varied within the range of 1000 CZK. A typical two-bedroom apartment was estimated at 6000 CZK (240 Euro!) which was equal to the average price per 10 square meters for apartments in other blocks not occupied by Roma.

legally responsible for the decaying blocks – never really insisted on getting the money back. In the case of Block Two, an ex-Soviet Mafioso, who ran several sex industries in the regional capital and was acquainted with Liška, for some reason invested 40.000 CZK (1600 Euro) in buying the property. Because foreigners were not allowed to own property in the Czech Republic prior to entry in the EU, Liška played the part of a straw man by concluding the contract in his own name but using the Mafioso's money. Shortly afterwards the Mafioso disappeared and was never heard from again. Whereas apartment blocks leased by the council have received maintenance investments throughout the last 10 years, Block Two and Block Three have not. The willingness of Roma to buy their blocks was motivated by the fear of losing accommodation in times when they could not assure rent payments. At the same time it left them unable to invest in their property's maintenance.

1.1.5 Setting up the divide

This short and condensed exposition of the confluence of a desire to promote a grass-root initiative and a desire to stick up with own preferences still raises many questions and I will subsequently return to some of the details. The series of events could be analyzed from various perspectives. One way would be to emphasize the political agenda behind the different social positions of the actors. This would turn the conflict into a political one, in the sense of a process of convergence between providers and clients of social assistance. This would demonstrate how a perfectly democratic method of assistance (stressing grass-roots initiatives as opposed to elitist pontificating) may run into difficulties when applied in an environment where values are embedded in a particular history of power relations and where the ultimate reference is not "community" or "solidarity" in the group but how to be the least visible, indeed how not to be "lumped together" (petrified) as a group.

The political aspect is more complex than the relation between "clients" and "providers" and is predictably involved in the contested relation between the two blocks documented in other observations. At one of the separate meetings on the beginning of the project, representatives of Block Three suggested to *Spolu-CZ* that since they [*Spolu-CZ*] understood their mission as an "organization for Roma" Block Two was not entitled to make use of the funds since the problem of their housing is not a "Gypsy problem" (the house has an owner who is a *non-Roma*). The attempt of Block Three to monopolize access to external funds was surprising to the NGO, less so to other people in Tercov. Both male and female representatives expressed this at one of the separate meetings after the disclosure of the amount of funds. Milan, who was the most vocal about it, said, "Well, I mean… they have a landlord so he should take care of the house." Then he added, "Why should we keep hearing from them [Block Two] that we are living like Gypsies! What can you do about the house with some 40.000 CZK? We are not worse than they are but look at it [he points to the house]… If you really help Roma, then you should help us!" This was another signal that the cleavage between the two blocks was all but accidental.

The more noteworthy aspect touched upon the style and percussiveness of Ferko's earlier pronouncement. This was more an *act of parole* than a simple declaration. He certainly enjoyed the moment, which signaled that its full import lay beyond the immediate content of his talk. Indeed, he actually spoke in Romanes, which in Tercov always conveys information about who is really being addressed. Those in Block Three who speak Romanes, like Šafrán and Biba, but also her sister Veronika, Šafrán's mother and for that matter also Ferko's sister Stáňa, were supposed to feel the weight of his authority. Initially, I had not been able to understand why Šafrán sometimes attempted to hide from Block Two certain advantages he discovered (as when he found a retailer who sold lime 30% cheaper than others). Weeks later,

the effect of the *act of parole* became more apparent to me. Šafrán explained his comportment in terms of revenge. In my view this was partly naïve, and partly overdone, as retribution for what he perceived as a cheap demonstration of cunning in Ferko's authoritative public presentation. All in all, to deny any vestiges of Gypsyness is the ultimate goal of any action that is made public. From this perspective the originally not very expedient way of spending the money that the Roma in Tercov discovered out of the blue (to repair the irreparable, as it were), appears more comprehensible when it is embedded in the greater context of decision-making which comprises the dispute among Roma over who is more Gypsy-like.

1.2 Elias in Tercov

As the case of the project of *Spolu-CZ* demonstrates, housing issues are important to all Roma of Tercov. At the same time these issues serve to differentiate the two blocks. I believe that the questions of inter-group relations and mobilization for house repairs are closely related: it represents an instance of the inscrutable process whereby values concurrently induce conformity and generate difference. This double-edged effort is most of all typical of Block Two. In the local configuration, which is also the translation of a historically developed field of relations, Block Two occupies a strange position at the conjunction of anti-Gypsy sentiments and responses to them. In fact the differentiation is even more operative in other contexts: the view of Block Two that Block Three is a lesser human breed is recurrent throughout many of the daily interactions which I will highlight consequently.

I think we start to see that in Tercov we can hardly talk of one group of Roma and the rest of the population. There is a tangible division among Roma that is fueled by representations of Gypsyness and that takes place within a larger context of inequalities. I will now concentrate

on how to describe this division. When Milan attempted to monopolize the resources for Block Three, the NGO was not only surprised, but also started to perceive the difference between the two blocks in its own way. For *Spolu-CZ*, Block Three started to appear as capricious, if not to say greedy. During the operations, there were always problems with Block Three's inhabitants. Either they were late in fulfilling the tasks or appeared lazy, sometimes talking back or acting in a hesitant way. Making agreements with them was more arduous and time-consuming than with Block Two. Some people from Block Two demonstrated a similar attitude, but within the NGO a firm conviction took hold that Block Three was less enthusiastic to participate in the project. This attitude was in fact not very different from how Block Two perceived the same people, and, as I mentioned earlier, the perception was also shared among the Czechs in the village. Rumors, gossip, prejudices and other ways of expressing and effectively employing superiority are the only materialization of the unequal relation between Block Two and Block Three that we have. At the same time, they are not external to the configuration but part and parcel of its dynamics. If social scientists tend to explain the imbalance in power relations by referring to corresponding economic and social disparities, in this case we are facing a situation where all such parameters lose significance. In lieu of differences in possession of property or in origin, we can draw only one conclusion: the temptation to dissociate from the other group was always articulated in accusations of being "gypsy-like." These accusations were invariably initiated by Block Two and Block Three only responded to them.

To explain the relation between the two groups we have to sort the situation out on two levels: what allows one group to be more efficient in imposing its perceptions on the other group and how this imposition of perceptions is maintained. I find it helpful to draw on Norbert Elias' concept of *Established/Outsiders* which emphasizes the "universal regularity" of this

figuration (Elias 1994: xvi). Elias coined the concept in 1976 as an introduction to a study of the urban community of Winston Parva carried out by his student John L. Scotson in the 60's (Elias and Scotson 1994, 1997). Drawing on statistics and on interviews with the inhabitants, the study detects three distinctive zones within the community area: a residential bourgeois zone inhabited by businessmen, professionals and white-collar workers, an old and central blue-collar zone considered "respectable" and finally a more dilapidated and new blue-collar zone with a bad reputation. There are very few observable differences between the latter two zones; nonetheless the perception of each is firmly established. It is this perception which makes one of the zones into an *established* community while the other is *marginalized*. The hierarchy is thus put in place without any violent means if not symbolic. On a more general level both zones are equally deprived. But what allows Zone 2 to be so efficient in casting "a slur on another group of people as of lesser breed" (Elias 1994: xvii)? For Elias it is not the analysis of the genesis of the hierarchy but the nature of the relationship in itself that matters. In light of this idea, racial hierarchies are but an extreme version of the *Established/Outsiders* figuration.

Elias's contribution is complex in that it operates on several levels. As I already mentioned above, Elias discovered a universal human theme in the fact that one more powerful group thinks of itself as better in human terms than another group. Endowed with a kind of group charisma, with a specific virtue shared by all its members, this group denied the same rights to the other group, which it perceived as lacking in human qualities and whose members it therefore excluded from participating in humanity. This universal character was of great significance to Elias, as the body of his work on the civilizing process confirms. The term aristocracy stands here as a metaphor for a general tendency not only "to construct and to maintain relations of inequality, but also to legitimize them through explaining them as

differences of individual values" (Heinich 1997: 76). The questions derived from this observations are thus of universal significance: How do members of a group maintain among themselves the belief that they are not merely more powerful but also better human beings than those of another? What means do they use to impose the belief in their own human superiority upon those who are less powerful?

Elias's other contribution consists in his methodological arguments in favour of microanalysis. If we take only statistical evidence into consideration, the two zones of similar occupation patterns, social statuses and income levels would hardly reveal the fact that one of the groups had closed ranks and excluded members of the other group from participating in the political life of the community. The cleavage shows up only when the attitudes and values of the members of both groups are taken into consideration. In Winston Parva, for example, the main mechanism of ostracism was based on scrupulous defamation and elimination of contact with members of the other group beyond professional encounters at work. The "practice of obloquy" (Heinich 1997: 76) is simultaneously the agent of differentiation and an effect of the inequality it helps to establish, in as much as it helps to increase the level of cohesion in the dominant group. Elias thus asserts the necessity of a micro-perspective for inquiries into contexts where there is a persistent differentiation of groups. According to Elias the *"empirical paradigm"* allows a detailed, macroscopically enhanced take at "a universal figuration within the compass of a small community" (Elias 1994: xvii). This could be enlarged and tested on related figurations on a large scale. I consider Tercov a parallel figuration to the one described in Winston Parva.

As I have stated previously, seen from the outside or through conventional socio-econometric parameters, the Roma in Tercov appear as constituting a socially marginal ethnic group. What we observe now is that what is at stake from the point of view of the Roma is the

overwhelming categorization imposed on them. By enabling the differentiation between the two fractions of Roma this categorization also becomes an active actor in the local figuration. We may therefore say that the configuration in Tercov is similar to the one analyzed by Elias: one of the fractions of Roma effectively instrumentalizes the idea of its superiority against another fraction by 1) redeploying ideas of Gypsyness and via this practice 2) confirming to itself as well as to others its detachment from these ideas. The reason for the success of this strategy consists in the capacity of the one fraction to create cohesion among its members, a cohesion which is higher than that of the other fraction. In the following remarks, I will deal with the dominant pattern of organization in each of the blocks, something that reveals the functional supremacy of the hierarchical pattern of relations in Block Two against the parallel relations pattern (or pattern of relative equality) among inhabitants of Block Three. In more general terms, my outline of the contrasting patterns will allow the consideration of two modes of social integration in society. It should not be assumed that the more cohesive pattern is better suited for integrating Roma into society. Quite the contrary, each of the patterns is abstruse or even banal if considered independently of the figuration. The existence of two patterns represents two co-existing modes, always present in the actions and perceptions of Roma. Each mode, however, offers different strategies and confronts Roma with a set of choices that are situational as well as ideological.

1.2.1 The specter of assimilation

The reason that Block Two is more efficient and consistent in imposing the image of Gypsyness on Block Three lies in its higher internal cohesion, which is linked to the prevailing pattern of kinship ties in the house. Whereas in Block Three daily negotiations,

decisions, personal relationships and all other forms of social interaction are often marked by the competitive nature of the relations between brothers, Block Two's social life issues from a more hierarchical organization on consecutive genealogical lines accentuating the relation between the father and his sons-in-law. The current situation is not accidental. It developed during the last 20 years after the arrival of the first Rom in Tercov in 1984. The patterns set in each of the blocks could therefore be traced back to three different circumstances under which settlement of Roma in Tercov took place: 1. the newcomers' strategy of disappearing socially 2. the reunification of the next generation with their parents after leaving orphanages, 3. the coming of age of the third generation born in Tercov during the 90's. The historical irony of this complex historical development lies in the fact that while the strategy of social disappearance was successful for the parents, its consequences put their children in exactly the same situation of restricted social and physical mobility 20 years later.

The discussion up to now has suggested that the antagonism between both blocks is embodied in the personal relation between the elders, Ferko and Šafrán. Nonetheless, twenty years earlier they were allies who found a solution to the misery of living in provisional places. Ferko was the person who literally discovered Tercov for Roma, although it was not at all his intention in the beginning. At the beginning of the 60's , at age 13, he arrived in Moravia with his parents and six sisters. In accordance with the most frequent pattern of migration of young Romani males from Slovakia, it was only later after he had served in the army that he came to the region of Český Krumlov. After finishing his army service, he changed many residences and jobs, though always within the region. He never returned to Moravia, where most of his family settled upon their arrival from Slovakia. The choice of jobs always hinged on its being arranged by a relative – a cousin, an uncle, a sister. It seems that the sole factor determining his future planning was the acquaintance with a relative of some kind. In 1984 just before

coming to Tercov, he had served a three-year sentence for an assault during a family quarrel in Český Krumlov.

> "When I came out of jail, I had nowhere to go. I stayed with Biba *[his sister]* in Krumlov, but it was difficult. Both she and her husband were alcoholics and they made me drink with them every night. After a while, I was really tired of that and started thinking of moving somewhere far away from them. But most of the Gypsies I knew were still in Krumlov so I had to look around and get out of there on my own. My wife was still in jail *[sentenced for repeated neglect in upbringing]* and all my children were staying in orphanages dispersed all over the place... Anyway,... we needed some place to be together with Hana *[his wife]* when she would be back from jail, but the railways *[for which he worked as a loader]* always refused my application for housing and kept offering me a place in a hostel... I really disliked the job... I wanted something in nature... something like I used to do before I went to the army... You know, I had already left school when I was 13 to work with my father on a cooperative farm..." (December 2001)

The experience of a man in trying to end a continuous live crisis is instructive of the conditions under which Roma spun their individual prospects during the socialist era. This is hardly an individual case. At the time, the general lack of housing and the misery of living conditions in places with a high concentration of Roma gave little cause for hope. This is in strong contrast with the experience of the initial generation of Romani migrants from Slovakia in the 1960's, for whom Bohemia represented the Promised Land. In the county of Český Krumlov this was even more evident since it the region had one of the highest densities of Romani population in Bohemia. In 1985 in the city center, where Ferko's sister lived, this figure reached 4 % of the population, the vast majority being concentrated in the historical

buildings that today have been designated part of UNESCO's world cultural heritage but which at the time were only a cluster of decaying buildings.[15] Numerically speaking, 1215 Roma comprising 317 families lived in 218 households (Davidová 1982b). This makes the average number of person per apartment 5,6 whereas the national average number was below 4. For Ferko the search for his own dwelling space was the only way to launch a new existence. Seeking to escape from his oppressive environment, he found an advertisement placed by *Státní lesy* (the state-owned forestry company) in the local newspaper seeking employees for a newly reconstructed saw-mill in Tercov. Besides the job, the offer stipulated housing in new apartment buildings. After a few months of living in a hostel, at the age of 30 and already father of three children, he was assigned a one-bedroom apartment, the first accommodation he had ever called his own. It was in Block Three, among solely Czech neighbors. Awaiting the release of his wife, hopeful to rescue their children from the orphanages and, as they both recalled to me later, "to live on our own so that other Gypsies can't keep interfering in our lives", they escaped Český Krumlov where they would be condemned to live in unsuitable, decaying old houses which the municipality assigned to the Romani population during the 70's and 80's (Davidová 1982a, b).[16] Up to then, moving represented the only alternative for people in an unstable position regarding employment or housing. However, Ferko intended to go even farther by embarking on the adventure of disappearing far away amidst the Czech population of a remote village[17]: "You couldn't find

[15] Ironically enough, the city center buildings of Český Krumlov are now among the most valued properties in the country. After 1989 the rest of the Roma living there were moved out. Suddenly the municipality was able to find housing for them in the prefabs on the outskirts of the city center, the same prefabs that for most Roma in Czechoslovakia symbolized upward social mobility and about which they could only dream of earlier.

[16] During socialism, apartments were divided into categories I-IV according to standards of living. Apartments in old buildings rarely attained the standards of Category II. For example, category IV signified that the apartment contained a communal lavatory that was placed in the hallway, usually serving tenants from the whole floor.

[17] Moreover, the state, which faced a continuous depopulation in the borderland zone due to its poor social facilities and economic potential, used financial incentives to promote migration here. Until 1989, this was still in effect and represented 10.000 CZK (equal to 4 average monthly salaries).

anything better… fabulous nature, quite a good job. I did well there, too, because shortly afterwards I was put on the cutter[18]…"

"During communism you had nowhere to appeal"

Šafrán, Ferko's brother-in-law, cannot be blamed for the attempt of his parents to flee the segregated settlements of Eastern Slovakia. Upon his arrival, he was sent to school to complete the sixth grade. He is actually one of two Roma in Tercov who had also completed some kind of professional training. In the circumstances under which this training took place certain guilelessness and Šafrán's social roots constantly conjure up:

> "It happened that I was sent to prison for absenteeism. They used to call it 'osmička' *["eight," standing for the number of months of imprisonment]*, which meant 'for work'. At the time they were not interested in the reasons, it was just if you didn't go to work, you were given eight months straight away. During communism you could not really appeal so I had to go. It was in 1974. My wife was roaming all over the place and leaving the children at home alone. So I went to look for her and was absent for three days. I was put in Bory *[a prison near Plzeň]*. Because I was young and strong, they put me in with other young guys on the fourth block: that was the elite, as they used to call them. They did detonations in coalmines. We were taken to a huge hall where you had dirty cloths suspended on hooks. I watched what other guys were doing and imitated them: I slid down the chain with a hook and dressed up. Then we were given helmets and torches. They put us in a big cage… It went down so quickly, it was so noisy… So I ask the guy next to me: Where are we going? We were three rookies there, we threw up, I felt my stomach turn upside down. And this guy says: Are you an idiot or

[18] Which is the least physically demanding and the most prestigious job in the saw-mill.

what? We're going down into the shaft where we'll mine the coal. Don't you know what's going on? What were you doing during the training sessions? I had no idea what he was talking about. But he seemed to know the place so I stuck by him so as to learn something. I watched him and I also used to give him my lunch sometimes… You need a friend there, don't you? In the evenings, I always saw him going somewhere with a book. So I asked where he was going. And he said: "I'm taking a course. I said: "What does 'taking a course' mean?" "Well, that means that if you want to improve your education you can study about gems after work." So I applied for it too. It meant learning what gems of different origin and shape looked like. They exported them all over the world. Then we learned how to work a grinder. For eight months I studied every day. At the end they sent us to do real work, we had to meet the output quota, and that was a hell of a difficult job. They even fed us better so we could keep on; they gave us milk and stuff."

Nevertheless, Šafrán could not finish his training because his sentence was too short. To qualify he would have had to continue for another six months to learn how "to fill out forms." The day of his release, he went to his local bar. Still very affected by the experience in the prison, he went home as soon as a fight between customers ensued.

"Just as I was falling asleep, two big arms shook me. I got up and saw two cops next to my bed. They said: 'Get dressed; we're going to the police station.' 'No, I'm not going anywhere, I was just released yesterday, I didn't do anything,' I replied. But they kept on saying that they had something on me. So I repeated to them that I had just come out of prison and went to the bar for a drink. That made me dizzy so I went home soon after. And they said, 'that's exactly what we're interested in.' So we arrived at the police station and I spotted the guy whom I met

in the bar, with blood all over his face. As I entered, he says, 'That's him. He did this to me.' 'What you mean I did that to you, I bought you a drink, don't you remember, you jerk!' I replied. However, he kept on: 'No, you beat me up.' So the cop called on a witness, it was the bartender. I said, 'Hi, Honza,' to him. The cop asked him, 'So tell us what happened here?' 'Why did you beat him up, you mug,' answered the bartender. I said, 'Come on…' and they grabbed me. They kept me in custody for three days. If I'd just insulted somebody, I might have understood, but… You know, during communism even an insult would cost you dearly. But I really didn't do anything. It was a mistake. Eventually, they found out it was a different Gypsy. But what happened just few days later was that Ferko had a fight because of his wife and I was guarding the door to the room where he was about to stab somebody. As an accomplice who was already on parole, I was sentenced to 18 months; I went to jail again and finished the training. Look, here's the certificate *[shows me a document entitled "Gem grinder"]*." (July 2003)

Šafrán still recalls the day his family migrated to the Czech lands from Eastern Slovakia. In the 70's ethnographers had already documented the perception of Bohemia as a Promised Land in Romani folklore (Guy 1977). However, for local authorities as well as for the public, who perceived Roma as gold-diggers, the dominant attitude was to control migration and direct it into areas where the unskilled Romani migrants would be useful. Contrary to the dominant perception of Roma as gold-diggers Romani migration from Slovakia followed an obvious and universally documented pattern of migration. Rarely did Czech sociology actually pay attention to the fate of those who were lucky enough to be given the opportunity to exploit their skills. For them migration might have resulted in an economic success:

"We came in 1962, we left on a bus and then travelled for very long on a train to Šebanov (near Český Krumlov). We stayed at the train station and looked for work for about two days. Then somebody came and asked what we could do… As you know, regarding work, Roma are like typhus – they work all day and do the worst job. Who do you think dug up and built all this for the communists? Roma would be given the most difficult and worst paid jobs and if they didn't show up, they were charged with absenteeism. It is true that they (communists, the authorities) gave us accommodations and there was a hell lot of work to do, but there was no liberty since they kept putting you in jail. … I was 12 years old so I can still remember everything very well. 'You there, where's your family?' and they went to find an apartment or a house for us… there were many of them abandoned then *[abandoned after the expulsion of Germans]*. They gave us horses and we worked for farmers in the entire region. In 1968 I went to do my military service, first in Prachatice (SW Bohemia) and then in Cheb (NW Bohemia). And when I came back I could see how in the meanwhile most of the Roma had succeeded. Everybody had pigs, chickens and all kinds of stuff. The white guys in the army couldn't believe their eyes when they saw my transistor radio which they'd never seen before. They couldn't believe a Gypsy had one. Because they thought I was well-to-do I was a good Roma for them, I was someone who'd made it… Some people had good houses, some didn't… Later the Roma started quarrelling amongst them so they started assigning them to villages all over the district." (January 2002)

On his regular visits to the orphanage to see his daughters, Ferko used to pass by the house of his brother-in-law, situated next to the railway track. He suggested to Šafrán, who is about the

same age, to follow him to Tercov. Up to then Šafrán was also surmounting a period of unstable relations – he had lived consecutively with three different women, with each of which he had a child – and short-term employments. At the time he was already living with Biba, his present wife.

> "I used to live in Vrabčí before, near České Budějovice *[the regional capital]*. That was until 1983. The reason was also the job. I used to have this small house next to the railway... you know what I mean, these houses inhabited usually by railway dispatchers. At one point, they... started offering these evacuated houses to people. But we had everything there, water, electricity... *[the houses in fact comprise one bedroom, only cold running water and they are never bigger than 20$^{m^2}$]*. However, we needed to move out because once a passing train almost hit our son... it was too close to the railway and the boy was just starting to move around... "(January 2002)

The state policies changed considerably in the 1970's when the central authorities realized that the massive migration of Roma from Slovakia was increasing and thus producing the same problem of lack of accommodations. While pursuing the policy of dispersing the Romani population on all the territory of Bohemia, local authorities were encouraged to provide Roma with work opportunities and housing to avoid a repeated formation of areas with a high concentration of Roma. However, the central authorities never provided local authorities with sufficient funds for building the new facilities. Employers, who were also encouraged to contribute to solving the housing problem, often exploited the situation by profiting from cheap labor power but not offering suitable housing, even of a temporary kind. As has been well documented, after employers terminated their projects they often left local authorities on their own in dealing with the problem of housing the Roma (Haišman and

Grulich 1986). Local authorities often resorted to accommodating Roma in dilapidated buildings, hoping that they would either destroy them or choose to leave of their own accord (see Davidová 1982b). For someone like Šafrán, who similarly to Ferko was determined to establish a household of his own, this kind of individual dwelling seemed an exception, but only because there were three family members. Eventually he would face the same problem as many other Roma. In this context, the opportunity to move to Tercov was like deliverance: a promise of decent housing and a regular job.

"I only became a Gypsy"

It would be interesting to confront these memories, reflections, and sociologies of selfhood with those of Romani women. I have to admit that I rarely had access to what would be considered a relevant deep interview with any of them. Nevertheless, in public Romani women are very assertive and do not give the impression of being muzzled. Biba grew up in Krumlov in Horvat's family, one of the oldest Romani families of the town, a fact she never forgets to bring up in discussions: "Já jsem Krumlovačka" *[I am a Krumlovian]* she always says when questions of belonging are at stake among Roma of the village. Nonetheless, she had not spent much time in her life there, being always dragged around by occasional friendships with men. Before joining Šafrán, she had two daughters with two different men. She never sees them, although she has never forgotten them. Coming to Tercov signified for her a decision to settle down and launch a proper family life living together with a husband and children. She and Šafrán met when she was only 16: "Once he saw me on the bridge in Krumlov and kept staring at me. Later he came and convinced me to run away with him." Eventually, they had to separate because Šafrán went to the army. After that, their lives went in different directions in different places only to converge 10 years later. This part of Biba's life is enigmatic and she is always very evasive when asked about it. It was shortly after a

heavy quarrel with Šafrán that I asked her why she keeps threatening to abandon him and to go to her mother's place. In a surprisingly reflective remark she told me:

> "You know what... I don't give a shit about being here... why should I be here, to be a slave for him and his lazy sons? No way, I've had enough of that. Before coming here I lived like everybody else, certainly not like these Gypsies in huts or whatever... I wasn't a Gypsy, people never thought I was and I never considered myself a Gypsy... I shouldn't ever have met him... it's only him and his damn family who made me a Gypsy." (January 2003)

Biba, as well as Hana, Ferko's wife, reached only the fourth grade and left school very soon. They have no professional training. They spent most of their lives on maternity leave. They both had six children. Only in Tercov did they achieve the ideal of a family. The state incentive helped them at the beginning to furnish their new homes as they liked. Hana even possesses the same furniture from back then, well-preserved and polished. They were both given one-bedroom apartments in Block Two and Block Three where only Czechs lived at that time. Both women worked for a short time upon their arrival, Hana in the saw-mill and Biba in the local cooperative farm as a milkmaid. Biba even agreed to embrace Šafrán's two sons from previous relationships to complete the ideal: "I pitied them; they'd never had a real mother before." This was in 1984 and Ferko and Hana were still awaiting their children. They had had three daughters placed in orphanages. As was evident from what Ferko said, the main reason for embarking on this strategy of disappearing among Czechs was to get the children back. The strategy among other things enabled them to comply with the government social care norms for raising children that Ferko and Hana needed to meet: having a regular job and decent housing conditions.

1.2.2 Patterns of organization

The "origin story" of Romani presence in Tercov reveals how the two families operated within the confines of a historically circumscribed range of choices. The strategy of disappearing consisted in a radical separation both from life with the extended Romani families in Český Krumlov and the life-style brought on by the social and economic circumstances of living in overpopulated areas. Their path to the geographical margins of the frontier area was at the same time the beginning of their way to assimilation in accordance with indicators formulated by the authorities. Once the strategy was completed and the families were ensconced in their newly acquired homes, the untenable nature of the strategy in the long run started to emerge. We can confirm this based on the subsequent enlargement of Romani presence in Tercov. With the arrival of the first children from orphanages who had just attained maturity the problem of inadequate housing reappeared as soon as they attempted to establish their own families. During the following 10 years the number of Roma in Tercov almost tripled, from 16 in 1984 to 50 in 1994.[19] This initiated a continuous flow between apartments in the two blocks. Whereas upon their arrival Roma occupied two apartments in Block Two and one apartment in Block Three, in 1994 there was only one family in Block Two (it was Ferko's family, which paradoxically had originally lived in Block Three) and five in the other block. Therefore, during these years Roma slowly dominated the one block and at the same time started to penetrate into the other. As soon as the Romani presence started to stigmatize Block Three, Czechs living there willingly started to desert it with the help of communal authorities, who offered them alternative communal accommodation in other

[19] All the data concerning the movement within apartments were gathered from discussions with Roma and Czechs living in Tercov. As such, they showed certain inconsistencies which I tried to redress by repeated crosschecking and confirmations. Although not flawless, they are sufficient for determining the main course of events. Unfortunately, official records were not available. Even if they were, they would not assure accuracy, since moving between and swapping apartments was often negotiated among Roma and was not necessarily officially approved.

blocks. The decisive moment was 1995. In that year three of Šafrán's brothers settled in Tercov. Two of them lived in independent apartments, whereas the third brother Milan moved in with their aged parents, all in Block Three. At the same time two of Ferko's daughters moved into Block Two thanks to a lottery organized by the communal authorities for apartments recently abandoned by Czechs. In this way the pattern of organization in each of the blocks was established. A properly family separation between the blocks didn't exist. All Roma in Tercov could be divided into two large families (Beláks and Horváts) and one small separate family that occupies three apartments in Block Two but barely interacts with other Roma (Toths). Both large families are interrelated through the marriage of the elder of Block Two (Ferko) to one of the sisters (Hana) from the Beláks family. Moreover, members of both families live in each of the blocks. Whereas Ferko's family (Horváts) and his sons-in-law in number dominate Block Two, altogether they occupy only four flats and represent 50 % of all the inhabitants of the block (19 of 37). On the other hand, two other sisters of Šafrán also live in Block Two together with their non-Roma partners. Also, one of Ferko's sisters (Stáňa) lives in Block Three. In lieu of a consciously maintained family division between the two blocks we have to look at how the existing relations in each of the blocks operate.

As was indicated in Episode 3, there is a specific modus of decision-making in Block Two. The pattern is determined by the relations between the father and his sons-in-low which I will only outline here. All of Ferko's three daughters married men who came from distant areas and who therefore had no other family ties in Tercov beside those established through marriage. Decisions are therefore usually taken under the auspices of the father who exerts authority over his daughters and, through them, over his sons-in-law. These can't rely on any external support and often submit to the decisions with defiance. Nevertheless, they mostly do submit. On the other hand, in Block Three the prevalent pattern of relations after the sudden

death of the grandfather was determined by relations between brothers. Šafrán together with the families of his brothers (Mirek, Milan, Gejza) occupy four apartments out of 7 in the block and numerically represent 21 people of 42. By contrast to Block Two, the fraternal relations are competitive and not hierarchical. Each of the brothers and also their wives tend to impose solutions favorable to their interests or at least to insist on having a say in every decision linked to the interests of the block. Such communal decisions are in fact very rare, as in the case of the housing project sponsored by *Spolu-CZ*. The more usual course of action is that one of the brothers discovers an opportunity of some kind and informs others only in exchange of recognition for his resourcefulness. We may say that whereas Block Two is patterned on hierarchical relations imbued with the authority of a patriarch, Block Three is patterned on the egalitarian ethos of competing individuals. In light of this arrangement we can start to sort out the riddle of how Block Two is more efficient in imposing the representation of Gypsyness on Block Three and how this consequently reinforces the existing cohesion of the group.

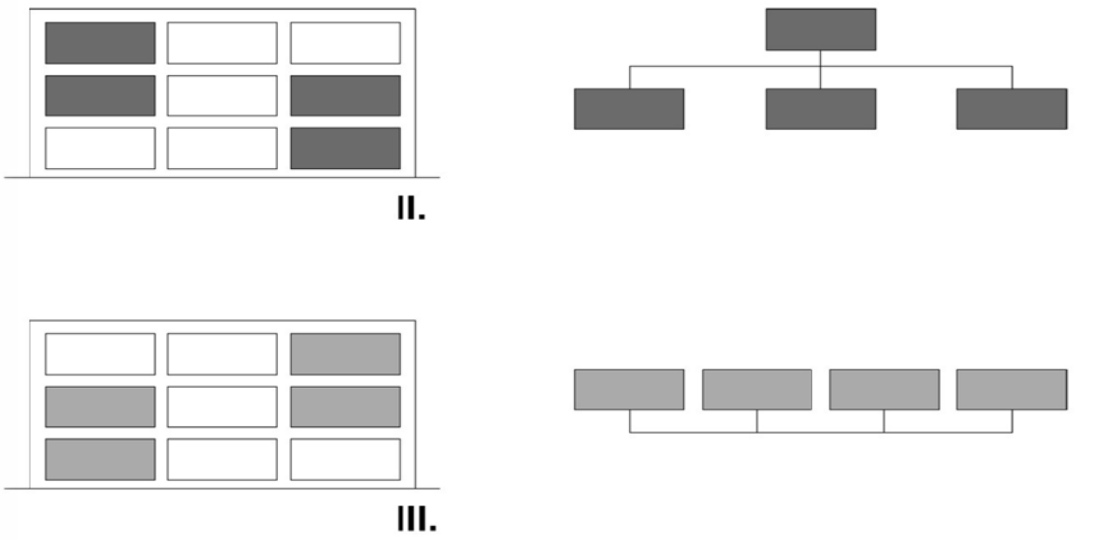

Figure 1 – Dominant patterns of relations in the two blocks (hierarchical in II., parallel in III.)

1.2.3 The Observer as a Social Location

The various situations and circumstances where the distinction between the two blocks becomes significant cannot be simply divided according to spheres of action since, as I tried to explain above, the distanciation is better understood as a dynamic, an irresistible proneness that pervades all sorts of action. It was particularly tangible for me when I was constantly tested of my preferences for one of the fractions. As an outsider who emphasized his impartiality I became an ideal terrain for exhibiting the attitudes to the other. As if the 'observer' was particularly prone like a *tabula rasa* for a fresh inscription. Especially people from Block Two profited from this situation. As the *established* fraction in the divide, they drew their superiority from objectively demonstrated distinctions. For that the impartiality of the observer was an assurance of an objective affirmation. With a cast-iron regularity my every visit to Ferko started with inquiries about my interaction with Šafrán or his wife or

anybody else from Block Three. Sometimes Ferko's avowed expectation of me mentioning a discussion with Šafrán irritated me to the point that I rather avoided entering such debates at all. On other occasions Ferko or his wife intentionally turned the discussions to the subject. In such discussions they fervently searched for another proof of their moral superiority. If they learned about me lending Šafrán money, they would highlight the fact that they never asked me for money: "You see they only know how to grab money! They will never learn how to economize. You will see yourself; they will never pay you back. That's a never ending story." It is one of the important aspects of the Established/Outsider figuration that whereas it casts differences upon the Outsiders, it is not them who are addressed in the act of categorization. Elias notes that as long as the cleavage is based on a high power differential between the two groups, the *established* do not take into consideration how the *outsiders* respond to it: "[in such case] outsiders have no function for the established groups: they are simply in the way…" (Elias 1994: xxxi). In Tercov, on the other hand, the power imbalance was quite narrow and it required reaffirmation in the form of repeated clashes between the fractions. Thus instead of an aristocratic arrogance in the expression of superiority from the part of the *established*, one encountered tiresome suasions.

As the origin and amount of revenues of Romani households were in Tercov quite similar, everybody knew more or less precisely the expenditures and the overall accounts of other households. This also allowed people to constantly compare between each other and to stir up on this ground discussions about life-style. To my big surprise although differences in the revenues of the households were only accidental, this still allowed to develop persuasions about good and bad management, about sane and insane ways of spending, and most surprisingly about affluent and poverty-driven households. The revenues of all the households were depending on social benefits. This was the regular income which was used principally

for the maintenance of households. Sustenance, bills, transportation, clothing and all other basic needs were covered from the money received through social benefits. Since most social benefits are income-tested and at the same time they represent the only regular income of the households, differences between household revenues were linked solely to the size of each household. Nonetheless this could hardly ever turn into a qualitative difference: roughly speaking higher social benefits are compensated by a higher number of dependants. The only real source of economic difference may have aroused in the case of pensioners (either retired or widowed). The pension is calculated independently from household incomes. It is a fixed sum received on a different date than social benefits. But again, the pension is accounted for in the estimation of household revenues and it consequently raises the household income. Thus a household comprising a pensioner receives in fact less on social benefits covering household needs. The only effective difference that may create a situation of a temporary economic affluence arises when the pensioner takes a loan. In contrast to social benefits, pensions are recognized as a regular income by the banks and they could be distrained whereas social benefits could be so only to a certain level. However in Tercov there was only one pensioner and the economic advantage from taking a loan was only temporary.

All in all, judging someone's poverty and destitution in consequence of an irresponsible household management had to operate within a very limited range of differences in revenues among households. Still it allowed for gross differences imputed by Block Two on people from Block Three. As it was already indicated, the main prism through which Block Three was perceived was that of negligent attitude to planning and temperate life-style. The demonstrations, claims and affirmations of the established status of Block Two therefore centered often on the handling of money. The constant shortage of cash applied indiscriminately to all households. This was a consequence of the fact that social benefit

payments were expended within two to three weeks. Nevertheless, it still allowed Ferko's daughter Zdena to boast about her possessing a credit card. Although she did not keep any money on her account, she could approach Biba for being constantly unsafe without cash: "How can you live without money, without some security (*jistota*)? It would drive me crazy living like that. I would feel ashamed to appear like a bag lady! I am never short of money; I always keep some on my account." Even if Biba was aware that Zdena's assumption was unjustified, she still could not retaliate with the same token since her application for a credit was turned down, a fact known to everybody.

Another central theme in the distanciation of Block Two concerned borrowing in general. I refer to the major arena of debts' handling elsewhere (see Chapter on 'The attraction of the poor'). As I mentioned above the money shortage towards the end of the month was a regularity encountered by every household. The first manifestation of this situation was when parents could not provide children with money for the school bus. But in Block Two it was often possible to collectively mobilize and to put together the small money from a number of households. When later Laci and his wife Dáša became targeted by the Social department for neglect in upbringing, another of Ferko's daughters Mariana took on the parents' irresponsibility: "They should put their children first. I would do anything to get my kids to school. Have you ever seen my kids not going to school? They borrow money when they need cigarettes, they buy on credit… but they are not able to assure their kids' school attendance. They start thinking of the money for the bus only in the morning… Ok, everyone borrows money at some point but it should be for a reasonable purpose." The accusations of intemperance did not need to link debt and neglect in upbringing. It could be also sensed an unwise economic decision. Thus whereas in Block Two people bought on credit only basic stock supplies, in Block Three the money were wasted on candies or alcohol.

In Block Two one may have also noted occasional symbolic acts underlying their *established* status. One day Ferko decided to place a door knob at the entry to his apartment. This simple act was of tremendous symbolic significance since it clearly marked out the private space by limiting its accessibility. While the constant flux of people between Romani apartments required that the entries were easily accessible by the simple manipulation of the handle, placing a door knob was a gesture against this practice understood as an example of the gregarious life-style. By placing the door knob Ferko was also assimilating to the ordinary practice as it was observed among non-Roma. The endorsement of a seemingly practical modification distinguished sharply between a Gypsy and non-Gypsy conceptions of private space: "At some point you get annoyed. You have all these Gypsies coming here and out, they never take their shoes off and I spend hours cleaning it… I want here only people I invited… Anyway they come here only to beg for something, they don't come for other reasons. So why to keep the door open for them?" asked Ferko's wife. After three days Ferko had to remove the door knob, exhausted by getting up to open the door to constantly knocking people. This confirmed the existence of limits within which the distanciation between the two blocks can operate. First and foremost it was his daughters' families who were the most likely visitors and who were mostly affected by the deteriorated access to their parents' and grand-parents' apartment.

2 Being Unemployed

In April 2005 the senator representing south Bohemian counties arrived to Tercov to personally inquire about the astounding figures of unemployment in Tercov. As he said he wished to "discuss with the local mayor the possibilities and ways how to create employment opportunities".[20] He was however stupefied by the response he received from the mayor: "Our problem is not the lack of employment opportunities but that these people do not want to work". And she continued: "I am annoyed that they do not want to work. Something should be done about it, something that would force them to work." The stupefaction of the senator then was only intensified when he compared the situation with the achievements in his home town: "So whereas in Hluboká where I as a mayor try to create work opportunities here such effort would be just of no avail!" This was a "bitter lesson" for the senator, noted the commentator.

The conversation captures in a quite illustrative manner how central the phenomena pertaining to marginal people may become. Once the figures of unemployment in Tercov started to appear in the media as an indicator of an escalating social drama, it induced a sense of responsibility that brought the senator to confront the problem on the ground. But the sudden exceptionality of Tercov as a place of unforeseen circumstances was not how it was perceived by the local power holder. This is reflected in how the mayor naively tried to detour any possible stigmatization of her authority: "At first sight the figures of unemployment may appear appalling but in reality it is only seventy people out of two hundred." The not quite logical reasoning contained in this statement is such only because we are missing what is said by what is unsaid. What the mayor really meant in an attempt to debase the significance of the warning figures is that the problem is firmly circumscribed to a specific part of the population under her authority. Unemployment of such a scale and so unresoluble becomes intelligible

[20] Zuzana Kyselová. Volných míst by bylo dost, málo je těch, kterým se chce dělat. *Českokrumlovské listy*. 9. 4. 2005.

once it is identified as the perennial problem of the Roma. Although the official discourse went through a consistent recoding during the 1990's which imposed the civic principle in the official parlance resulting, among other things, in the obliteration of ethnic identification, those allegedly extricated from ethnic identification are still identifiable through firmly established attributes.

For the Roma in Tercov being unemployed is thus at once the economic reality they have to live with and a heavily intrusive discursive apparatus that imposes on them a set of evaluative moral criteria, that generates their social status and that affects the ways in which their sociality is perceived and shaped. This becomes apparent on examples as the above mentioned discussion which resulted in a conjunct sigh of the senator and the mayor: "Then we have no choice but to force them by law, most probably by reducing their social benefits…" It is also at once the vein inscribed in much of the actions of the Roma through dispositional inclinations and preferences and a framework of social fabrication whereby various social actors vehicle dominant values of work and individual responsibility. My argument is that in the contemporary Czech Republic the unemployment of the Roma is the major additive in the perception of their difference and for all that it deserves a particular attention. The process whereby the seemingly social category of the unemployed is transformed into a sign of cultural difference has been powerfully demonstrated by Leo Howe in his study of Northern Ireland unemployed (Howe 1990). Howe's central concern was to document how among the unemployed radical cleavages may arise in consequence of the various attachments to the state. Thus whereas the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor is represented by differing values of work, responsibility and family, it also cuts along the Protestant vs. Catholic cleavage. The deservingness is however not an invention of the poor; it should be rather understood as a translation of an existing ideology to

the purposes of a status conflict among the unemployed. In this, as Howe puts it, it operates as a strategy in impression management: "The categories 'deserving' and 'undeserving' exist as part of the stock of cultural knowledge. Since it is widely recognized that others use such a scheme of classification to organize their understanding of unemployment, individuals who are themselves unemployed feel more or less constrained to invoke similar contrasts to try to secure for themselves deserving status" (Howe 1990: 2). The categorization of deservingness issuing in the constant contestations among socially vulnerable classes is then charged with such moral appeal that it comes to convey differences between people as inherent to them. In some contexts then the cultural content of this socially produced mechanism of distanciation dominates, the social is reaffirmed as cultural. Social marginalization thus always mingles with cultural discourse and plays the double game of social and cultural differentiation.

What follows is my attempt to show how dealing with unemployment should be understood as a situated response to petrify the Roma as the undeserving poor. In contrast to Howe's example it is not demonstrated on how those deemed undeserving are created as such in the "act of classification" (Howe 1990: 3) and how arbitrary the classification is. My concern is to accentuate the economic reality of the long-term unemployed Roma and through this to chart the range of possible responses. This is yet another example of "escape" from dominant categorization and yet again it is not through an articulated opposition to the dominant order but through a constant search for more suitable chances. After providing a picture of the extent of unemployment among the Roma in Tercov I proceed first by introducing the structural qualities of poverty in the Czech Republic pertaining to the most disadvantaged groups of the Czech society. This should lay ground for my later argument that contrary to dominant beliefs, the Roma in objective terms do not stand out as a special category among the poor.

2.1 Situating Deprivation

Although the complex relations existing between limited access to the legal labor market, dependence on welfare benefits and personal dignity are not always the subject of personal preoccupations, they still escalate in the experience of the Roma as they envisage ways how to break out from economic hardship. Many of them are for example very perceptive in their critique of the work conditions in occupations offered to them on the job market. These consist predominantly in unskilled, low-paid and sometimes stigmatizing work. In the following chapters, the relations between job access, welfare dependency and dignity will be analyzed in a contextualized account of the various strategies employed by Roma to cope with their limited access to the labor market. In addition, the chapters will shed light on the elements constraining their decisions to take on a job. The results of these analyses suggest that the question of unemployment and income deprivation should not be dominated, as is often the case, by a focus on ready-made measurable factors like the absence of human capital on the part of the unemployed (see Sirovátka 2003: 23, GAC 2006: 43) or on inherent or institutionalized forms of ostracism, as argued by many human rights organizations (most recently ERRC 2007: 32).[21] Sociological analyses acknowledge various constraints, but while seeking historically determined and supposedly structurally sound causes of Romani unemployment they tend to argue for the simultaneous accumulation of handicaps but in the final account they underlie the absence of individual dispositions (social competences, professional training, and work habits). What from the point of view of the sociologists might seem like an independent fact could from another perspective appear as a story replete with failures, successes and partial achievements. For example, contrary to the expectations of

[21] Thematic report by European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC).

some sociologists, even in places with extreme levels of unemployment Roma males in particular often have had the experience of attempting to enter the legal labor market. Now and then in Tercov certain individuals decided to take a chance and against all odds assert themselves by taking on a job. However, virtually none fulfilled their wishes and attained the stability, recognition and upward mobility they dreamed of. Indeed, this produced a cohort of people who were "truly unemployed," that is, people who had permanent problems finding legally paid work.

At the same time, however, external conditions may change. In such a case the effects of the absolute segregation of Roma from the rest of the society, implicated in the discourses of "culture of poverty" and "the underclass" (cf. Stewart 2000, 2002) that also resonate in Czech sociological analyses of Romani social exclusion, may disappear. I argue that we can detect the seeds of potential change even in the examples of failed attempts as long as these are given due attention as maneuvers of the unemployed to break out of their isolation. Thus in the case of the Roma in Tercov being unemployed meant engaging in a constant quest for economic openings. The status of these openings may have not been as privileged as the sociologist would wish, but they still offered the Roma in Tercov the means for, and sometimes the experience of, success.

2.1.1 The Long-term Unemployed in Tercov

In the following chapter I will try to dissect the various factors involved in the production of long-term unemployment. The account is not exhaustive in terms of evaluating all socio-economic factors. Indeed, some substantial factors are totally missing, as, for example, a description of the regional economic development of the last two decades in southern

Bohemia that has reshaped the geographic distribution of work as well as transformed the core economic orientation from extensive agriculture and engineering industries to tourism, silviculture, manufacturing and food-processing. The account is thus limited to the terms of empirical reality as I encountered them in Tercov. However, this still allows me to focus in on something that is usually conceived of as two separate phenomena: the external and internal constraints leading to long-term unemployment (Cf. Sirovátka 2003: 14, GAC 2006: 43-45). Although it might be analytically comfortable to separate the two I have opted for a narrative account that is only occasionally accompanied by an examination of structural relations. As will become apparent, in the case of legal work the account is limited to a handful of individual cases because during my fieldwork I could witness interactions relating to paid work only on a limited number of occasions. The level of long-term unemployment among Roma in Tercov is almost 100% and creates a situation in which it is more likely to hear people's ideas about work than to observe them in practice. High unemployment level is not a momentary phenomenon; this level has persisted since the disappearance of the two main employers of Roma in Tercov, sawmill and the local co-operative farm, at the beginning of 1990's. Since then Romani unemployment stayed high and absorbed more and more people as new generations were coming of age. In the absence of "ethnic" data concerning unemployment we can establish the longitudinal perspective by merging the absolute numbers of unemployment in Tercov provided by the Labour Office with my own field data. In 2002 the 70 unemployed registered as work expectants at the Labour Office represented 47% of employable people in Tercov.[22] Of these 38 were Roma (see below) which represented 54% of all unemployed in Tercov. Three years later in 2005 the 75 unemployed in Tercov made 50% of the employable population.[23] The increase in absolute numbers corresponded to the

[22] Míra nezaměstnanosti v obcích okresu k poslednímu únoru. *Českokrumlovské listy*. 27. 3. 2002.

[23] Míra nezaměstnanosti v obcích regionu k 31. prosinci. *Českokrumlovské listy*. 18. 1. 2005.

increase of the number of Roma registered at the Labour Office by about 10 young Roma, aged between 16 to 18, who moved under the register after finishing compulsory education. At this point the 48 unemployed Roma already represented 64% of Tercov unemployed.

Obviously, high unemployment rates are not typical only for Tercov. In the entire region and even on the national scale Romani unemployment evinces similar figures. Depending on how the sample constituting the survey is defined, the figures may range from 46% of unemployed Roma on the national scale (Sirovátka 2003)[24] to 90-100% of Roma living in places marked by social exclusion (GAC 2006).[25] The figures of unemployment in Tercov are however still exceptional regardless of the high number of Romani unemployed. If theoretically Roma were excluded from the number of unemployed, Tercov would show some 35% of unemployed in 2002 and 26% in 2005 which would still place Tercov in both cases among the top three communities with the highest national level of unemployment. In the tumult of debates around the increasing unemployment in the Czech Republic (which peaked in 2004 at 10,5%) the fact brought the attention of national press which informed about Tercov's oddity in a typical fragmentary and trivial way that collapsed myths and reality.[26] Whereas the unemployment of the Czech villagers was linked to the general regional economic underdevelopment or to local political cleavages, Romani unemployment was blamed uniquely on the their unwillingness to work and on the unmotivating generosity of the welfare system that allegedly allowed Roma to live carelessly while on social benefits.

[24] Sirovátka (2003) mentions that the figure does not include those participating in the shadow economy that he estimates at approximately 5 %.

[25] A research report commissioned by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. (Gabal Analysis and Consulting (GAC). 2006. *Analýza sociálně vyloučených romských lokalit a komunit v České republice a absorpční kapacity subjektů působících v této oblasti*)

[26] Ivan Motýl. Nuda v bytovkách. *Týden*. 4. 10. 2004.

2.2 The knowledge of deprivation

There is a big hey in the social sciences about the "new poverty". It is most often linked to an ongoing qualitative change on the labour market. De-industrialization, globalization and new forms of production supposedly produce new sorts of people inadapted and inadaptable to these changes. Their social status decline results, as it were, from this refreshing breeze of effectivity that introduced the need of high skills or flexibility on the labour market which those unacquainted with new processes do not posses. Sociological accounts (see Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 627-30)[27] of the marginalization on the labour market take two, to some extent complementary although politically contrasting directions. The individualization thesis understands marginalization on the labour market as a failure and consequence of a lack of human capital on the part of the poor, be it in the form of competencies or motivations. The other direction draws from the assumption that every individual case of marginalization represents an accumulation of various objective disadvantages resulting in marginalization understood as material deprivation and social exclusion (Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 628).

The research on "Social exclusion and social policies"[28] realized in 2004 in the Czech Republic brought for the first time, as far as I know, survey data that help to situate poverty in the general picture of post-socialist social stratification. Hence from a more global perspective the research reflects the general observation that research on poverty seems to be immune to the political shift in Western societies away from the welfare state. Quite on the contrary, the assessment of "what the welfare repeal has meant for the poor" (O'Connor 2001: 291) focuses on the effects of this shift for the poor and opens up for an evaluation of the manifold

[27] All the following section summarizing the sociological view on marginalization is drawn from this article: Sirovátka, Tomáš & Mareš, Petr (2006).

[28] The survey was realized in 2004 and 2005 and guaranteed by Masaryk University. It focused on individuals who showed marks of income deprivation. The authors of the article interpreting the data focused on people who were welfare recipients in 2004 or considered their situation comparable to that of welfare recipients. The aggregate consisted of 2500 people.

constrains this has not only on the life conditions of vulnerable parts of the western population, but also on the redefinition of the social meaning of poverty and its new forms. The research in question does not explicitly address ethnicized poverty (see Ladányi and Szelényi 2006), however it allows elucidating social categories mostly affected by poverty and consequently deducing how this could be translated into individual cases.

From a comparative perspective, poverty measured by income does not involve more than 7-8 % of the population in the Czech Republic. Also, only about 6-7 % of households receive social support benefits providing for the minimum subsistence level which makes of the Czech Republic the country the least affected by an accruement of poverty among the transforming post-communist countries and comparable with other European countries. From this point of view the Czech social support system seems to be efficient in eliminating poverty for people with low income and according to the authors this is due to developed schemes of income testing of benefits. However, this does not apply for other groups endangered by poverty, like the unemployed or incomplete families with children (Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 630). The difference does not however pertain only to the position on the labour market. The authors alert that it is also necessary to pay attention to the "quality" of deprivation.

The research lays bare some of the assumptions about poverty, especially those linking poverty and social exclusion to employment. It is often assumed in relation to Roma that their poverty is constituted by their civilizing handicap, consisting mainly in their inadaptability to the demands of market economy. Not only that they lack working skills, they are also deeply seated in the traditional communal ethos contradicting the individualist and competitive character of the labour market. Let's look then at some of the characteristics of income deprivation analyzed through data from the survey on "Social exclusion". Who is then really endangered by poverty in the Czech Republic?

The research stands out for its emphasis on comparison of income deprived categories of the population according to their place on the labour market. Some of the findings are interesting for the analysis of the social position of poor Roma. For example it is palpable that among income deprived the employed, who often occupy only temporary jobs (31 % of employed), dominate in number over long-term unemployed (50 %, resp. 30 %).[29] Also, among income deprived households prevail those where at least one of the members has a job (fully unemployed households – both partners don't have a job – represent only 14 %).

The authors of the research also investigated the quality of employment among income deprived. The analysis shows that income deprived employed people operate predominantly on the secondary labour market, which is more competitive. In their subjective perception, for 2/3 of them having a job does not offer any social mobility, neither does it bring other advantages. On the contrary, they link their employment with various drawbacks, like physical fatigue, various inherent sacrifices (long commuting, law salary) etc. It is not surprising then that employed among income deprived view employment the same way as unemployed. The main conclusion drawn from the findings is that quality employment is not accessible to income deprived. Consequently, marginal labour force is divided, according to the researchers, into three categories: those who keep their stable although bad jobs for the security they provide; the majority nevertheless alternates between unemployment and short-term employment; the last category prefers to rest in unemployment for the non-expedience of employment (law salary and other costs of being employed).

Another paradox arises from the analysis of declared incomes (which is a paradox only on the first sight): incomes of steadily employed among income deprived are comparable to the

[29] Moreover, altogether employed and unemployed outnumber by three the short-term unemployed and people unemployed for the first time.

income situation of unemployed. The income situation of temporarily employed is even worse than that of the other two groups. The authors thus establish a clear conclusion: "Position on the labour market and unemployment, even if accumulated in a particular household, are not the decisive factors of the income deprivation of the poor and their households. We may conclude that "in the case of the income deprived and their households temporary or partial employment does not pay off" (Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 639).

TABLE 1 - AVERAGE INCOME PER PERSON IN A GIVEN TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Household employment	**Per person in CZK/month**	**Per person (Eurostat)**
Fully employed	5060	6123
Partially employed	4320	5693
Unemployed	4673	5754

Source: „Social exclusion Survey", December 2004[30]

The only difference on the labour market between people living in unemployed households and fully or partially employed households the authors see in the capacity to "accomplish 'majority life-style'" and to affect to some extent the plight of their children and their own. According to selected indicators (mortgage, pension reinsurance, accident insurance, studies of children, concerts and cinema) income provides income deprived people with "certain safety and possibility to dispose resources and to decide with bigger security about its usage and financial planning" (Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 643). The selected indicators for financial

[30] In Sirovátka & Mareš 2006: 639.

planning however may only reveal the possibilities of depositing money, or possibly their "cultured" spending. In other words, the indicators of deprivation may only predicate culturally distinctive markers but not participation on a life-style, if not a life-style determined by economic wealth. Similarly we approach the conclusions about poverty reduction. Whereas the majority of income deprived does not foresee any possibility to break out from the poverty circle and their scepticism increases with the time spent in subjectively experienced poverty (up to 45 % of income deprived perceive their situation as such for more than two years), for the most deprived among them like Roma in Tercov, who are, moreover, even less participating on the "majority life-style", these feelings are not compatible with their view of personal dignity and thus do not share them.

2.2.1 From socialist to post-socialist poverty

Some authors suggest that the current social position of the Roma is determined by recent changes on the labour market (see Sirovátka 2003). Notwithstanding the importance of this factor, such a view masks the fact that the changes did not take place only on the labour market but in social relations generally. Such a view implicitly foists the incompetence on the part of the poor to assert oneself. At the same time it implies that before the transformation their situation was better. On the ideological level, the main change that took place between the state socialist and post-socialist regimes of social support consisted in the retreat of the idea of family as the central focus of state intervention in the post-socialist era.[31] Scholars

[31] The centrality of family during socialism was even more crucial to its economic functioning. On both micro- and macroeconomic level the system unconditionally proceeded from the assumption of a two-income nuclear family (as consequence of a generally very low income diversification). Therefore any distortion to this model, like the inevitable need for reproduction and consequently the absence of one income due to maternity leave, brought serious repercussions to its prosperity. Accordingly the social support system heavily focused on such circumstances by allocating important sums to universally granted (that is not income or means tested, but

who focused on the family in transition, not particularly numerous indeed, detected in this shift of concern the constitution of a distinct "ideology of intimacy" (Nash 2000: 33). Whereas the socialist state tied its conception of family and its place in society to the stories it told about itself (Ibid.), in which family became the agent of distributed equality, the post-socialist state relinquished the family as vector of its self-perception. This time the concern was to dissociate family life from the operations of the state so that legitimate interest and involvement was possible only when the state was called to help. For this purpose an elaborate register of causalities was defined in the form of justly claims embodied in "befitting benefits" (*nárokové dávky*) in contrast to socialist universal social support (see bellow). New social policies were henceforth articulated along idioms of individual accountability. The elimination of state tutelage over the reproduction of families brought congruous change in the ethos of social solidarity expressed in the parlance of the state in the following way: "[a]n important aspect of the [post-socialist] social reform is the decrease in the dependency of the citizens on the government" *(Ministersto práce a sociálních věcí* 1999, cited in Nash 2000: 103).

It is interesting to look at how the ideas of undeservingness are progressively embodied in a way that they pertain to the Roma. According to Nash, although absent in official documents, the difference of treatment based on the understanding of the different nature of Gypsy and Czech family is inscribed in the discursive practices of the state apparatus. Nash explains how "Romani families often served as negative examples of 'the Czech family'" (Nash 2000: 104). It seems that Roma hold a peculiar influence on the interpretation of post-socialist social

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across-the-board) child allowances and other financial transfers to single income families. Some authors refer to this phenomenon as the hidden source of poverty in socialist economies: high number of dependents per income provider. Yet the poverty reduction policies were not always effective. For example in 1988 75 % of the poor lived in families with dependent children (see Mareš 1999: 186-7). Poverty during socialism is estimated according to the level of *social minima*, i.e. 56 % of average income.

policy. Nash observed the operations at the Social support department and she thus could investigate the discursive practices in action. She observed that the Czechs associated the official category of "socially weaker" *(socialně slabší)* with those they perceived of as unable, or unwilling, to care for their own and as entirely dependent on the state. What she calls "unproductive" is equivalent to the undeserving poor in Howe's interpretation. The main shift in the understanding of deservingness is thus situated in the re-interpretation of "productivity" during socialism when social support was applied generally. The discursive shift must thus entail how it happens that what was accepted as the obligation of the state for the majority of families is now supposed to become a privilege of those deserving the attention of state support. "While distinctions between those who work for the family emerge out of memories and discussions of hard work and self-support during the socialist era, during the postsocialist period these characterizations were put forth against the backdrop of new needs-based family awards for lower-income families" (Nash 2000: 9).

There is a historical precondition for the ways social benefits are understood in contemporary Czech society. Nash notes how "state materials were often considered one's to obtain, hoard, steal and use for private purposes" (Nash 2003: 207) which was an attitude also recorded for other former socialist countries, as in the Soviet Union, where "state products and resources were conceived of as 'ours' to be drawn on and used" (Humprey 2002: 40, cited in Nash 2003: 209). In the case of social benefits, since these were conceived of as "across-the-board", they were also encapsulated in a more general interpretive framework of claim in the relation to the State. At that time, benefits did not reflect the social position of receivers; in a perfect deconstruction of means-testing they were attributed according to the age of a child along the universal claim (*nárok*) indiscriminately to all families. This was one of the reasons for which the claim was often interpreted as a "natural right" (*právo*) (Nash 2003: 209). Another reason

should be seen in the manoeuvring of individual claimants of benefits. Although it was part of how the State "mythologized its generosity", there was a tangible experience that only informal relations and contacts with bureaucrats assured successful claims. Moreover, besides family benefits the state support consisted in various financial subsidies and grants (interest-free loans) as part of pro-family policy. These for example helped young families to establish homes, which were otherwise inaccessible. The sedulous effort to procure building material through informal webs of acquaintanceships, the personal investment in the construction and other difficulties often produced the sense of deservingness; that nothing was for free. Also, social benefits were derived through the employer who did the paperwork and benefits appeared on the pay check as parts of the salary, whereas currently benefits are claimed individually at the Social benefits department by filling a request on a designed form. "Today, a *nárok* is no longer promised to all, it is no longer an inherent right" (Nash 2003: 209).

The post-socialist shift to income testing benefits was introduced shortly after the political changes. As in many other former socialist countries, the redefinition of social support was not a subsidiary element on the agenda of transformation, but its constitutive part. The principle of income testing was introduced in a concentrated effort on several levels, from a new organization of social policy knowledge, zealous indoctrination of various agents (scholars, policy makers, experts, politicians, caseworkers and students) to the reconstruction of welfare apparatus assisted and funded by large Western forces like agencies, think tanks and multinational institutions (see Haney 2000 for a detailed account of the Hungarian case).

2.2.2 Citizenship and Work: the ordinary in the extraordinary

When I arrived to Tercov in September 2001 there were two Roma males out of 24 employable Roma who had a job.[32] Mirek, in his mid-forties and father of five children, worked on and off as a construction worker at various building sites within the southern Bohemian region. Gejza, in his mid-thirties and father of two children, on the other hand, had been temporarily assigned by the Labor Office to the Tercov Community Council under the *Community Service Scheme* (VPP).[33] In the context of Tercov Mirek's story was quite special. Yet I prefer to place it at the beginning of my account of un/employment because it represents an extreme, albeit not unique, position on the scale of social dispositions for entering the labor market. In Mirek's case it was an undeclared and unstable job in which he depended on the willingness of his Romani boss to take him in. It was also a low-paid job: Mirek agreed to 500 CZK a day excluding the costs of transport. When he deducted these costs together with the cost of daily nourishment, he came back home with no more than 300 CZK. Mirek took the job upon his arrival from prison where he served a sentence of unclear length. In 2001 his status was unsure in many ways. After the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993 the citizens of the former federation automatically gained the nationality of that part of the former state where their official residence was.[34] The rest had to opt for the nationality of the country of their current choice (Czech or Slovak). Under normal circumstances it was a formality. After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation on January 1, 1993 a new law regulated Czech nationality (Law No. 40/1993 Coll., On the acquisition and forfeiture of Czech nationality). The law stipulated who could acquire the Czech nationality *ex lege*, how to "opt" for a nationality and also how to acquire nationality on demand (naturalization). The law thus

[32] The total number of 38 adults is rounded out by 9 women on maternity leave, 2 disabled persons on full or partial disability pensions and 3 retirees.

[33] VPP – Veřejně prospěšné práce.

[34] Law No. 40/1993 Coll., On the acquisition and forfeit of the Czech nationality.

identified a special case for the former citizens of the federation (Sec. 18) who were eligible for "opting" for Czech nationality and set the deadline for doing so as December 31, 1993.[35] However, the requirements effectively precluded a significant part of the Romani population from complying with them in such a short period. In particular, the requirement of two years of continuous permanent residence at the time of choice proved to be selective since many Roma had their official permanent residence—until then formally unimportant within the federation—in Slovakia. Also, the requirement of a clean criminal record five years prior to choosing barred access to nationality for a significant number of Roma and was criticized as an example of double jeopardy. Under these requirements many Roma were not able to sort out their nationality within the deadline and consequently fell under the category of foreigners for whom even stricter requirements for naturalization applied. It is estimated that up to 100,000 Roma who were born or had lived most of their lives in the Czech Republic found themselves aliens in their home country. As late as 1998 the Czech Helsinki Committee reported that 15,000 citizens of the former federation were living with illegal status in the Czech Republic (Miklušáková 1999: 267-270).

Thus eight years later Mirek (who like most of the Roma on the territory of the present-day Czech Republic had migrated from Slovakia was still officially considered a foreigner, a status that impeded his claims for welfare benefits, health insurance and social security and meant he could theoretically be deported to Slovakia at any moment. Unable to integrate after his release from prison, denied welfare support due to pending questions about his nationality status, and effectively barred from obtaining Czech nationality as a result of his prison sentence, Mirek found himself in a Catch-22 situation that placed him at the mercy of luck and circumstance. The scarcity of job offers together with his unsure civic status required him

[35] Later extended to June 30, 1994.

to accept jobs that even other Roma would not: "I know it's a rip-off. I'm paid like a Ukrainian who doesn't care about anything. But what can I do? I asked Deži *[his Romani boss]* to pay me more but he knows very well what my situation is like. He said 'either you take it or I'll get a Ukrainian,' he was just like that." Mirek's net gain was thus below the accepted hourly wage (barely 40 CZK/hour, whereas the acceptable rate among Roma was 50-60 CZK).

Unfortunately, Mirek passed away shortly after I commenced my fieldwork. I therefore cannot provide a more complete account of how he maneuvered between an uncertain civic status that made him a *structural pariah* and the necessity to survive as a social being. Although Mirek was the only one in Tercov who fell into this situation, it is not a special case in structural terms. On the one hand the impact of the new law on nationality was in statistical terms far from insignificant, on the other Mirek was responding to the same constraints as other Roma in Tercov who also sought work opportunities determined by competition for a cheap labor force. Accepting a wage that other Roma (who were not compelled to take a job at any price) were able to ignore only accentuated Mirek's specific existential vulnerability.

2.2.3 Ventures into Legal Work

For the Roma in Tercov the possibility of negotiating either a weekly or, even better, a daily payment of wages was just as important as the actual level of remuneration. The secret of success consisted in getting past the period in which one received the social benefits calculated to cover basic household needs (which cannot be redirected to other ends).[36] Especially in places like Tercov, where it was highly probable that any job would require

[36] See Hůlová and Steiner (2005) who discovered a similar causality in one of the cases under investigation despite the different conclusions they come to.

daily commuting and therefore always necessitate an initial investment, it was almost indispensable that such an arrangement be made. This was actually one of the determining factors in taking a job. In the sociologically informed analyses of Romani unemployment authors tend to explain the preference for undeclared work as a rational economic choice allowing maximal household revenues while retaining social benefits. Such analyses inevitably fuel a discourse suggesting that the Roma depending on social benefits are abusers of social welfare who exploit social solidarity at the expense of the more needy. What these analyses however fail to recognize is that from the point of view of the long-term unemployed, taking a declared job requires an initial expenditure which may well be beyond their reach. Furthermore, these analyses overlook a fundamental dimension in the economic life of the long-term unemployed: neither social benefits nor revenues from undeclared work are sufficient to cover household expenses. Thus after analyzing attempts to enter the legal work I proceed to the analysis of informal economic activities as the structural counterpart in the overall framework of survival strategies. It shows that the preference for undeclared work over declared work is not a fact in itself. The evidence I am providing points to something different: with all its flaws undeclared work provided the long-term unemployed with an alternative to conventional monthly wages and thus responded better to the crucial problem experienced by people dependent on social benefits—their lack of cash.

Let us now first look at how Roma in Tercov attempted to find their way into legal wage work. I present three cases that all show, each in a different way, how ventures into "goin' legit" collapsed. Five of the seven characters were younger than twenty years old, and I find it significant that the experience of attempting to work legally was gained at a relatively young age. This also means that failure was learned relatively early on, too. As has been noted by

sociologists and economists, the basic problem of Romani unemployment is structural. In the socialist "economy of shortage" (Kornai 1980) there was also a shortage in the allocation of labor. The adoption of laws requiring citizens to be employed created a situation of quasi-full employment into which the Roma were drawn and which for the first time in their history meant they had steady access to cash inflow (Emigh, Fodor and Szelényi 1999: 7). In Czechoslovakia the Roma were to large extent reserved the places of unskilled workers. It is a common argument in the literature on communist policies targeting the Roma that the post-war displacement of Romani migrants from Slovakia was enhanced by enormous investments in the development of heavy industry, where an unskilled labor force was needed. The assumption goes that the need for a labor force and the idea of dispersing the Roma from segregated and backward settlements in rural Slovakia went hand in hand. To my knowledge so far we lack a detailed historical grasp of the process of how Romani migrants from Slovakia were incorporated into post-war industrialization. However, the sociologist Will Guy, who undertook both fieldwork and archival research in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1970's, argues convincingly that instead of a master plan being put in place it was more a push-and-pull story between the desire of local authorities to escape central orders to accommodate Roma and the lack of labor force on the part of industrial planners (Guy 1975: 33-34, Guy 1977: 207-211). Still it seems warranted to claim that the socialist redistributive system of production, using coercion and incentives (and poor educational policies), reserved the status of unskilled labor for Roma to such an extent that in the former Czechoslovakia in 1980 almost 84% of Roma were employed as industrial workers,[37] where they were disproportionately represented in low-skill, labor-intensive jobs. And it was exactly these jobs that were the first to expire during the transition to a market economy (Sirovátka 2003: 16,

[37] Only 0,5 % in agriculture in contrast with 7,5 % of the overall population (Srb 1980: 168) (Vladimír Srb. 1984. Některé demografické, ekonomické a kulturní charakteristiky cikánského obyvatelstva v ČSSR 1980. *Demografie* 26 (2).

Barany 1994, Gheorghe 1991) which some scholars consequently identified as the "broom of 'efficiency' sweeping through the dead undergrowth of the socialist economy" (Kertesi 2000, cit. in Stewart 2002). Yet rarely did scholars pay attention to the possible change in relation to work and to the cultural dislocation it may have incurred. The hidden assumption behind the linear account of the transition to a market economy that made the Roma unemployable as unskilled or low-skilled workers is that hypothetically they were also freed from the ideology that compulsory incorporation into the working class brought with it. Instead, attention is paid to the reproduction of the "multiple disadvantages" that the Roma all over Eastern Europe have been subjected to.

2.2.3.1.1 Zdeno: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Zdeno was twenty years old when he was offered a job rarely available to Roma: a prep-cook in a popular music bar in Krumlov with the prospect of becoming a bartender. For someone fond of the street culture which the bar cultivated it was an irresistible seduction despite the rather mediocre wage offer. For Zdeno the prospect of such a job represented both a work opportunity and a source of identity that not only he but also his peers valued highly:

> Zdeno: "Fucking hell! That would be amazing! I would work day shifts so I could hang out in the evening. Short and long weeks![38]... It isn't big money but they say you can earn a lot on tips. If I get the bartender job after someone leaves, I'd really have it made. Some days you come up with three hundred just on tips."
>
> Cina: "Yeah… and no shit, man, just clean work. They'll give you clean cloths… an apron and that funny hat."

[38] Twelve-hour shifts alternately three days on and two days off and then two days on and two days off. Consequently the "long week" has five working days, the "short week" only three working days.

> Zdeno: "The guys who work there are all cool, they're all dopeheads… they smoke pot and stuff. They're all real *letci*,[39] I know them from before. Can you imagine, we'll *tvořit* [act creative] at work the whole time?"
>
> Juli: "I was to the bar, there're only young people coming there. Plenty of tourists… Americans, English, Australians and I even saw blacks there."
>
> Zdeno: "No more boredom in Tercov, no more fuckin' lazy days. There's always something to do in Krumlov, all the guys are there… *[he names his cousins and other relatives]*." (June 2002)

Krumlov is too far to commute every day; Zdeno had therefore arranged with his aunt to stay with her at the beginning before he found accommodation. He didn't even have enough money to get to Krumlov to start his job. At the end he managed to get a ride with Martin, who was going in the same direction. When he was doing his shift he did not really need any support. He was fed in the bar. But on his days off he relied on his aunt's willingness to support him. She herself was unemployed, as was her husband. They lived with their two children in a one-bedroom apartment rented in the upper part of the town, in a neighborhood of typically socialist large concrete apartment blocks. Zdeno slept on a sofa in the kitchen. He had to leave his sleeping spot in the morning as soon as his aunt came to prepare breakfast and he could go to bed only after everybody else didn't need the kitchen anymore. Being literally penniless since his arrival, he could not contribute to the household budget. However, this was never an issue. His aunt felt obliged to play host to her nephew. From time to time, Zdeno also reduced the costs of his stay at his aunt's place by going to other relatives for lunch. Sometimes he borrowed small amounts of money from his cousins to buy cigarettes for

[39] *Letci* (sing. *letec*), literarily "pilot," refers to someone who smokes dope in a way that he can narrate about it, that is he can *tvořit* (be creative).

himself. Most importantly, when he received his first wage of approximately 7000 CZK he felt obliged to go to his aunt and give her a flat sum of 3000 CZK as contribution to the household budget. I found this quite astonishing when I discovered that the sum equaled one fourth of the real monthly household expenses (for three adults and two children)— as if Zdeno had consciously estimated his proportional part in the household expanses (which he however did not). After he paid back the money he borrowed from his cousins the remaining money (3000 CZK) were not enough to have him pay a sublet or other accommodation so Zdeno was bound to stay with his aunt another month. The next month the situation repeated itself, but this time he gave his aunt only 2000 CZK, so that he could pay for a sublet that he had found for 3000 CZK. Still not having obtained the position of a bartender (which would have allowed him higher revenues from tips) he was left with only 2000 CZK for his personal expenses. Zdeno suddenly discovered that living on his own was much more costly than sharing the living expenses in a household so he quit the sublet in the middle of the month when he ran out of money and went back to his aunt's place. He dragged on like this for a few more weeks, until he realized that his options were either living with his aunt's family in a one-bedroom apartment in a relatively comfortable way or going back to Tercov and await another job opportunity, which he eventually did.

Passing from unemployment to paid work thus came to naught because it was impossible to surmount the basic condition of the unemployed person who lacks the cash to buy time before he/she settles down as an employed. Moreover, the passage is made even more difficult if we step back from the individual disposition to consider the social milieu within which he/she is operating. Even the well-disposed family network could not provide the necessary initial generosity that would have allowed a temporary suspension of the constraining conditions. Zdeno's salary always happened to arrive at the moment when his aunt's household ran out of

cash from social benefits; a situation that according to my observations regularly occurred in most of the Romani households the second or the third week at the latest after social benefits were received. For the long-term unemployed, the financial condition of their social support network seems to be as equally constitutive as their own individual initiative in extricating them from a state of unemployment.

Some economists propose a challenging interpretation of the same phenomenon. Steiner and Hůlová (2005) claim that the existence of "family solidarity networks" represents an optimal redistributive mechanism in times of economic shortage. The economic function of the extended family solidarity network consists according to them in that it gives assurance to every individual that family members will share their means if one of the members happens to be temporarily destitute. At the same time, however, it is this conscience that precludes individual and collective economic upswing because it has an adverse motivational effect on individuals: why to take pains if the potential individually added effort would be watered down among other members? What the economists fail to recognize is that redistribution within a network of economically deprived people can hardly meet the requirement of equal redistribution the economists explicitly assume (p. 5). As Zdeno's aunt who never questioned her obligation to make available her help to the nephew, her help was paid back to a nicety as the situation required it. It is precisely the "generosity of solidarity" the deprived can't afford although it may be present as an ideal. Later I will address the same question when I will attempt to show that it was precisely the abandon of sharing in the sense of "undistinguished sharing of common resources" which mostly characterized the transactions between the Roma in Tercov.

2.2.3.1.2 Milan and Laci: the Time of the Machine

The inexpedience of hourly wages in the figurative sense proved itself most in the case of legal employment. Laci and Milan had a fairly stable job for some time. They worked in a factory producing prefabricated wiring. The factory is only 8 km away from Tercov so it was not costly to commute together using Laci's car. They had to work day and night shifts. Laci had a year's contract but he quit before termination. Milan, who started later than Laci, gave up shortly after the three-month trial period. They were both disappointed by their salaries, which only slightly exceeded the minimum wage. The reason was that it was difficult for them to meet the production norms that would provide them with adequate salaries. I could not observe Milan and Laci at work because they quit it shortly after I started my fieldwork. Therefore the depiction of their work conditions depends solely on how they described it to me. Both of them in fact operated the same machine, which bundled together a bunch of wires into an inductor. Their tasks were to arrange the bundle of wires, found in a container, into the machine, then launch the process and at the end assemble the bundled wires in a different container. The machine repeatedly jammed or the wires fell out of the feeder. Also, the supply of wires was not always steady. However stereotyped the work was, it was not very demanding in terms of skills or knowledge and both Milan and Laci were initially content with their work during the trial period, when output norms did not apply to them. The disillusionment came later when Laci was working regularly and when real output norms applied to him. In reality, workers were required to produce 130 % of the norm. Only at this level did bonuses raise the basic salary to a reasonable level. As was related to me by Milan and Laci, the problem was that during the shift one never really worked for 8 hours due to repeated jams in the machine and to the irregular feed of wires. The promise of higher earnings was thus only hypothetical. The company apparently calculated the salaries in view of these technical shortcomings and established the norms accordingly. The norm was to pay

workers only the minimum wage under standard circumstances. The workers could achieve higher pay only if these circumstances changed considerably. But in that case the company's production would also increase and the risk of elevated salary claims would be covered. The contract itself stated both the basic salary and the bonuses for exceeding norms and it originally created in Laci and Milan the impression of remuneration according to merit. Although the salary was not measured by hours, the eight-hour shift was the unit within which the work performance had to be achieved and which was at the same time the basis of the norm. Laci and Milan believed they could work more and achieve higher norms, but this was effectively precluded by the repeated failure of the machines. In their view they had been taken in: although they were kept for eight hours on the shop floor, they were paid only for the time the machines were in use. It is thus not surprising that as soon as summer seasonal work started, both Laci and Milan abandoned their jobs and turned to an economic opportunity where the link between work effort and gain seemed more unequivocal.

2.2.3.1.2.1 The "Zarobitchan": of the pertinence of structural analogy

The complete shift of entrepreneurial risk to employees eventually turned out to be a fatal hindrance to the above-mentioned company's ability to attract workers in the region and it sold its electric appliances division. It continued operation of its other divisions (sewing car seat covers) but totally re-vamped its recruitment policies to target mostly women workers. But even when the company started offering free transportation to and from the factory, the response was still insufficient. The only employees willing to work for the minimum wage turned out to be the work force imported first from Bulgaria and then from Mongolia. The problem of competition over cheap labor is however more complex than that. With the transition from the socialist redistributive economy the need for cheap labor obviously did not

disappear. What disappeared was the "privileged" position of the Roma regarding such occupations. This sector of the labor market is now not situated so much in heavy industry as in other branches of the economy, mainly in the building industry and in manufacturing. Here the demand was soon saturated by both legal and illegal migration from Eastern Europe. In the case of the Czech Republic this migration was mostly from the Ukraine, due to historically transmitted work migratory patterns dating from the pre-war period (Uherek undated). This pattern was revived during the economic crisis of the 1990's, which had scattered between 3 and 7 million Ukrainians (Livinský 2007) all over the world in a quest for emolument unavailable at home. Especially in the western part of the country, Carpathian Ruthenia, which was the main source of migration to the Czech Republic, unemployment at one point reached almost 50%. Existing work opportunities offered the Ukrainian worker on the average 4-5 times lower wages than what he could earn as an unskilled laborer in the Czech Republic (apart from the fact that wages were paid irregularly with long delays). According to unofficial estimates the number of Ukrainian legal and illegal work migrants (*zarobitchan*) in the Czech Republic reached 200,000 persons in 2004 (Uherek, op. cit.). The official figures alone suffice to illustrate the extent of labor relocation and its impact on the sector of cheap labor. If we exclude Slovak nationals, whose presence in the Czech Republic can be explained by various causes and cannot be linked uniquely to economic factors, in 2006 the *zarobitchan*s represented 47% of all foreign workers in the Czech Republic (67,000 in absolute numbers). Half of the officially registered *zarobitchan*s at the Labour Office worked in the building industry, another quarter in manufacturing, i.e., in the sectors with the highest demand for unskilled labor (moreover, 30% of the *zarobitchan*s worked as skilled or semi-skilled craftsmen and repairmen).[40] The steadily growing influx of an army of highly

[40] *Cizinci v České republice. 2006.* Praha: Český statistický úřad (*Foreigners in the Czech Republic*. Czech Statistical Office).

motivated and economically desperate workers (from 14,230 in 1994 to 87,789 in 2005 in official numbers) explains to large extent the shifts in that sector of the labor market the Roma would normally have access to.

The edging out the Roma from the labor market was however not caused by the appearance of a more willing, cheap labor force from abroad. For in the long run the working and living conditions of *zarobitchan*s are untenable. The enormous gap between average revenues from unskilled work in the Czech Republic and the general average revenues in the Ukraine has created a large maneuvering space for a middleman niche of semi-criminal businesses rationalizing and organizing the distribution of migrant workers. Thus a large segment of the *zarobitchan*s is hired through agencies which not only charge fees for the procurement of work in the host country but which also deduct significant portions from workers' wages (Černík 2005). This multimillion-crown business regulates the living and working conditions of migrant workers by often imposing their legal status as that of tradesmen. It is estimated that almost half of the *zarobitchan*s are officially registered as tradesmen who operate under the Commercial Code and not under labor legislation ensuring the protection of employees. At the same time this arrangement allows contracts to be concluded between employers and workers in the form of trade invoicing[41] which exempts the employer from levies and contributions to the social security system. The manifold convenience of the arrangement is further confirmed by the fact that granting the status of tradesman is an easier way to legalize the residence status of the foreign worker than through work permits.

[41] This practice is commonly called the *švarcsystem* after the businessman Miroslav Švarc who at the beginning of 1990's, soon after he had privatized a factory in central Bohemia, fired all the employees and then established contractual relations with each of them on the basis of supply contracts. This allowed him to reduce the operating costs by evading the obligation to pay health and social security for the employees who became *de jure* business partners. The practice has been prohibited since 1992, however it is always difficult for the authorities to identify at what point the nature of the given work relation is more business-like or more occupational. The temporary nature of work in construction where workers are hired for specific projects encourages the *švarcsystém* arrangement.

Working under these conditions is in fact possible only if employees consider this life-style to be temporary. This corresponds to the prevailing "circular" pattern of migration of Ukrainian workers, who regularly go back home to either invest their earnings or to simply take off for some time before going back to the host country.[42] The price for being compelled to accept unskilled work is paid for by an exhausting life-style. To the best of my knowledge research on the living conditions of migrant workers on the margins of the Czech labor market has only just begun.[43] However, although we lack a qualitative grasp of the social world created by this migration, we may still deduce its most visible manifestations from narrowly focused statistics. A report issued from a survey produced in 2004 on the health conditions of migrant workers from the former USSR[44] showed that 39% of these workers worked 6 days a week and another 9% worked without taking a single day off. Their day shifts were also much longer: 26% of them stated in the survey that they worked 10-12 hour shifts, another 46% worked 8-10 hour shifts. The same survey revealed that almost 40% of their injuries happened at the workplace. Their lifestyle, which was centered almost exclusively on work at low wages, created a social environment based on transitoriness and loose social attachments. Migrant workers thus live predominantly in dormitories, or worse in cabins previously used for other purposes and lacking sanitary facilities. Homesickness, as well as the absence of stable social ties and leisure time induce frustration and give rise to social isolation, plunging workers into the unrestrained and exorbitant alcohol abuse that has become the defining social badge of the *zarobitchan*.

[42] Michal Nekorjak, personal communication.

[43] However see Nekorjak (2007) for a first account of *zarobitchan*s' strategies of entering the labour market and the effect of this on their legal status.

[44] *Zdravotní stav a péče o zdraví občanů bývalé SSSR pobývajících dlouhodobě v ČR a občanů ČR*. Sborník č. 1/2004. Kostelec nad Černými Lesy: IZPE.

This condensed look at the work and living conditions is intended to illustrate that for those Roma who seek entry into the regular labor market, the situation is also heavily affected by global flows of cheap labor that impact the unskilled labor market in such a way that it becomes a sphere of outright, inexorable exploitation and untenable living conditions. Given this situation an astute analyst of class conflict might strive to accentuate how the struggles in a desperate walk of life on the margins of society create anxieties and intolerance between people of the same status.[45] However, to my surprise, the Roma in Tercov were mostly indifferent towards their structural competitors. Even when they endorsed mainstream narratives about migrant workers from the former USSR they did so with a kind of detached aloofness. The figure of the indefatigable worker, not dissimilar from the Stakhanovite (*stachanovec*) which one may sometimes register in mainstream narratives about the *zarobitchan*s mitigates the horrors of migrant workers' work and living conditions by suggesting a historical continuity in their exaggerated dedication to the endless and tedious physical work of the Stakhanovite man-machine. It seems to me that the mainstream narrative sometimes seeks to oppose this work ethic to the shiftless attitude of the Roma, to their idleness and slyness in matters of individual responsibility. A friend of mine expressed the mainstream view of the Ukrainian worker, albeit in a different context of contrasting it to the Czech worker: "You need to be one-dimensional to bear up work the way Ukrainians do. That's why they're efficient and why I prefer to give them work. You can't leave them alone to do the work; you have to observe them all the time. Otherwise they would mass up. But they never care how much work you ask them for; they never question what you ask them to do. Where a Czech worker would find hundreds of excuses so he could do it the easier way, the Ukrainian worker just does it. This is his value: he's keyed up to work."

[45] See Sassen (1988) for how flows of migrant workers from the periphery to the centre affected the labour market in dislocating precisely the bottom of the social pile.

An early 1950s propaganda feature film, *Můj přítel Fabián* (My friend Fabián, dir. Jiří Weiss, 1953), transmitted to the greater public the ideology behind the assimilation of Roma into the working class. The plot reproduces a Communist-inspired plan for assimilation that begins with the segregation of the Rom from his fellows and blood-tie loyalties by his integration into a working brigade, then advances through the painful adoption of an orderly new life-style and climaxes in an endorsement of the social value of work, integrating the by now unrecognizable Rom into the working class as an agent of the new social order. The story of Fabián also displayed the critical moments of this process which, interestingly enough, were not seen in abandoning a feckless and dissolute day-to-day lifestyle but rather in the contrast between productive and unproductive work. The latter is represented by a grandiloquent and wily Czech worker who constantly and publicly ridicules Fabián as work-shy. The film is then staged as the historic clash between the Czech worker constantly recalling the times when he lived as a barber from tips and thus sabotaging the building of the new worker society and the Romani worker who now excels in work productivity.[46] I find a surprising continuity in this ideal of the assimilated Rom and the model of the *zarobitchan*, in the sense that they both instigate the Roma to put work first regardless of the repercussions this may produce. However, the Roma seemed to be more realistic than the mainstream in detecting another historical continuity in the relation to work: they situated the *zarobitchan*-cum-*stachanovec*'s self-denying attitude to work in his mental structure shaped by the experience of long-time misery and deprivation during socialism in the USSR.

> *Šafrán*: "The Ukrainian is like that, he is used to living from hand to mouth. They work like horses because Russia was very poor… and still is poor. That's why

[46] In this the propaganda also wished to insinuate the radically anti-racist ethos of assimilation which discerned only class differences and ideologies, not primordial sentiments. See Donert (undated) for the ambivalent period reception of the film.

> they're such drudges; they don't even take breaks at work. They have nothing to lose… and even if they are paid here very little, like slaves, when they bring it home they are still looked upon like kings…" (August 2005)

Šafrán's attitude to Ukrainian workers was at the same time appreciative. He had a heart for their capacity to win respect: "You shouldn't take Ukrainians for a ride… you need to be friends with them. Then they give you all they have: vodka, bacon, bread and salt. But if you do dirty tricks to them, then you have to deal with the mafia." Since I never witnessed a single encounter of the Roma in Tercov with Ukrainians, I assume the ideas about them reveal more about the way Roma imagined the social universe. And in this universe their structurally analogous position in the unskilled labour market is simply not acknowledged. As I tried to demonstrate above, unskilled labour was shaped during the transition to the market economy by the influx of migrant workers from economically disrupted countries. The overall economic and social status of these migrant workers created specific conditions for entering the sector of unskilled work which took advantage of the vulnerability of these workers in terms of social security, legal status and life-style. This resulted in neglect of long-term stability, submission to powerful clientele networks and exhausting and destitute living conditions. From the point of view of the Roma in Tercov, succumbing to the constraints established by this process would have signified another confirmation of the already dominant view of them as hopelessly marginal. At the same time the simple, forthright opposition to available wage work would also confirm the representation of Roma as indolent. Caught between the option of accepting a marginal status and of being ascribed such a status the Roma seemed to acquiesce the latter.

There is one more aspect that needs to be addressed. This was more typical for the generation of Roma who had the pre-1989 experience of regular work. In their case this attitude was

particularly paralyzing. Although the Roma often remembered this period with some appreciation – which they expressed precisely when they confronted the effects of their current long-term unemployment – they also sometimes realized that not every work would improve how they are perceived. And this was directly linked to the experience of the stigmatizing work during socialism.

> *Milan*: "People keep telling me there is work. They say 'go and get hold of a shovel' (*jdi k lopatě*). Ok, I never did but look at the people who did… I mean who built all these roads? Some Gypsies are even proud of it… they would answer 'all these roads are the work the Gypsies did'. But before the same people used to recount jokes about Gypsies leaning on the shovel instead of working and that stuff…" (August 2005)

It is significant then that if the Roma in Tercov of this generation currently tried to get a legal work at all, it was most likely outside the realm so deeply affected by the contagious association of the Gypsies as destined to the single choice of the "shovel" as it is inscribed in the construction work. To go and 'get hold of a shovel' meant both, an instruction to get to work but at the same time it also assigned meaning to this kind of work as the lowest and the least prestigious in continuity with the socialist period when the same idiom stood for social failure.[47] What was paralyzing was the fact that the already limited availability of work was even more tapered for this generation as Milan's comments reveal.

[47] The term 'shovel' (*lopata*) is even today commonly used also as an insult referring to someone's dumbness or stupidity.

2.2.3.1.3 Four Young Men: The Route to Employment

For most of the time the Roma in Tercov wishing to break the spell of welfare dependency were constrained by the existing work opportunities, which were as one oak leaf to another. Especially the young males often mulled over their fate of being unemployed during typical meetings on the bench at the bus stop. During these sessions when they temporally succumbed to the illusion of upward mobility the young men together with their Czech friends acted out their acquaintance with mainstream values and myths. They imagined 2+2 families, two-bedroom apartments, and how to become rich. However, in contrast to their Czech peers, with whom they shared exactly the same values at these moments, they always imagined their future in Tercov and the idea of abandoning their accustomed social environment seemed to them inappropriate.

> *Marko*: "If only the mayor gave us a proper apartment… I don't want to move to the town. I want to be close to my family. I'm like that… I couldn't survive without my family, I'm sure. I'd miss them; I'd miss my native place. I was born here and I grew up here. I lived here all my live. My friends are here and I know how to approach people here… It would be too difficult to move out… so not only family, but also friends keep me staying… all that teasing and stuff. I just want to stay here, nowhere else." (December 2002, before Marko inherited an apartment in Block Three after the departure of his partner's parents)

After one such meeting at the bus stop bench a group of four young men aged eighteen to twenty came to ask me to accompany them and drive them around factories in the district. Initially quite surprised by such a request, I accepted without hesitation. This was the first time they expressed a desire to take a chance on looking for work. They even proposed to reimburse the costs of fuel from their first salary, which I emphatically refused. As agreed,

they met me in front of the car the next morning, all dressed in their best clothes (which was not part of the agreement).

As I found out the next day when we set off on the "route to employment" the young Roma had a quite detailed picture of all the factories offering work opportunities in the immediate vicinity of Tercov. "Immediacy" was measured more by viability of commuting than by geographical proximity. One of the factories was situated on the outskirts of the hithermost town about twenty kilometers away from Tercov. Commuting by public transportation to the town would not have been very practical. There is no direct bus from Tercov; one would have to transfer to another bus half-way between. Even then it would not have been realistic, since there is only one morning and one afternoon bus leaving from Tercov. It would have thus been imperative to organize collective transportation by car, which none of the young men had. The factory in question was a supplier of fruit preserves for dairy producers. The young Roma knew about the possibility of employment from a friend in Tercov. After we arrived we headed towards the gate with a closed crossbar. As we approached I found myself in front. They apparently counted on me as a mediator. The guard described to us the way to the personnel department which led through a myriad of gates and halls. After we finally arrived an employee of the department received us. Here again the young men expected me to speak for them. I pretended as if I was speaking in the name of all of us and explained that we were looking for work and that we had heard from a friend that this company was looking for employees. The man thanked us for our interest in the company and enacted a welcome scene in which he stressed how the company wished to attract future employees who are motivated, flexible, and eager to develop new skills; however, he did not invite us to his office. He disappeared briefly behind the door and then came back with a few copies of a form. Responding to my friendliness he asked us to be so kind and fill out the forms and said he

would be back in few minutes to collect them from us. However, he did not give us pens so we had to use the one pen I had. This made me fill out the forms for everyone. Since we were still standing in the corridor in front of the office there was not a table or a chair. I filled out the forms while leaning on the wall. As I recall, besides contact details the form contained information about employment history, education and skills, and possession of a driver's license. Since none of the young men had anything to provide regarding the required information, filling out the forms for all of them did not take more than few minutes. The employee of the personnel department apparently did not expect this and was surprised when I knocked on the door to pass him the forms back. Then he explained that at the moment there were no vacancies and that the department would contact us as soon as they had evaluated the forms. Then he shook hands with everyone and we left. Altogether the visit took barely thirty minutes.

The same day we visited two more factories. One of them was in the same town, the other further away from Tercov. In the first one, which supplied car companies with electrical equipment, we reached the personnel department where we were quickly persuaded by the person on duty that there were no vacancies. In the second factory we did not even reach the personnel department and were refused entry on the basis of security regulations which were communicated to us by a guard who transmitted our query by telephone to the security department.

In the car on our way home the young men first felt confirmed in the conviction that once "they find out you are Gypsy, suddenly there are no vacancies." The experience from the visit to the last two factories may have induced such a feeling and it was later reaffirmed by accounts of other Roma in Tercov who allegedly had previously attempted to apply for a job in the same factories. But when we met again the next day and discussed the events, different

ruminations emerged. It was the confrontation with the job-application form that proved most disconcerting. The young men appeared to be aware of their marginalized position on the labor market when they acclaimed that a job applicant should be evaluated on his performance and not "on paper." A discussion ensued:

> *Pavlík*: "Yasar, what can he tell by looking at a piece of paper? I mean, I don't need to go to school to mix yogurt. I'm strong… I'm as competent to do that as Tonda *[a Czech friend from Tercov who works in that factory]*. The guy didn't even tell us anything about the work; he didn't ask what we would like to do… I'm not doing this again; there is no way to get a job this way." (April 2002)

The fruit preserves company never contacted the young Roma. I assume they placed the forms in their database of applicants. The man from the personnel department actually mentioned this and suggested to await their response, without giving any deadline. However, he also recommended to the young men to query about possible vacancies in the future, which as far as I know they never did. In contrast to the older generation, young Roma expressed self-confidence in matters of individual capabilities. I was often struck by the ethos of invincibility that infused their public utterances. As conveyed in the above quote, young Roma seemed not to allow association with imperfection in any regard. This self-confidence was often although not uniquely centered on manly qualities like physical strength and bodily prowess.

The self-assurance of the young Roma regarding their physical superiority is not without reason. As I am writing a new football team is being established in Tercov in which all (!) the young Romani males are involved (6 of 11 players of the starting line-up were Roma). I attended one of the team's very first competitive matches in the regional amateur league. From the start of the match the inexperience of most of the players was evident. However, as the game evolved they imposed themselves physically in such a way that they reversed the

score from 0:3 to a final 4:3. On another occasion I was enraptured by their nimbleness. One of the kids had found a pair of left-over in-line skates next to a container. Within a week of practice virtually all the young boys learned to skate so well that they could perform acrobatic figures and ride down seemingly impossible terrains. The fact that there was only one pair of skates did not seem to limit the development of skills. Quite the contrary, it caused them to find ways to use the skates in couples. The most skilled skaters among the young Roma (not necessarily boys) could skate in pairs, each sporting a skate on the outer foot and bouncing with the inner one in a speedy and coordinated movement. On another occasion the young boys, who were always eager to test their limits and to compete among themselves, pulled out an old spring mattress they had found in a container and placed it in the middle of a steep incline in front of the blocks. To heighten the trampoline effect they folded the mattress in two. Then they spent the whole day and several days thereafter bouncing from a full run onto the spring bed, turning full flips head on while in the air and then landing stationary on their feet. This physical self-confidence is further externalized as courage at moments of episodic clashes with other men or during sporadic clashes with other Roma in Tercov (which occur even less frequently). If someone was intent on retaliating for an offence or a public humiliation they totally ignored their own physical disposition. In one of the few occasions of physical conflict I observed I witnessed how a young Roma man planned and carried out face-to-face revenge on a Czech two times taller and heavier without even considering his own physical inferiority.[48]

[48] This self-confidence stretched also to other domains like sexual relations. There young Roma men never demonstrated any shyness especially when they were crossing ethnic lines, as if these were visible to everybody but them. Not only did they regularly target noted beauties, but they also persistently reversed the logic of enticement by often representing their amorous liaisons as if it they themselves were the unresponsive objects of desire.

2.2.3.1.3.1 From Skills to Dispositions

The general attitude of the young Roma men was thus that there are no limits that could not be tested. And this is not an accidental feature of a particular cohort. It is part and parcel of the socialization whereby boys especially are introduced early on to all the skills their parents perform.[49] Not only can all the children ride bicycles at the age of five, but driving a car is a matter of course for most of the boys by the age of fourteen. Whereas physical self-confidence is nurtured early on when little boys are publicly encouraged in their small quarrels and fights, in the development of skills the children are invited to participate on equal terms in various tasks. Thus fifteen-year old Roman and Marek could tell me what all the parts of a car engine and clutch were in stunning detail. This was knowledge and skill they had gained while helping their father disassemble old vehicles to salvage parts made out of precious metals that could be sold to a junk dealer. In general Roma in Tercov would approach a craftsman only when they had previously failed to repair what they needed. Thus everyone was a bit of an electrician, a mason, a plumber, a repairman, a carpenter or a turner, a *bricoleur* of skills and solutions. And these were not virtual skills. I have already mentioned how Roma repaired their houses with self-help, plastering the façade and repainting the entire blocks in the interior. Bejla was known for his skill in car repair. If he bought a car, which he did at least three times a year, he would first take it apart well-nigh to the last screw and then put it back just to identify all the hidden defects and then spend months repairing one after another. Although he was mocked by other Roma because the time invested in the repairs never paid off when reselling the car, nobody in Tercov needed to go to a garage since Bejla—who had finished only six grades of school—could do most of the repairs. When the band's mixing device broke down Mirek's son Jožа, twenty years old, who had completed only basic school education, insisted on repairing it himself. During one month he kept trying,

[49] See Stewart 1997: 56 for how Vlax Roma boys are socialized into "autonomous moral agents."

always being sure that he had finally discovered the solution which repeatedly proved wrong; the mixing device broke down again and again. When I arranged with a local electrician to repair the device for free (actually when he learned it was for Roma he asked for a jug of fresh, hand-picked blueberries) nobody ever seriously contested Jožа's capacity to prove himself. It was only when a scheduled music party with many guests from outside Tercov approached that Jožа and the other people agreed to entrust the repair to the electrician. The sense of physical aptness in fact would not be a source of firm self-confidence if it did not translate into more real socially coveted skills.

And here the problem arises. The encounter of the young Roma with their *social profile* in the fruit preserve company confirmed that the major obstacle for Roma to getting a job consisted in their insufficient skills. However, I find it ironic how precisely the various items of the social profile of the young Roma required on the form (absence of special education or training, no working history and also lack of some auxiliary properties like possession of a driver's license) detracted from the fact that the qualities expected by the employer the young Roma nonetheless possessed: they were resolved to break the spell of unemployment, they preferred versatility, and learning new skills was their habitual mode of existence.

2.2.3.1.4 Gejza: Work for Public Benefit

Gejza's job was stable inasmuch as we accept that minimum wage brings about any stability. Gejza was the only Roma in Tercov who was skilled in official terms. He grew up in a children's home after he was taken from his parents and was therefore closely supervised throughout this period in his school attendance, which eventually brought him to a vocational school for masonry. Gejza was employed as an unskilled worker by the Community Council under the *Public Benefit Works* scheme (VPP – Veřejně prospěšné práce). The VPP scheme,

as part of the newly developed *Active Employment Policy* (APZ – Aktivní politika zaměstnanosti), was introduced as early as 1991 as an alternative to the "passive" employment policy which amounted to the disbursement of doles. [50] The scheme is officially defined as "employment opportunity in the maintenance of public spaces and properties (public buildings and routes) or other activities for the benefit of communities, the state or charitable organizations." The employer may create this kind of job for an unemployed person registered at the Labor Office (where he is euphemistically called a "work expectant") for a maximum of twelve months in cooperation with the Labor Office, which in return may contribute to the overall wage costs and insurance of the prospective employee. The scheme is primarily addressed to unskilled work expectants or to people with "reduced social adaptability." These may comprise people with basic education, single mothers or the "socially unadaptable." In Gejza's case the original decision was made deliberately. In fact, he urged the mayor to keep him on under the VPP scheme after the assigned period had expired. Until then Gejza had temporarily worked under the scheme with two Romani women. It was at the end of the summer, at which time their work consisted solely of mowing the grass at public spaces. Whereas the other women were happy when their job came to an end, Gejza wished to continue: the work seemed easy to him and, as he said, he was bored sitting at home. But when Gejza discovered his younger Czech overseer was paid twice as much as he and that he was always assigned the most tiring tasks while his colleague operated the tractor, Gejza quit the job after two months:

> "I used to get 5300 CZK, but the white guy who didn't even work all day, who just stood around looking stupid, who was bossy and didn't do anything but drive

[50] Law 474/2001 Coll. amending Law No. 1/1991 Coll. and the decree No. 35/1997 Coll. of the Ministry of labour and social affairs (later amended by Law No. 435/2004 Coll., Art.112 and by the decree No. 518/2004 Coll.).

> the tractor got 12,000 CZK. What kind of a job is that if the mayor then held back what we owed on water bills? For two months I wound up getting nothing because she stripped me of the whole salary and in consequence also our social benefits were taken away." (February 2002)

The VPP scheme was requested by the mayor often. She would report new employment openings to the Labor Office. The employment opportunity would be marked as being for an unskilled worker and the place designated as Tercov. With such specifications it was impossible for any unemployed person in Tercov to refuse the work if he or she was offered placement by the Labor Office. Registration at the office obliges jobseekers to respond to employment offers matching their work profile. Unlike other schemes of state employment support, like retraining, contributing to employee orientation or subsidizing new job openings, the VPP scheme is implemented through a contract concluded between the Labor Office and the employer (local council, municipality or charitable organizations) based on the number of newly opened jobs and not on the names of prospective employees. This gave the mayor freedom not only in the choice of persons for work but also in the option of circulating a number of persons on the same job within the time slot allotted to that job. In this manner the mayor could involve as many persons as she wished. Theoretically it is the Labor Office which suggests candidates for the VPP from the register of unemployed. In reality, and due to the fact that most of the Roma were unemployed and had been placed on the register, the mayor could always negotiate with the Labor Office as to her preferences for those to be selected. This gave the mayor a powerful tool for exercising her authority over Roma. Although the Roma believed that the mayor specified the particular persons she wished to employ to the Labor Office, I could never verify this information. On the other hand, people solicited for VPP knew about it in advance because the mayor informed them. Be that as it

may, if the VPP scheme was designed in theory to facilitate the integration of vulnerable social strata into the work force, it wound up working much differently in practice.

The mayor in fact took control of the VPP in two ways: firstly, as in the case of Gejza, she rendered the VPP an act of charity, as the expression of a caring authority. Nonetheless, in such cases she would impose on the employee work tasks deemed grubby and undignified not just by the Roma. These included trash collecting, scrap cleaning or various heavy tasks like moving large stones. Secondly, and more importantly, the mayor used the VPP as means of recovering debts the Roma may have accumulated towards the Community Council. The debts represented most often fines for allowing dogs to wander unsupervised in the village, a violation that was strictly observed after numerous complaints from other village inhabitants.[51] Other debts related to payments for water. Because water consumption meters were placed in front of each of the apartment blocks, they reflected the general consumption of the entire block rather than individual household use. Household consumption was then calculated per capita against the overall use of water. In consequence there were often disagreements between households over the distributed amounts, which in turn resulted in payment lags to the Community Council, which was the public provider of water. Almost every household thus accumulated over some period of time debts to the Community Council which they were not very much inclined to pay. When these debts reached a certain level, the mayor used the VPP as a way of recovering them by deducting them from the VPP wage.

[51] Almost every Romani household kept a dog, sometimes even two or more. These were usually small dogs the Roma gave shelter to after they found them. Although the dogs belonged to households, they were not treated as home pets but rather like children: they were never trained; they were not taught to obey or limited to a particular place. Dogs didn't even get special nourishment; they were usually given leftovers of the food consumed in the various households. This approach to keeping dogs resulted in them always running around from one apartment to another; it was only at night that they found their way home to the place where they belonged. Although the mayor insisted that dogs should be on a leash when outside, the Roma never conformed to the rule and ended up paying fines almost every other month.

The idea of "work for common benefit" by those who are marginalized on the labor market was introduced as early as the 1990s. Despite subsequent juridical reformulations which did not alter the legal disposition of the VPP scheme[52] in any significant way, the application of and approach to the scheme changed considerably. Until 2004 the measure was meant to facilitate the creation of work opportunities for long-term unemployed and the primary (although not unique) provider of such opportunities were supposed to be authorities on the level of self-government.[53] The evidence provided above shows that the VPP scheme as a socially approved mechanism of social integration not only fails in its goal, but also creates a genuinely new context inhibiting employment. In a survey undertaken in 2005 to evaluate the effects of the VPP the scheme proved to be inefficient in integrating long-term unemployed into the labor market by allowing them to acquire stable jobs (Syrovátka and Kulhavý 2006). Almost a third of the participants in the scheme were back in unemployment within six months after completing a VPP placement, whereas the number of those long-term unemployed who did not participate in the "active employment policy" under this scheme was only slightly higher—40% (Syrovátka and Kulhavý 2006: 33). In other words, the chances of being integrated into the labor market through state-sponsored policies were almost as high as if this scheme did not exist. Moreover, the authors of the survey concluded that the scheme "created[ed] a segment of the work force which after six months of work [in placements created under the scheme] tended to stay unemployed longer than those who did not participate in the scheme." (Syrovátka and Kulhavý 2006: 60).

[52] The 2004 reform brought on a new law, No. 435/2004 Coll. On Employment, that introduced new measures into the Active employment policy (APZ) hitherto absent in the law and tied the amount of subsidies from the central budget to regional scales of unemployment. The reason for the reform was mainly to facilitate the adoption of EU employment schemes and thus the utilization of EU structural funds for newly acceding countries. Because the reform was introduced after my fieldwork I will not deal with the changes caused by it.

[53] The law in all its amendments explicitly prohibits central authorities from making use of the measure.

It is not surprising then that among the Roma in Tercov the VPP scheme gained the reputation of being a punishment. The mayor's practice of imposing VPP on people indebted to the Community Council sometimes had grave consequences for the economic sustainability of households. Since social benefits, which are the principal source of cash for households with long-term unemployed, are income-tested the VPP had repercussions on the benefits paid. Although there is not an exact symmetry between the amount of social benefits paid when there is not any declared income and the social benefits reduced because of declared income, for the sake of argument I will assume that the logic of this relation basically holds true. Under such circumstances, the fact that the mayor deducted substantial parts of the VPP wage equaling several months' debt on bills and fines accumulated by households meant that households with members participating in the VPP were stripped of the meager financial resources already allotted for covering their basic needs. Nonetheless, because of the obligations of the registered unemployed it was impossible for the Roma in Tercov to refuse participation in the VPP. This would have immediately resulted in deletion from the registry and, in turn, the suspension of social benefits. The only way to cope with the VPP was that the young helped the old or men helped women to hasten the work and to get rid of the obligation as soon as possible. The quicker one did away with this unpropitious situation, the more time there was left to find a solution for closing the inevitable gap in the budget.

3 The Work of the Unemployed

The conjunction of the highly contested unskilled work sector and the generally unaffordable legal work led to the search for other income generating opportunities mostly haphazard, short-term and in terms of initial investment undemanding. The nature of such economic activities differed considerably and they may have ranged from chore services to individual or collective subsistence activities. They also differed in terms of the social networks enhancing them and in the moral economies put in place. For example various illicit works solicited by the Czech villagers in Tercov were usually cast in terms of acts of charity in which the relation of exchange was represented by the villagers as from their part voluntary, strictly non-profitable and therefore more moral than reciprocal. By contrast, the less frequent opportunities generated through social networks the Roma in Tercov were part of outside the village with other Roma brought access to reciprocal relations in which one may have had negotiated on more equal terms.

Before I start presenting the evidence about the various informal economic activities of the Roma in Tercov, some preliminary remarks need to be made concerning the legal status of such activities. Legally as claimants of social benefits the Roma were supposed to report every single crown they earned since most of the social benefits were income tested. In general by completing the application for any social benefit the claimant confirms the absence of unreported revenues and if the opposite is proved the application itself becomes a *corpus delicti* in the breach of the law. In consequence, besides possible legal sanctions the claimant runs the risk of being denied or retrenched social benefits and expunged from the records for a period of time (usually six months). However, this being said there was a surprising consent among social workers not to really investigate about such activities of their Romani clients. I will get back to this question later when I will describe the interaction at the Welfare benefits department. Here I wish to point to the fact that although social workers did not in fact have

any effective legal means to control such activities one of their convictions was also that the Roma avoid working at all. As a result the possible breach of the law did not represent a real threat to the Roma and I have not encountered a single incident when social benefits were retrenched in consequence of lately unveiled unreported revenues. The social workers often expressed resignation as to the state power's ability to exact its authority. They blamed those on the "top" for overlooking the proper operation of the state. In some extreme cases they even believed "the system" was set up this way wittingly because the elites took side with the Roma. The threat was however present in a less tangible way in the form of a coercive rhetoric device used by the social workers during talks and negotiations with their clients. As an expression of symbolic violence the Roma still bore in mind that such think may be used as a pretext if they claimed some additional social services or if they demanded special treatment.

The absence of effective control over their economic activities still did not purge the Roma of the charges of being abusers of the welfare system. Such charges time to time surfaced in the conversations with the social workers who never missed the opportunity to caustically mention these activities. Such comments revealed a contradiction in the general persuasion of the social workers about the idleness of the Roma. The social workers obviously knew about the various informal economic activities the Roma pursued. After all some of them like scrap collecting were widely reported in the media, other activities like blueberry picking were regionally specific. All in all they symbolized to large extent the Roma as economic actors in the public discourse. But this only enforced the view of them as abusers of the welfare system in the eyes of the social workers since the typical economic activities were by definition undeclarable and even more escaping the control of the authorities. Some of the social workers thus did not resist the temptation of ironic remarks as "what a nice pair of shoes from

social benefits" addressed to what they considered to be the undeserving claimants. From the point of view of the Roma it was thus wiser to keep their informal economic activities as invisible as possible to the social workers. When Milan, for example, bought a very old used car from the earnings from blueberry picking for a couple of months he used to park the car cautiously on the parking further away from the city centre when he was going to a scheduled meeting with social workers. In the same way the Roma avoided remarks by adopting a "dress code" for visits to the Welfare benefits department. Although especially the elder Roma distinguished between casual dress and more formal dress, they also paid attention to not to appear in too many new pieces of cloth during the consecutive visits to the department.

3.1 From Wage to Commission

As it was already mentioned above, informal economic activities provided the Roma with the missing cash money. The need for cash determined the scope of the activities. In the case of undeclared wage work which is the subject of the following section it was imperative that wages were paid out in short periods. Thus Mirek was able to negotiate a flat daily pay paid at the end of the day. The daily or weekly pay met on the one hand the real economic situation of the long-term unemployed, on the other it also defined work in a way that dignified the otherwise stigmatizing nature of such work as unskilled and subordinate. When paid by hour it is more likely to be exposed to surveillance over the timely performance of tasks. The Roma in Tercov thus attempted to elude the instant expression of hierarchy by negotiating work as a commission. Seventeen years old Pepík, one of the young men who several months later attempted to venture into legal work (see above), had never worked for wage but had a clear idea about what work he would accept:

> "I like when I am told 'you do this and this' and I get the time to do it and then I am paid for it at the end of the day. I would take a break whenever I want, I would eat and smoke whenever I like. I would never take a job in a factory when you are monitored at every moment by cameras or by the foreman." (April 2002)

As we can see, in the preference for work as a commission one detects the inclination to self-employment as the ideal of subsistence. Work as commission is half-way between wage work and self-employment and it constitutes the preference for undeclared work: not only that remuneration is more adapted to the real economic needs of long-term unemployed, it also responds to the desire to work in the company of people whom one knows. The other advantage, no less significant, is that such agreement is achieved without any mediation of third parties. As far as I know such an arrangement was possible only when it was a Romani entrepreneur who employed uniquely Roma workers. Such entrepreneurs would always be urban dwellers from nearby towns who had contracted works within the same county. Such work opportunities would be arranged only shortly in advance, two or three days before the actual start of work. Although I was told about several such opportunities in which the Roma in Tercov engaged, I observed only once how an entrepreneur truly came to Tercov in search of work force. He needed quickly five men to do the rough work (taking down the plaster) in a building that was going to be reconstructed. Although the entrepreneur did not have any acquaintanceship in Tercov, some of the Roma knew who he was. There was some kinship relation with the Belak family, but very distant. Still the entrepreneur could present himself as a relative of close relatives of somebody in Tercov. Because he negotiated in Czech I assume he did not speak Romani.

He arrived on a decent used car. His comportment was rather jovial although not in any sense extravagant which is how the Roma in Tercov perceived the body language of the would-be

Romani entrepreneurs from Krumlov. As if the entrepreneur was following a prescribed code, he insisted to talk first to Šafrán as the elder of "the community". When Šafrán came out on the street in front of the block, the entrepreneur presented himself. He mentioned a relative of Šafrán from Krumlov, but he did not pretend any close relationship with him. Then he immediately changed the subject and asked if somebody would be interested to earn quick money. He did not dwell for long on the nature of work, which he described simply as a construction work (*na stavbě*). Neither did he elaborate why he chose to come to Tercov to look for workers. The main part of his proposition consisted in the offer of a lump sum for completing the work and it was upon Šafrán to decide how many people should be engaged. Nonetheless he suggested that five people would be an adequate number. The work should have taken according to him five working days. Šafrán was listening and then he explained that there were many young men able to do the work. Then he cautiously moved to the subject of payment. As he said, they welcomed the opportunity to earn money. However he also expressed some reluctance as he outlined the circumstances: daily commuting was costly and also the actual situation of the people in Tercov was such that they could hardly afford the living expenses when working away from home. This was a signal for the entrepreneur to disclose the way of remuneration. For this he offered a sum of 10,000 CZK with an advance of 1,000 CZK for each worker after the first day. If we split up the sum to an hour-wage, it was rather a mediocre offer. For five men working ideally eight hours a day it stood for 50 CZK per hour. The appeal however consisted in the advance paid on the first day that could provide the Roma with the initial cash to cover, among others, the costs of transportation.[54]

[54] Later I discovered that some kind of advance is a regular way of payment arrangement between Romani entrepreneurs and Romani employees. A colleague of mine who has been investigating transnational migratory patterns of Slovak Roma tells me about a Romani entrepreneur who imports Romani workers from Slovakia to work on construction contracts he gets in the Czech Republic. The advance that should facilitate the employment of Roma is in this case provided for covering the costs of migration to the Czech Republic which include not only the costs of transportation of the worker but also the costs of his absence back home. The advance thus may serve the worker's household to sustain while he is absent (Jan Grill, personal communication). I consider this a

The other appeal then consisted in the definition of remuneration. The advance together with the lump sum for completing the work paid at the end of the week conformed to the situation in which the households found themselves. It was still two weeks to the next payment of social benefits so such money would allow the households to get over the period without money.

The privileged position of Šafrán to decide who will be engaged in the work was such only in the eyes of the entrepreneur. Šafrán might have theoretically decided to engage only his sons and seize all the money. However, this was never an option. Firstly, since Šafrán's car was currently out of work he needed to engage somebody who could assure transportation. Secondly, the accumulation of money in one household in a situation when many households around are equally without resources would founder with consequent demands for loans by the other households. Under such conditions the attempt to engage members of a single household would be considered greedy.[55] The selection of men to do the work was rather spontaneous. It became those who were currently present and observed the negotiation. First Laci imposed himself by proposing his car. The two older of Šafrán's sons just standing around also agreed to get engaged and they suggested their cousin and close friend of the same age as another worker. Nobody else being present gave way to the agreement that four men should be enough. The entrepreneur also agreed and the deal was concluded. The

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qualitatively different arrangement than what is quite usual in the case of non-Romani work migration where for example the provision of some cheap or even free accommodation is often offered by employers. The presence of cash, handed in to the potential worker, constitutes in the former case a different relationship in which the advance express more than an incentive – it is a mutual guarantee for the observance of the "contract" that goes beyond the usual contractual ethics since it incorporates into the contractual relation the specific "social costs" of work. It goes without saying that it is the entrepreneur who bears the initial risk. This is however compensated by a work cost reduction and by the constitution of a pool of compliant and committed work force.

[55] Šafrán would have certainly wished to exercise some power over the selection of workers, although not out of covetousness. He always enjoyed moments when he could imagine his status increasing. However, the situation somehow developed spontaneously. Moreover, his say on the selection was not considered by others since everybody knows that this kind of work is too physically demanding for someone with such a flimsy health.

entrepreneur fixed the starting date in three days and gave the indication of the place. He did not leave any phone number neither did he take any.

After three days the Roma set forth to go to work in a small town about 40km away from Tercov. When they arrived the entrepreneur was waiting for them. He provided them with the tools and gave them work instructions. These consisted in taking down the plaster in the three rooms on the first floor of a building that was going through a general reconstruction. As it turned out the owner of the building suddenly decided to take down the plaster, only few days before the general reconstruction was to start. That is why the entrepreneur was in a need of new workers and why the works needed to be done quickly. At the end of the first day he paid them the advance as it was agreed. The work went on for five days in which the Roma completed the works in four people and the entrepreneur paid each of them his part of the overall sum.

The net income after five days of work for each person was about 1600 CZK. Of the ideal proportional part of 2500 CZK for each person we have to deduce the costs of fuel (about 80 CZK/day/person). This was paid on the first day from the advance when the car's tank was filled up. At this moment everyone was left with some 600 CZK of cash which they however did not keep for themselves but spent them on replenishing their respective households' stocks with basic groceries. Only Šafrán's sons kept some more money. Because they lived in the same household they economized a little more and spent it together with their friends on beer. Also each kept a little cash that allowed the group to share the costs of cigarettes and drinks everyday. The daily nourishment at work was procured either collectively in a grocery store near the place of work or the Roma ate a hot meal at a cheap bistro. Although the net income was much less than what the Roma would usually accept as hour-wage, it was still

sufficient to help each of the households to get over the period till the next payment of social benefits: the first week in a provisional way, the next week more adequately.

3.1.1 Social capital imagined

For long I believed this was the kind of economic opportunities the Roma in Tercov would regularly seek after to help them supplement the expenses for household needs. Being paid the same day seemed to be the perfect mechanism for buying the time during the regular spells of money shortage. A condition hardly acceptable for legal employers, it seemed to be acceptable for Romani entrepreneurs as proves the example above. In general it allowed the Roma to pursue a work activity as such, but it also allowed them to do it in a way that was more suitable to their patterns of consumption. The link between work and subsistence in this arrangement was immediate since earned money could be consumed as they came. But how to explain then that in spite of the conviction about such an economic practice on the part of the Roma in Tercov, despite its felicitousness and practical fecundity for their specific economic reality as long-term unemployed, I have not recorded more than one example of such a successful cooperation? To be more precise, the other examples, although only recounted to me, revealed something else. Marko described a similar economic activity with a quite different accent. In his comments we discover how the experience attenuates any decision to look for cooperation with Romani entrepreneurs:

> "Sometimes Roma come and offer men some work openings, obviously undeclared. That day they came and looked for few men to make a trench for telecommunication cables somewhere up north. The agreement was perfect, they arranged accommodation for us, they were supposed to give us money everyday

> etc. When we arrived they showed us the place and said 'here you make the trench' and then they left. But we couldn't find the tools; we didn't find any on the spot. It turned out that somebody stole them the night before. But the guys were gone and we were left there all the week alone, without money, nothing to smoke, nothing to eat and just cramped in a hostel. When I came back home I was like a splinter. That was a disgrace. Since then I am really cautious. They knew we had no money so they should have given us to eat; they should have given us some advance for the work." (December 2002)

Such advantageous openings as in the previous example were in fact very rare and I am even inclined to think it was rather accidental. However it does not yet belittle that such an arrangement was realistically pursued. As I stated earlier it was very close to the ideal of self-employment the Roma in Tercov often conceived of as the best economic strategy. That is how Šafrán responded, long before the situation described above took place, to my request how the preferred work would be like:

> "I will tell you what I would do if I had money: I would buy a van and I would take my boys or other strong and fit guys… and we would travel around to do demolition works. You don't need much equipment for that and we would be on our own. The guy *[submitter]* would tell us what he needs, we would do it in few days… the boys would do it, I would take care of them, get them to eat and drink, drive them around. We would be paid on the spot (*na ruku*). This way we would come home with some money every few days." (February 2002)

Despite the conditional mode, Šafrán was developing his idea of a prosperous business in conformity with the social inspiration derived from the example of few successful Romani entrepreneurs not only him but also other Roma living in the outskirts of Krumlov or in the

villages of the county knew and endlessly passed the information about among themselves. Šafrán occupied a specific position for imagining such strategy. He believed in his networking capabilities which would make the model viable. He would always impress the company by claiming yet another person he knew. This was one of his great convictions that "old acquaintances never die". In contrast to his sons and to the younger generation of Roma in general whose social capital was restricted also due to a very infrequent contact with people outside the immediate milieu in the village, Šafrán kept memories of many colleagues and mates he encountered during his life and considered them a value in itself. He could assign a value to these acquaintances precisely in comparison to the differing social trajectories of his generation and the younger one. Whereas Šafrán constituted his acquaintances during the military service, in the various jobs he had during socialism, but also in the prison and on the many addresses he lived at, his sons never went to the army, they never had a regular job if not under the VPP scheme in Tercov, they lived in Tercov all their lives and the furthest they ever went was to the regional centre 40 kilometres away from Tercov. The difference in the potential of social capital was tangible and commonly accepted. There were many occasions when it was demonstrated. For the young generation going to the administrative centre in the near town was like a trip to a distant place where they knew nobody. For them the trip represented an event that was marked out of the daily course of events to the extent that it was planned in advance. It often generated feelings of shame from being exposed to an unknown context to which they adapted by taking on an allegedly efficient social mimicry. The young would therefore insist not to go to the town in big groups which would attract attention. If it happened that more Roma from Tercov arrived at the same time to the town, they would separate. The young would certainly dress in their best suits which were always up to date and in compliance with the latest fashion trends.[56]

[56] The people from *Spolu-CZ* noted that upon their first meeting with the young from Tercov, which took place

This conviction about the vital importance of acquaintances for social survival could be traced back to the times when informal networks were a highly valued token of social competence. Šafrán seemed to be indulged to this pattern in his thoughts whereas in reality he was not able to exploit the acquaintances in a viable manner. There were various occasions when he reassured himself of his specific quality of social networker. It was remarkable to observe Šafrán walking down the street in the town with his son, responding to many greetings from the passing people. His son was repeatedly confused by the many people his father got to know and shook hands with, but he was also asking himself how serious these acquaintances were. He later questioned his father's avidity to show social competence without really turning it into an economic edge: "All these people you seem to know would turn their backs if you asked them for help. You keep believing they might be useful for you one day, but it actually never happens since you have nothing to offer them... only blueberries or mushrooms." Šafrán's son's judgement may have been harsh but not unjustified. The potential of his social capital was in fact dubious precisely because he was not able to stand out as a reciprocal partner.

This became evident when Šafrán was trying to pass his car through a technical control necessary for renewing its licence. For the owners of really old cars this represents a fearful situation since compliance with technical norms is quite unpredictable. The owner may remove the most visible signs of aging (rusted parts) but he can never replace all technically flaw elements in the engine or other more sophisticated parts of the car which necessarily attenuate with age. For cars sometimes older than twenty years the replacement of flaw parts becomes more costly than the actual value of the car. Nevertheless, the utility value is still

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in the same town, that they were quite uncertain about the necessity of a development project in this community and they particularly emphasized the confounding appearance of the trendy and stylish look of the young: "They were dressed much better than us."

worth keeping the car and therefore the management of its licensing represented an important strategy not only for the Roma in Tercov. One of the ways how to avoid the obligatory two year technical check was to buy a fake licence with a valid technical check and alter the identification signs of the car according to the fake licence. Such strategy did not necessitate prior personal engagement in informal networks since the mechanism consisted precisely in the efficiency of anonymous contacts enhancing the chain of bribes. One only had to know the person "selling" the fake licenses, usually somebody linked to second hand car trade. The car owner however ran the risk of accusation for falsification of official documents which could be revealed during casual thorough police controls. Another way, more expensive, was to simply pay a fixed sum to a person making profit from close relations with the licensing authorities (which in the Czech Republic was in fact a police department) and await few days to receive the authorities' approval through the mediator without ever going to the technical check. The first way being too risky, the second too expansive (the fixed sum in fact squanders on bribes to several officials), Šafrán wished for a safer way getting the car through the proper technical check and acquire the official technical certificate. He believed to have an agreeable technician at the state licensed control station who could obviate the detection of technical defects. This technician was supposed to be Franta about whose position Šafrán learned only recently. He referred to Franta as an old friend from times when they worked together at the railway. Franta is ten years younger than Šafrán. Twenty years ago when he took his first job at the railway he was as a rookie equally marginalized among co-workers as was Šafrán, the only Roma in the work team. In the uncouth and alcoholic environment of social outcasts who were often pushed into the unskilled work of railway janitors the two soon formed a friendship that helped them overcome the spurns of co-workers and superiors. Although this friendship never developed beyond the work environment, for Šafrán the memories of mutual moral support were still vivid and constituted the belief in its continual

legacy: “We don’t need to see each other; I know Franta will always remember me. If you knew how many beers we drank together!” When I asked Šafrán to tell me how they helped each other, the only example he recalled was that they provided each other cover when absent from work:

> “Getting an *áčko* [“A”, standing for “absence”] was a big fuss! That was the worst thing that could happen to you. You would get into big aggro because of that… [*T*o avoid that] you needed someone to stand by you, to eventually testify for you even if it was a lie…”

I accompanied Šafrán, convinced about the lasting of their friendship, to the technical control station. He spotted Franta in the garage from far away and sent somebody for him, insisting to be presented to Franta by his name. He had not seen him for some twenty years so I could recognize the tension and expectation in Šafrán’s body language when he was peeping over the fence. As was Franta approaching, Šafrán’s conviction started to evaporate. Franta did not show much of enthusiasm and when he finally came to us his greeting was all but hearty. Šafrán became very uncertain about his position to ask his one-time friend for help. An embarrassing conversation ensued in which Šafrán was trying to bring the memories to life (“Do you remember when we…?”) but encountered only indifference (”Vaguely…”). Eventually he did not feel justified to directly ask Franta to get his old car through the technical check and only asked for advice. Franta had a brief look at the car and named some of the most typical defects for Šafrán’s type of car.

3.1.1.1 Of Memory and Acquaintanceship

I assume that with the disappearance of the social framework in which Šafrán and Franta stood side by side on the vulnerable end of social hierarchy during socialism, the common

ground for maintaining the memory of moral support also disappeared. In the new social fabric they occupied different positions to the extent that Šafrán had nothing else to "offer" than fading images of a one-time alliance. In the new context recalling such memories appeared awkward. Since the time when they separated each of the one-time friends has evolved in a different social milieu. Franta barely acknowledged their acquaintanceship. He was now working in a well-established company pertaining to an important world car producer. Although it does not mean that at such companies one could not arrange for an affable treatment, it was certainly addressed to a different clientele and the cars as well as the odds at stake were much higher than Šafrán's modest aspiration to get his old Škoda pass. What I am suggesting is that the shared memories of Šafrán and Franta did not represent the same thing to each of them anymore and this had an impact on their intensity. As Maurice Halbwachs would put it, the memories change significance as they are displaced from the social milieu in which they took shape (Halbwachs 1997 [1950]). Consequently their recollection is always contested by the conjuncture of time trajectories that elapsed since the memories were collectively built. Šafrán's believe in the social capital that "never dies" is the expression of a life trajectory which has kinked. It kinked precisely in 1990. As I am writing Šafrán informs me that in his recent pension assessment 9 years of work were obliterated and in consequence his pension was estimated at 3,100 CZK a month, barely touching the current official poverty line (minimum subsistence level). I asked him therefore to check with me every year of his work record so we could figure out whether it was a mistake. As we restored his work experience he got stuck on the years when he was in prison (1979-1980, 1982-1984) which were missing from his work record although he had worked them off. And as we moved up the time all of a sudden he stopped reckoning at the year 1990. I asked him "And what was then?" "Then is now, there is nothing", he replied.

Ever since the closure of the saw-mill in Tercov in 1990 Šafrán has not had a regular job. Since then he has been living on social benefits and from various informal economic activities. Although the "now" is very long, almost twenty years, it is marked out as empty only in consideration of Šafrán's productive life and under the very specific circumstance of confrontation with its reckoning. It is necessary to bear in mind that such contrast is provoked under the uncertainty how to survive as pensioner. Nevertheless, I find it particularly revealing that the memories of one-time acquaintances are maintained as significant as if this period of "emptiness" never elapsed. Šafrán's imagined social capital was not put under the scrutiny of new social frameworks in which social capital is generated, reproduced and sustained. His social capital is then more a site of memory, a personal one indeed, which he wished to resuscitate but failed to recognize the elapsed time which separates both Franta from Šafrán and the social capital from its fading images.

The social capital reduced to memory is still the more auspicious eventuality in Tercov. As I stated before, Šafrán's generation's trajectories in the realm of the social are incomparable to the social isolation of the following generations who evolved after 1990. If I was asking why income generating activities that were suitable to the economic reality of long-term unemployed households were rarely achieved, one of the principle reasons should be identified in the constrained implication of the Roma from Tercov in the social networks that bring about such opportunities. In the case of the young generation the isolation is almost absolute and they therefore depend to large extent on relations they maintain with the non-Roma villagers in Tercov of which I will provide some account later. Here I wish to present another example of an attempt of somebody from the generation which could still profit from acquaintanceships gained before moving to Tercov.

3.1.2 Work among Other Roma

The rather personal feature of Šafrán allowed him to imagine a suitable subsistence strategy, for an effective pursue of which he lacked the necessary social context in which such activities may materialize. Šafrán himself as well as other Roma in Tercov quite realistically believed that they differed from the exemplar Roma only in one important attribute: in contrast to them they could not take hold of the advantages of living in a city. The city, particularly Krumlov, was a synonym of upward mobility. Earlier I described how the idea to leave Krumlov in the mid 80's represented a strategy of disappearance from the highly stigmatizing living environment in dilapidated housing. I also described how the success of the politics of integration of Roma into the mainstream society in Krumlov has depended until today on the concerted effort of the local political representation and the local Romani elite to bar access to the city to other Roma. One of the outcomes of the post-socialist changes is that integration is also translated into the limited access to economic opportunities.

We can take as an example the company providing street cleaning services for the municipality in Krumlov. It is owned by a respected Romani family. And the municipality repeatedly applauds the company for keeping Romani unemployment low in Krumlov. The owner of the company was even recently awarded in memoriam the prize of the town for his "long-time cooperation with the city" and for his contribution to "the cohabitation between the [non-Roma] majority and the [Romani] minority and to solving the unemployment problem. The extent and effect of this cooperation inspired other towns in the Czech Republic and abroad."

The company employs predominantly although not uniquely Roma for assuring the street cleaning. It can rely on the municipality's determination to order these services preferentially at this company. There were at least two families from Tercov who yielded to the persuasion

that in Krumlov Roma can find work and decided to move there hopping for upward mobility. Ferko, particularly, kept thinking of moving for years until he finally encouraged himself. When the life with two grown up sons, the youngest daughter and her partner and a small child in a one-bedroom apartment was untenable anymore Ferko arranged with one of his nephews in Krumlov to house him with his wife till he finds some lodging. At the same time he was confident to find work with the street cleaning company. Eventually he succeeded in finding this work also for his wife and shortly after they rented a small studio. It was for an exorbitant price of 9,000 CZK. It was at the end of the summer when the municipality launched the general cleaning of the city and the company consequently recruited new employees. The temporary high demand for employees thus luckily met with Ferko's aspirations which later proved to be a weak guarantee to maintain the job. For the first two months the couple lived tolerably from two minimum wages. After two months they registered their residence in Krumlov which made them eligible for the housing benefit. Their net income suddenly increased to some 15,000 CZK a month, which did not include, as I was told by Ferko, premiums the owner of the street cleaning company was selectively distributing to employees. Sometimes in January the work became intolerable: the company did not provide employees with any working clothes that would protect them from cold. In the hierarchy of work tasks Ferko and his wife were repeatedly assigned the least prestigious works requiring them to start very early in the morning when the temperature was at its lowest. Naturally they both fell ill soon. When at the beginning of the winter period there was an elevated demand for workers coupled by an elevated pandering of Romani workers who in the winter can not pursue other income generating activities, Ferko and his wife were the first to be sacked. They were not part of the social network interlinking the established Krumlovian families with the owner of the company and the uncrowned king of the integrated Romani minority so upheld by the municipality. Or more precisely, the network being based

on personal relations with the owner, Ferko's status wavered with his capacity to reaffirm the relation through personal encounters with the owner. The absence from work due to illness put him out of sight of the owner and made him incapable of the necessary building of mutual attachment. The company employed approximately forty people of whom about thirty on permanent basis. The majority of permanent employees belonged to the families which were settled in Krumlov since the beginning of the 1950's. These were either the immediate peers of the owner or from the following generation. Ferko who knew the owner from childhood thought for that matter to possess the insignia for belonging to this circle.

> *Ferko*: "I know him since long time ago, we're friends. People say he's crazy, but I've never had problems with him, we've had good relations. He just doesn't like dawdlers so he often gets angry on people. People then sneak on each other."

However, in contrast to the permanent employees he did not participate at the social life of the circle which evolved around various local associations, music bands, etc. More importantly he was not implicated in the now already manifold marriage concatenation among the families. Being a childhood friend was enough to make Ferko believe in the sureness of the relation but it did not outdo the continual expression of belonging to the network rehearsed in the various arenas of sociability.[57] When he mulled over being sacked, Ferko still blamed others for backbiting about him to the owner. But this was precisely the expression of the status of the minority of non-permanent employees who depended on the momentary will of the owner. Belonging to the outer part of the network necessitated continuous vigilance. Had Ferko been

[57] The owner of the street cleaning company was presiding at least two associations representing the Roma of Krumlov. The associations were culture-oriented, they organized leisure time activities for Romani children and adults, one of them also acted as partner in social inclusion projects.

really affiliated to the network backbites and rumours of the importune minority would never harm his status.

Because Ferko and his wife did not fulfil the requirement of a minimum of six months of permanent work during the last three years they were not eligible for the dole. Therefore they had to reapply for social benefits as when they lived in Tercov. Their net income dropped considerably and the economic standard worsened in comparison to their live in Tercov. In fact with the very high rent prices in Krumlov it became untenable and they went back to Tercov shortly before the following summer. Although Ferko never admitted this as a failure and still plans to go back to Krumlov, he now knows how a risky enterprise it is.

4 Exchange in Tercov

4.1 The Predicaments of Reciprocity

Before launching the discussion on work relations and on exchanges in general within Tercov I have to provide some preliminary remarks concerning the village life-style. As I mentioned earlier, Tercov went through a massive rebuilding through the 70's and 80's reflecting the socialist plan to "socialize the countryside". This plan significantly transformed the rural landscape. One of the aspects, particularly visible in Tercov, was the introduction of communal housing projects to lodge the employees of the saw-mill and the cooperative farm. Ever since, with few exceptions, the great majority of inhabitants lived in communal housing after the fashion of urban dwelling. Roma and non-Roma alike do not possess gardens or other pieces of land to cultivate. Most of the land in the area was nationalized early after II World War and later was tilled by the cooperative farm. Private land property was introduced only after 1990. After the dissolution of the cooperative farm the land fell under the State Land Fund which either sold the land or rented it. The socialist cooperative farming left its mark on the actual size of the agricultural holdings which are predominantly very large.[58] In conjunction with the technically difficult sustainability of the piedmont landscape this brings about the effect that land is not accessible to individuals and is predominantly rented to big agricultural entrepreneurs who earn money on subsidies granted by the EU as compensation for the maintenance of the piedmont landscape.

I am putting this brief characteristic in view of facilitating the assessment of the following account of the relation between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants of Tercov concerning work. This account will show that such cooperation is very limited. This is in deep contrast to some

[58] Whereas in 1948 the average size of a farm was 23 are, in 1990 it was 20 ha, i.e. almost 100x bigger. The current average size of an ecological farm in the Czech Republic, which usually manages piedmont land, is 315 ha.

historical as well as contemporary records of the economic patterns of other rural Roma groups. The Slovak romologist Emília Horváthová derived a specific Eastern European historical pattern of economic integration of Romani groups which has evolved since the fourteenth century. In contrast to the more economically developed Western European countries, in Eastern Europe the Roma migrants from the Balkans made themselves useful through various services to the autochthonous society. Consequently from the seventeenth century it facilitated their sedentarization whereas in Western Europe they remained itinerant (Horváthová 1964)[59]. Drawing on Horváthová's historical research, Milena Hübschmannová even outlined the economic integration of Roma into post-feudal Slovak peasant society along the lines of "economic complementarity". The social formation of the Roma into "ethnic jatis" as self-contained profession-specific groups played in Hübschmannová's interpretation the double role of economic integration and socio-spatial separateness (Hübschmannová 1998 [1984])[60]. Both Horváthová and Hübschmannová then point to the professions the Roma exerted for the peasants, ranging from blacksmithing, basketry to entertainment. Michael Stewart's ethnography of Vlax Roma in socialist Hungary on the other hand provides a vivid picture of the centrality of horse trade for both the Vlax experience of economic resilience and the Hungarian peasants' autarky. The complementarity of the passion for exchange and the productive use of the horse met at the horse market as the major lieu of interconnectedness (Stewart 1994, 1997)[61]. The Norwegian anthropologist Ada Engebrigtsen has recently demonstrated how despite a deeply rooted conviction on the part of Rumanian peasants that the Roma (*ţigani*) are "people without" and that they depend on the peasants' condescension

[59] Emília Horváthová. 1964. *Cigáni na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied.

[60] Milena Hübschmannová. 1998 [1984]. Economic stratification and interaction: Roma, an ethnic jati in East Slovakia. In *Gypsies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*. Diana Tong. Ed. New York, London: Garland.

[61] Michael Stewart. 1994. Fils du marché: les maquignons tsiganes et le modèle anthropologique. *Études Tsiganes* 2: 105-126.

to give them work, there has been a long history of reciprocal exchanges between both. The myth of Gypsy dependence is moreover sustained even in times when they acquire resources the peasants need and thus the imbalanced relationship is temporarily deflected. While avoiding entering into wage labour with Rumanian villagers, the Roma still often provided them with manual works, produce for them tools and objects in exchange for other goods, mostly home-grown products the villagers cultivated in their gardens (Engebrigtsen 2007)[62].

As we see the existing accounts of the economic integration of Roma in Eastern European societies portray the Romani economic role in close relation to the peasant life-style. However the reciprocity between Roma and non-Roma is culturally processed (be it as begging, barter or beneficence), it is closely linked to land property and its management, to the reproduction of the peasant household or simply to the division of labour in the rural economy. This also determines the scope of practices which to large extent reflect the peasant economy. In Tercov there are no peasants. Although we are situated in a rural context, there is very little that would remind us of the peasant year cycle, household values or organization. The life-style of most of the non-Roma villagers in Tercov was not very different from urbanites: everyday they commuted to work, after work they pursued their hobbies or they watched TV. Occasionally they indulged in urban entertainment in Krumlov or in other towns of the county. Since they mostly lived in communal housing they did not have to maintain houses or plots, they did not keep animals. This had unexpected consequences for my fieldwork as it was difficult for me to meet them. Although I knew most of the non-Roma families by name, there were many of the some two hundred non-Roma I never met personally. For some time I believed it was caused by my perception as the ally of the Roma. Although there were villagers who really despised the Roma, most of them never really came into contact with

[62] Ada I. Engebrigtsen. 2007. *Exploring Gypsiness: Power, Exchange and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village*. London: Berghahn.

them. The lack of contact was not however the expression of a firm attitude of the non-Roma towards Roma. Such an attitude was expressed only under specific circumstances as when the non-Roma vociferously opposed the expansion of the presence of Roma into other than the two blocks where they already lived. As long as there were not signs of intrusion the lives of the Roma and non-Roma passed by each other. All this leads me to think that the current impression one gets of the non-Roma completely ignoring Roma is in itself a performance of their attitude to the past. The promises of the new future oblige to construct a big curtain behind. I am almost rephrasing what one of the villagers told me when he learned what the purpose of my stay in Tercov was:

> "I have friends among the Roma, in both blocks. But that is it! I am not buying them beers anymore. This should change, they should learn that it is a different time now; everyone has to take care of himself. They have their problems, I have my problems. Once we worked together in the saw-mill, but now we have nothing in common"

The absence of interaction was not in fact proper for the relation between these two groups but for the village social life in general. Before 1990 most of the villagers met daily at work: they were employed either in the cooperative farm, in the saw-mill or in timber harvesting. For these objective reasons the interaction was unavoidable in the past. But there seems to be also a voluntary interaction. I was often told how the pub used to be a veritable lieu of interconnectedness where Roma and non-Roma males revelled in gambling, where public events were commonly celebrated however official they were. The community chronicle records some periodic public festivities but these did not exceed official holidays (May Day, Children's Day, International Women's Day, New little citizens welcome party etc.). The

contemporary absence of communal social life was sometimes felt by the community political representation. The mayor once complained to me saying:

> "I wish we had clubs here… we have huntsmen who are retired. They are sitting at home doing nothing. If they organized a club for children and taught them about the nature I would support them by all possible means." (December 2002)

Top-to-bottom attempts to promote communal life petered out as when the mayor organized a calico-ball but only a dozen of people showed up. All in all my original impression of a sporadic interaction between Roma and non-Roma was gradually overcome by recognizing that it was a more general phenomenon pertaining to the life-style of Tercov inhabitants captured in the narrative of a twenty years old Jarda:

> "Many people like to express how they admire living in Tercov because it is beautiful here, the nature is preserved and clean, the air is fresh. But look at it realistically: who does really enjoy the nature?... It is sleepy here because most of the people only come to sleep here. As soon as they need something they go and get it in the town. And I bet if they could afford it they would move out. I would, at least. I can live the same way anywhere else. When I get home from work, all I am able to do is to put myself in front of the TV or I go to the pub. Out of boredom I drink ten beers… if you want to socialize, you have to go out. But everything is far from here so you better stay home." (February 2003)

It is difficult to convey a life-style that is presented by those who maintain it as absence of life-style. Nevertheless, one can draw on the impression the villagers, especially from the younger generation, make: this is of stepping out, one feet being still attached in Tercov while the other fluttering in the unknown. It is necessary to be reminded that Tercov was populated

for a very concrete purpose: most of its inhabitants were work migrants. Of all the inhabitants there was only one person who resided in Tercov already before World War II. The consequent waves of migration were always stimulated by settlement policies. It is these spasmodic waves of newcomers which generated the need for accommodating at once bigger numbers of people and which are reflected in the largely dominant pattern of housing in housing blocks. Obviously living in an apartment in a housing block does not explain lack of attachment to the place. There is an articulated sense of attachment which Jarda rightly characterizes as celebration of the natural beauty. Nonetheless such expressions were always addressed to outsiders as if there was a need to rationalize the fact of living in a place that is so fatally marked by its socio-spatial isolation. A determination for a collective cultivation of this attachment was certainly missing. What in my view mostly characterizes the post-1990 presence of the villagers in Tercov is transitoriness which nevertheless does not lead to a transition.

4.1.1 Denizens and newcomers

What I will describe on the following pages pertains to exceptions. The most significant interaction concerned with exchange the Roma in Tercov maintained with non-Roma regarded those who moved in Tercov only after 1990. However arbitrary it might seem as a definition, the movement to Tercov in this period shows in the analysed cases similarities that deserve attention. Both Jura and Martin abandoned their previous homes in big cities in order to start anew a life in the countryside. The radical change in life-style is in both cases reflected in the ambition to constitute their new independence on autonomy and self-sufficiency. Their first goal after arrival was thus to build independent homes which they both consequently did. They both had projects concerning livestock keeping and eventually rented

or bought large pastures. Shortly after settlement in Tercov, both Jura and Petr stood out as wealthy among the mostly propertyless villagers. And as newcomers they represented a political element of its own: an aspiring higher bourgeoisie surrounded by a majority of common men. The sociological features of the newcomers notwithstanding, the visibility and social significance of their presence in Tercov would not be as important were not they both very articulate about their interests and values. For both of them the change of life represented a materialization of their attachment to the entrepreneurial ethos, radical individualism and political anti-communism. They were supported by the ethos of change that commanded much of the post-socialist social upheaval and which they wished to introduce in Tercov. They felt, they presented themselves and indeed they were the agents of change. Under such circumstances the lines of aversion in the political life of Tercov were progressively drawn along such issues as lack of support for business initiatives on the part of the Community Council dominated by the denizens.

Both Jarda and Martin introduced a new pattern of communication with the Roma in Tercov. Although it would be a gross simplification to claim that they treated them as equals, it is still pertinent to distinguish it from how other non-Roma treated the Roma in terms of independent subjects. And it was this attitude which attracted the Roma and which enabled the opening of a space of interaction until then absent in Tercov. In contrast to the denizens who were predominantly employees, both Jarda and Martin were entrepreneurs who often entered into exchange relations with other people for maintaining and improving their businesses. Martin's business will even target the Roma as its principle clientele whereas Jarda's business was directed to clients not only outside the village, but often outside the region and even internationally. This also explains that there is a degree of interaction with the Roma reflected in the attention I pay to each of them. In Martin's interaction with the Roma, more pervasive

and long-lasting, I detected the enactment of a set of values and ideologies. The due attention thus compelled me to a chapter-long presentation. On the other hand, Jarda's interaction with the Roma was more spontaneous, abrupt and incidental. Nevertheless, it was monotonous and evolved always around the same issue of a patronizing attitude towards the immature Gypsy mentality. In this it was very particular and tightly linked not only to an imaginary of Gypsyness but also to the nature of Jarda's livelihood as eco-farmer.

4.1.2 Charitable work

Jarda grew up in Prague with his grand-parents. His parents often changed place and moved around the world as diplomats. Occasionally he joined them but never for a very long period. Nonetheless, one of the places his parents were serving at left a significant mark on Jarda's future preoccupation. In North Africa he encountered the phenomenon of the Arabian horse. Ever since he developed this interest and eventually became one of the first breeders in the Czech Republic. He is also the founder of an association representing the Arabian breeders and the organizer of the biggest long-distance Arabian horse race in the Czech Republic.

Breeding Arabians is an aristocratic occupation. Arabians are not the kind of horse for general consumption, so to speak. They are smaller and thinner than average horses. They do not excel in speed but in endurance. And they are very expensive. Trading with Arabians is a long-term investment destined to a very limited circle of potential customers. Jarda's business has to be thus much diversified. He breeds also other horses: either his own or other people's horses who pay him for feeding and training them. But Jarda's farm contains many more animals, particularly hen and goats. His farm bears the stamp of an ecological farm which

specializes in the production of bio eatables. In 2006 his goat cheese brought him national[63] and eventually international fame. With the imposition of EU regulations concerning hygienic norms for cheese manufacturing equipment Jarda in an act of protest publicly proclaimed his cheese to be "Incompatible with EU regulations; destined to dietary use only; tested on humans" despite his goat cheese's large popularity among Prague celebrities. The story was also covered by the BBC and it initiated a debate in which the BBC server recorded over 30,000 responses of similarly stricken small agricultural producers. For some time Jarda even acted as the unofficial spokesperson of small producers who criticized EU regulations for imposing hygienic regulations liquidating small producers at the expense of large animal husbandry. Finally Jarda's farm also functioned as a tourist destination. When he discovered the potential of eco-tourism he reconstructed the attic of the house into separate rooms which can host up to 12 people. Besides hosting individual customers Jarda with his wife organized two-week sojourns for children in which they were introduced into eco-farming and horse riding. This proved to be a big business achievement. They gathered most of their regular customers in Austria and the prices of sojourns corresponded more to the purchasing power of the Austrian urban elite which sent its children to the eco-farm every summer. The regular presence of children pursuing "active sojourns", as Jarda used to call it, will prove important for my later account.

Jarda's entrepreneurial talent was accompanied by an immense diligence. Most of the work at the farm was done by him, his wife and occasionally they were helped by their little son. Besides work related to the actual breeding of horses and other animals which the couple divided more or less equally among themselves, Jarda also did all the technical house maintenance and reconstruction on his own. Although he never complained about it, he was

[63] Marek Kerles. Český sedlák se proslavil „bojem" s EU. *Lidové noviny*. 5. 5. 2006.

also convinced that he could not afford to pay for a possible helping hand. This stance was crucial for the terms under which he negotiated cooperation with the Roma.

Jarda perceived and represented his interaction with the Roma in terms of acts of charity. His overall posture was curved by his intention to educate Roma into "honest work" (*poctivá práce*) with a particular focus on children. He gave other generations of Roma up for lost. In this he was surprisingly consistent with pre-1990 categorization of the Gypsies in official policy plans. Here also the category of the "least suitable for assimilation" coincided with the older generations that were too much restrained by the backward life-style characterized, among others, by a workshy attitude. That is how Jarda glossed the eventuality of giving work to Šafrán which I find particularly revealing in light of my previous account of work arrangement preferences when taking on an undeclared work:

> "If I took Šafrán, I would first have to pay him; then I would have to feed him; at the end he would never show up because he would malinger, telling me something about his back, leg, hand and God knows what else."

To get work from Jarda one had to deserve it. The Roma boy would have to prove himself. He would have to show real interest, dedication and most of all he would have to demonstrate submission to the value of work as a civilizing mission. However, it was not upon the Roma boy to decide about his eligibility. Only Jarda could discern the transformative potential in the person. And this was a very elective process. It was then interesting to observe how the potential of civility was demonstrated in the selection of those deemed fit for becoming civilized.

Between 2001 and 2003 only two Roma boys were actually "invited" to work for Jarda. Both Roman and Marek were under sixteen when they started working for him; that is they finished

compulsory school attendance but at the same time they were unemployed, without marketable skills and still officially considered dependents. For the young Roma of this age it was particularly difficult psychologically as well as socially. They often felt mature long before they left school but in this position which somehow underlined their "betweeness" they felt especially uncomfortable. In the examination of the effects of the existing schooling system on the reproduction of the schooling failure of Romani children one important aspect is often overlooked: especially in the last years strong resentment is bolstered as soon as they start to perceive that their maturity is repeatedly negated by poor schooling achievements. In consequence of a repeated dropping out the Roma end up attending classes with classmates sometimes three years younger. The loss of motivation in the decisive years of schooling is thus often produced in the encounter with the school. When I asked Marek about his repeated absenteeism and demonstrations of aggressiveness in the class which put temporarily his parents in perils and his removal to a children's home impended he expressed subjective disorientation:

> "I can't stand the kids anymore! I can't stand their stupid jokes; I hate how they amuse themselves. They're just dull, they speak shit. I tell them 'keep away from me' but they don't listen. I barely touch them and they scream, fall down and stuff… I need to get out from there; there is no point for me to sit with kids in a class. I want to work."

When marek was eventually diagnosed by a psychiatrist, one of the reasons he identified for Marek's elevated aggression was "social frustration". I am not claiming that Jarda preferentially targeted young frustrated Roma for working for him. In this, after all, Marek's case was exceptional which was confirmed by the fact that it set off the long machinery of the social protection of children, starting with family counselling, psychiatric diagnoses and even

criminal investigation. I just wish to suggest that there was a correspondence between what Jarda identified as ready to receive the civilizing lecture and the people finding themselves in a particularly socially vulnerable position. For both Marek and Roman applied that they were seeking after a way out of this vulnerability and that they both imagined this way through affirmation in work. There were also some differences between Roman and Marek. Whereas Marek was the molly of his parents and their only boy, Roman was disregarded by his parents, sometimes even in an ostentatious way. He was the second youngest among four brothers but as the only one rarely expressed self-confidence, may be because he was very short.

Giving work to the young Roma boys signified for Jarda their integration into the daily operation of his household. They did not only work together, they also ate together. On the other hand the integration was not absolute since it was not allowed to move freely on the farm: the line of privacy was strictly drawn so that access to the house without invitation was not allowed: the civilizing mission did not mean adoption. The main rule consisted in being on time in the morning, at seven o'clock, ready to start to work. There were some specific work tasks the Roma boy had to execute regularly, like watering the horses in the morning. During the day and in the course of days, however, the work changed according to what was needed. Sometimes it was necessary to muck out; sometimes the all day was spent on mowing the meadows. In fact the Roma boys could execute all labour intensive tasks which did not necessitate prior knowledge or specific skills. Jarda also applied the principle "you can go wrong only once". This applied equally to discipline and work performance. Obviously, it was uniquely upon Jarda to judge the possible lapse. Thus he would accept some excuses for late arrivals, but not if he learned that the boy was hanging out the previous night. It is also necessary to mention that it was not work on a daily basis. Jarda would always call for the boy

some time ahead, usually one day before. He also did not respect the distinction between working days and the week-end.

4.1.3 The centrality of marginality

As we see, the civilizing mission represented for Jarda the inculcation of discipline and diligence. In his treatment of the Roma boys during work he also added firmness. If he was unsatisfied with their performance he would express it in laud shouting which often turned into bluster. This way he developed a permanent tension in which he held the upper hand and in which the roles of the master and the apprentice were reaffirmed. I do not think the discipline he wished to inculcate was of a military kind neither was Jarda himself the incarnation of such a discipline. For example he obsessively opposed all attempts of the Community Council to coerce people to keep their animals under lock and key. Aware of the existence of the communal order, he constantly kept his hen running around. "This is countryside and in the countryside it is like that, animals run around. If I wanted to keep animals in designated places, I would not have moved to the countryside. It was always like that in Czech villages and it should stay like that and if not we will look funny." The discipline he had in mind was the discipline to keep up with the knowledge of ancestors and well-tried practices. His ecological consciousness was not inspired by expert global considerations (he certainly mocked "green" politics) but by the knowledge of the ancestors. This was the explanation for the popularity of his goat cheese. It was made "the way our grand mothers did" was his most typical phrase. When I asked him why the young Roma should be interested in working at his farm, he also used the ancestors' argument. This time it was not "our" ancestors but "their" who lived of horses and the wealth of the nature. In some way the civilizing mission he was inculcating was the same he was undergoing himself.

Jarda also used his verbal powers in a more moderate way. The most frequent address towards Roma was rather abusive: he called them "blackies" (*černá huba*). Such an overtly injurious term needed to be debased which he used to do by calling himself "whitie" (*bílá huba*). This was often followed by a supposedly anti-racist rhetoric: "I don't care what colour you are. All what matters is what you respect!" Because Jarda did not develop a systematic account of his attitude, he insisted on the explanatory power of the commonsensual understanding. The take-it-or-leave-it logic informed much of his discussions about inter-ethnic relations in which he was obsessively reclaiming his colour blind attitude: "I don't care where you were born; I don't care what Block you are living at… I can have a beer with anybody as long as he pays for his beer."

I am not quite sure whether this particular attitude was in anyway attracting the young Roma. What they really appreciated about Jarda was his wealth and self-sufficiency. I will deal with the view of Roma of the work for Jarda later. Here I will attempt to situate Jarda's proclamations in a political context since they seem to me purely political. When he laboriously announced the examples of how he attempted to nurture the values of work and civilization in Romani children (and he did so usually in public places, for example during casual discussions in front of the convenience store), he certainly intended to address another public than the Roma. Denying the existence of the separation line between the Roma and non-Roma was the performance of the central political controversy in Tercov which opposed the advocates of change against those who defended the status quo. That is how the controversy appeared to the former. In this context the ideas about the civilizing effect of work and Jarda's objective enactment (although not very systematic) of the civilizing mission for the future of Roma acted as a political token. I am inclined to say that the civilizing of the Roma was a metonymic device through which Jarda was supporting his agenda of change. In

this view we are coming across yet another example of how the 'Gypsy question' vehicles central concerns of the actual society. The civilizing of the Roma coincided with the attempt to reshape local politics and in this it occupied, at least in Jarda's view, central stage.

4.1.4 From work to whim

Although it is out of any doubt that the work the Roma boys performed for Jarda was of big value, Jarda claimed he could do without it. This was the fundamental condition which informed the negotiation of work. The work relation was not of reciprocity since Jarda did not need to reciprocate. By giving a civilizing work he was much more giving than what he was receiving. More precisely, in his view it was the civilizing handicap which justified and ensured the voluntary giving of free labour by the 'blackies'. I am leaving aside the aspect that such work was free only rhetorically since Jarda 'paid' the Roma boys either in kind or in giving preference to their parents to buy from him products for cheaper prices (Jarda was also operating a gas recharge station where empty gas cartouches could be exchanged for full ones; for the parents of Roma boys and only for them he would sell them on credit). So how did the Roma perceive the fact of giving free labour? And did they justify such an arrangement at all?

As I tried to convey above, not every Roma could accept such conditions of work. Regardless of how Jarda distinguished between those eligible for receiving the civilizing mission, the boys actually agreeing to these terms showed resemblance in their social situation: they were just about to absorb their schooling failure and not yet enjoying full independence (reflected in their official status of 'dependents'). They both envisaged a way out of this "betweeness" through affirmation in work. What Jarda offered them was precisely this affirmative

discourse. It was clear to me from the start that it was not a relation which could last for long. In the long run they both discovered that working for Jarda was not helping them in any sense to overcome either their marginal position within their families nor their social insignificance as not-yet-mature-enough because working for free did not bring an improvement in their social status. Both of them abandoned working for Jarda after few (three and four) months and in both cases in happened after more and more intensified quarrels with Jarda.

For other Roma the idea of free labour was just nonsense and they assimilated it to slavery. Sometimes there was a pressure on the boys from their families' members to abandon working for Jarda. Roman for example was at one point thrown out of the house because he "stank like a horse" and for the same reason his mother refused to do his laundry. At the same time they took advantage of buying some products from Jarda for cheap prices, mostly dairy products. But this was only when they could not afford to buy standard products in the shop. The advantages were considered opportune for periods of shortage and their opposition to working for free hence depended on their actual economic situation. In times of shortage what seemed to be a work free suddenly reappeared as a source of precious goods whereas in times of relative satisfaction the exploitative aspect was somehow perceived more strongly. The Roma therefore never really publicly condemned the work of their boys for Jarda and kept the gates open.

In a concluding remark I wan to point to the economic logic of Jarda's attempt to civilize Roma through work. Jarda stopped giving charitable work to Roma at the same time as he started operating sojourn programs for the children of the rich Czech and Austrian elite. It was surprising for me to learn that the program contained hours of work on the farm. Often these children accomplished similar tasks as the Roma boys used to do. They were cleaning the stable, tossing the hay, milking the goats. What previously represented a civilizing mission

was now recoded as introduction into eco-farming. What was supposed to turn the Roma into respectable subjects was now presented as an elitist whim. And the Roma detected this hypocrisy when they nicknamed Jarda the "children slaver" which they obviously never uttered in front of him. It is not then surprising that as far the Roma were concerned, the 'Gypsy token' never materialized in Jarda's political recognition.

4.2 The Attraction of the Poor

One afternoon in April 2002 I was relaxing with Martin Novotný on his veranda. He confided to me that he had decided to open a convenience store (*večerka*) in the building he had bought on the main street of the village.[64] His ownership of the house demonstrates his exceptional trajectory in the local context. Martin moved to Tercov shortly after 1990. The main reason was to escape the highly polluted environment of Northern Bohemia where he had lived until then and which had caused allergic reactions in his newborn son. Following medical recommendations he searched for a more suitable environment for his family. The small mountain area of Novohradské hory at the other end of the country was in this sense a promised land. The promising quality of the environment was however counterbalanced by a less favourable quality of life in a provincial and an undeveloped region. Originally Martin had intended to revive the knowledge he had acquired as an agriculturalist: his plan was to rear livestock on the grasslands abandoned after the dissolution of local cooperative farming. This business plan didn't pan out because upon his arrival the state-owned pastures were already being farmed by a number of large local farmers who profited from patronage networks established during socialism. However, Martin never suffered from want. Shortly

[64] The former post office was a two-story building opposite the former school building which in turn used to be the council hall, up until the construction of a new council building at the opposite side of the village.

after arriving in Tercov Martin and his brother built two model houses next to each other. His sound financial base allowed him to buy farm machinery in cash. After the failure of his original business plan the main source of his income came from leasing the machinery to less fortunate farmers or providing works necessitating the machinery. At the beginning of 1990's the lumber industry was just beginning to develop, so Martin's technical expertise paid off immensely. When the region later became the Eldorado of the state-owned company *Lesy ČR* this source of income dried up and Martin had to turn to other economic options.

In the meanwhile he tried investing his money in undervalued property. Although he had bought the house in the village's centre some time ago, he told me that he had always been thinking of running a small business that would provide a stable income for his family. I asked him how a small convenience store in a village of three hundred inhabitants could provide for such an income—in a village where almost half of the adults were either unemployed or retired and there already was a similar such store. His original business project was however directed at a different clientele. As he believed, the region and particularly the border area of which Tercov was the hub was destined to become a prosperous tourist attraction. He arrived at this conclusion after having observed increased numbers of cyclists touring the region *en masse* during the summer months. His calculations were based on a quite realistic estimation: Tercov is an important junction for a number of cycling tracks intersecting the mountain area, which is otherwise lacking in tourist infrastructure. In 2002 this advantageous geographical position of Tercov had not yet been translated into business opportunities: Tercov so far offered tourists only a one-time, cooperative-style grocery store operating at odd opening hours (6:30-11:00 am and 1:00-3:00 pm) and a bar opening only late in the afternoon. The outlying villages were similarly lacking in awareness of possible tourist business. Martin was consistent in his business plan and just

before the summer season in 2002 started, he invested much time and resources in setting up his little shop. From the beginning it was a family business: his father helped him out in repairing the interior and exterior, his wife worked full-time behind the cash register and Martin himself stocked the shop together with his two sons. The shop was arranged as an over-the-desk service with no direct access to goods, which were handed to customers by his wife. On the grounds in front of the entrance he constructed a terrace and set up a rest stop with a large table, stools and a parasol. During the first weeks of operation he would stand at the doorstep of the shop, eager to discuss suggestions for improvement coming from anyone. He also sat around the table with customers wishing to have a quick drink. The discussions often grew into long drinking sessions and soon became a regular meeting place for a group of local residents, including both Roma and others.

The main season for outdoor tourism barely lasts three months. For that reason Martin could hardly expect to maintain the same rate of turnover from the occasional tourism taking place during the rest of the year. Martin began to stock the shop with more and more goods so that after few weeks, to my surprise, the things offered by his convenience store were not all too different from those of a proper grocery store. The products arranged on the shelves behind the counter and in one large freezer became less and less those of the kind designed for convenient consumption by tourists: he now offered canned processed food, frozen poultry, milk, all basic household staples like sugar, salt or farina, detergents and other sanitary products, even dog food and certainly a large variety of cheap alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco. Tourists passing by may have appreciated the offer of cold drinks, ice-cream and candy, but they were apparently no longer the chief target of his business.

Soon after the *večerka* commenced operation I started seeing Romani kids come to spend their change on candies, time and time again followed by Romani housewives replenishing

their stocks with missing goods or seeking last-minute ingredients for their daily meals. And Martin, apparently happy at the prospect of having a stable clientele, told me: "You see, it's different here. I'm not picky about my customers. It's cheaper here than in the grocery store. And people like to come here because we treat everybody the same way. We don't play on prejudices… As long as people can pay we don't care." Martin here revealed one of his recurrent postures: that of the entrepreneur. This, indeed, was his favourite one. It fit into the discursive battle he was engaged in with the Czechs in the village—a battle which opposed established residents and newcomers (for more on this conflict see Chapter…). The prejudices alluded to in his utterance and allegedly echoed in the treatment of Roma in the village grocery store delineated one of the battle lines separating established residents from the rest, i.e. from Roma and newcomers. This time Martin was exhibiting his entrepreneurial morale in a consciously chosen framework of inter-ethnic relations. This consisted in obliterating any pertinent divide between him and Roma by invoking the ideal of equality embodied in exchange relations. In compliance with the logic of "Money is money is money…" Martin underscored the colour-blindness of his entrepreneurial ethos.

4.2.1 Patterns of Consumption

As I observed in the remarks above, as Martin's business evolved I noticed that his inventory gradually responded to particular patterns of consumption. Even if we take into consideration other material and structural limitations on the range of offerings in such a small shop in a village context—the size of the shop, its technical equipment (which did not allow, for example, for storage of fresh meat) but also the more general context of market competition generated by large retail centres in the immediate area—it became apparent that the business success of Martin's *večerka* was now closely tied to his capacity involve Roma customers.

The adjustment of his range of goods to their patterns of consumption was one of expression of this.

Brand-name products were generally absent from his inventory from the beginning, so that most of the items were represented by the cheapest brands. This was especially evident regarding alcohol and tobacco products. The one or two international brands of cigarettes sought by tourists and only occasionally by local residents gave place to cheaper Czech brands, chief among them the filtered brand Start, the one preferred most by all Roma regardless of age or gender. Moreover, the *večerka* was the only store that offered pipe tobacco. The reason was not that in Tercov pipe smoking was particularly popular. For Roma, the much cheaper pipe tobacco, which they rolled in cigarette papers (and sometimes in a shred of newspaper), often represented the last resort in times of money shortage, despite the pipe tobacco's extremely unpleasant taste and its horribly irritating effect on the throat. The same went for beer and liquors. Cheaper, locally produced mild beer types were especially prized by Roma (mild Czech Budweiser) as well as boxed wine and traditional liquors (local potato-starch rum and fake vodka-like liquors). During the first weeks of operation Martin's wife, Nadia, kept a notebook where she regularly noted the preferences of Romani kids for sweets and lemonades. She often noted with concern that Romani kids asked for the sweetest products, the most seductive tastes and the products benchmarked by big suppliers for child consumption. And because Romani kids enjoy almost complete liberty in the choice of how to spend money on candies, Nadia was able to adjust the stock according to her notes with a quite high degree of accuracy. However, as I noted earlier, the range of goods was not limited in kind. To a large extent, the *večerka* offered the Roma all of what they usually needed. If fresh meat was absent from the offer, it had a worthy substitute. A huge freezer placed at the back of the room contained predominantly frozen poultry, which is basically the most

preferred meal ingredient for Roma[65] (in the grocery store, by contrast, one could find frozen vegetables, pasta, fish, and processed pastry, all products typical of Czech cuisine). There was also a more striking, though less visible demonstration of Martin's adjustment to Romani patterns of consumption. This consisted in the overall character of the convenience store as a counterpoint to the other grocery store in the village. The grocery store was run by Janyš and his wife, long-time residents of the village. The building as such was the property of the community council. It was constructed in the mid 80's as a cooperative enterprise run by

[65] This should be understood in contrast to "Gypsy food" (*cikánský jídlo*) which often contains meat, as for example roasted pork fatback or the biggest delicacy, *pašváre* (roasted or cooked pork spare-ribs) or even *halušky* (home-made farina gnocchi most often served with lard and curd but also with chicken and tomatoes). The attitude of the Roma in Tercov towards "Gypsy food" was ambivalent. At the one hand they were pleased when visitors praised their cuisine; at the other preparing a "Gypsy food" was a sign of backwardness. When my supervisor visited me in the field, my Romani friends insisted on treating him properly. I asked them what I should buy for dinner and they instructed me to buy chicken, tomatoes, cooking oil and farina. Thus they chose to present the professor (about whom they knew from me that he was eager to learn about people's way of life and that he had once lived in New Caledonia – that is, with "black people like us") with a "Gypsy food". When I used to come back after a period of absence I would often ask for *halušky*, which I had come to miss in the meanwhile. Both Biba and Hana, and certainly their husbands Šafrán and Ferko, would often try to extract from me whose *halušky* I preferred best, as if it were a sign of honour and prestige to be the best at making "Gypsy food." However, "Gypsy food" was prized only inasmuch as it involved ritualized outward self-presentation. Especially Roma from Block Three used to refer to "Gypsy food" when they wanted to stress a *non-Roma*'s close relation with them. One of the examples used, highlighting the exceptional character of such a relationship, was saying that "he comes to eat at our place." I also witnessed a quarrel with a *non-Roma* concerning inappropriate backbiting from his part about Roma's character when Roma shouted back on him: "You didn't mind we were Gypsies when you used to come all hungry to eat at our places, did you!" Making *halušky* as a daily meal was rather the exception. And, if it appeared on the table, it would be commented on bitingly by the young generation, for whom *halušky* stood for the incarnation of a non-meal and the absence of table manners. *Halušky* are typically prepared like a stew in a big pot; they are served with a ladle and the gesture of the arm laboriously loading the heavy spoonful of the meal is its metonymic invocation. Another ironic gesture invoking *halušky* cites the skilful, quick movements of the palm on the trencher when the dough is sliced into small pieces over the boiling pot. In consequence the elders often waxed nostalgic about "Gypsy food" and really welcomed me asking for it because it gave them the necessary context within which making *halušky* was tolerated. If I asked about this ambivalence in the appreciation of "Gypsy food," I was told that chicken meat is simply the most common and ordinary ingredient which may be combined with a variety of side dishes (pasta, potatoes, and rice). Its universality and frequency led to ironic remarks, as when Šafrán said, "We'll all be flying one day." I might add that the biggest advantage of chicken consists in its easy preparation, either in the oven or in a boiling paprika or cream sauce which can feed the entire household at once. The preference for chicken over other meat was thus argued in terms of economic and practical advantages. However, if we operate on the symbolic level, the distinction marked the separation between a new and an abandoned life-style.

village inhabitants[66]. The community council thus rented the property out to Janyš, but at the same time retained the responsibility for its maintenance. The same went for the adjacent local bar. Given this context, the grocery store was somehow perceived as a communal service which served the demands of local residents.[67] It was common, for example, to place orders for anniversary cakes or banquet snacks for private or public events at the grocery store, which then arranged the order with an external supplier. The opening hours were publicly authorized, as they were spelled out in the lease contract. However, the economic payoff for the council budget was nil. Quite the contrary, in the long term the maintenance costs seemed to exceed the revenues from the lease. All this added up to the common perception, shared by many long time resident Czechs, that this was their *sámoška* (a colloquial diminutive for *samoobsluha*, a small convenience store). It often happened to me that at 10 am the grocery store would run out of some basic commodity like bread or fresh milk. Obviously, a grocery store is not a big retailer which could stock large quantities of non-durable goods. As I later found out, most of local residents used to do their shopping much earlier, in some cases even very early in the morning. If I came earlier, which I sometimes did just out of curiosity, I would not be denied what I looked for. But in contrast to other customers I would have to specify the quantities or kinds of goods I wanted. There was a noticeable symbiosis between the vendor and his customers based on a shared and established time schedule that prescribed when to shop and eat: early opening hours allowing for the purchase of fresh bread for breakfast, a break during lunch time, early afternoon closure

[66] This was under the notorious scheme of *Akce Z* (Action Z) with *Z* standing for *zvelebování*, "improvement." Under this scheme the socialist economy sought to respond to communal needs the central and local authorities were not able to handle. Officially it was defined by a governmental decree (14/1959, § 27 art. 1) as work for free performed by citizens for the good of their community. Originally the "improvement" involved cleaning up communal property. Later it was to develop into institutionalized investment plans with steering committees, guidelines and a centrally allocated budget.

[67] This was further confirmed when the extension of the lease was put on the agenda of the community council. The issue was barely discussed and the extension was accorded unanimously within a few minutes—not least because Janyš is also an elected member of the community council.

corresponding to the time allotted to domestic work, and an early dinner at 6 pm (which explains, in my view, the odd opening hours). The principal clientele thus consisted primarily of elderly residents who did not have either the means or the capacity to undertake a trip to supermarkets in nearby towns. At the same time these were the people who some twenty years ago had participated in building the structure itself. For the rest of the populace, who made their large food purchases at retail centres, shopping in the grocery store was limited to fresh goods bought on a daily basis and to occasional purchases of missing articles.

Until the opening of the *večerka* the Roma also used to do their occasional shopping in the *sámoška*. Although they did not schedule their day the same way (one of the reasons being that as unemployed their timing was noticeably deferred later into the day), I assume that out of necessity they had to adjust to the *sámoška's* opening hours. However, what they certainly did not share was the sentiment of the *sámoška's* usefulness, the idea of "our *sámoška*" as a provider of a communal service. Later, when the *večerka* had already been operating for a while, Roma would recall the idea of going shopping in the *sámoška* with revulsion. When the fact that Roma were spending their money in the *večerka* became generally known, the antagonism became even greater. It was not that the Roma stopped shopping in the *sámoška* entirely—the *večerka* opened just after the *sámoška* closed at 3:00 pm, which was an agreement concluded between Martin and Janyš—but they did so only in utmost necessity. Their purchases would be limited to one or two items urgently needed for lunch meal preparation, or sometimes children whose parents had forgotten to buy them a midday snack for school the previous day would stop in at the grocery store on their way to the bus to school in the morning.

As I tried to illustrate, the contrasting characters of the two shops reflected two different attitudes towards Roma in the village. On the one hand there was an attitude that limited

contact, on the other an intensified effort to socialize. The former attitude could be in fact described as characteristic of most of the interactions between Roma and the majority of Czechs in the village; the latter attitude was confined to relations between the Roma and a minority of Czechs, specifically those who moved into the village for various reasons after 1989. Here I want to dwell more on Martin's entrepreneurial efforts. At first glance the conditions under which he launched his business project were quite risky. If it had depended only on tourist customers, the *večerka* would soon have closed its doors. Martin realized that early on: in his words, during the first tourist season, which was severely affected by sudden, large-scale floods, he had to subsidize the business from his savings. But even then his business prospects were not particularly rosy.

4.2.1.1 "Gypsies have money"

Martin's interaction with the Roma in Tercov preceded the opening of his *večerka*: either he would hire some Romani boys as temporary help on the contracted woodworking jobs he often carried out for a local lumbering company or he would provide Roma with various services (most often transporting people or things for them and charging excessive prices). He also once invoked the image so familiar in the region, an image of a Gypsy car packed to the roof with foodstuff just purchased in a supermarket, an image regularly visible when they received their welfare benefits. In conjunction with his generally critical attitude toward the generosity of the welfare state Martin shared the conviction that "Gypsies have money." He also witnessed how others incessantly attempted to cheat the Roma, as in pawnshops where they were charged usurious interests. The only question, then, was how to prosper from the attraction of Romani customers.

The *večerka* was a perfectly legitimate way to participate in the circulation of money issuing from welfare benefits. In view of the existing patterns of consumption where Roma spent the largest portion of benefits on big purchases at retail centres in nearby towns on the day they received their benefits (or within a few days thereafter), the attraction of the poor for a small shopkeeper consisted in securing the rest of the meagre resources they might have had.[68] Martin's adjustment of his inventory to Romani patterns of consumption was the direct result of this calculation. However, in order to assure that the Roma would really opt for spending their money in his *večerka* Martin had to offer a comparative advantage that would bind Romani customers to him and at the same time guarantee the bind's longevity. This advantage consisted in the practice of granting informal credit.

4.2.2 The Social Meaning of Informal Credit

Anthropologists have recorded informal credit in Central and Eastern Europe in the past (Sampson 1986)[69] and present (Verdery 1995, Chelcea 2002).[70] The accounts usually referred to contexts in which informal credit helped to reconcile the scarcity of money on the part of people without access to financial resources with household economies during the post-socialist economic transformation.[71] However, informal credit in the Czech Republic never

[68] I assume that even the following abstract calculation that one may make in advance is quite convincing: If there are some 100 people in 16 households and if each of the households spent an average of EUR 70 a month, i.e., approximately 1/4 of the average income per household, it would result in some EUR 1120 a month in sales revenues.

[69] Sampson, Steven. 1986. The Informal Sector in Eastern Europe. *Telos* 66:44-66.

[70] Chelcea, Liviu. 2002. Informal Credit, Money and Time in the Romanian Countryside. (http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/C/Chelcea_L_01.htm; accessed 25/09/2004). Verdery, Katherine. 1995. Faith, Hope and Caritas in the Land of the Pyramids: Romania, 1990 to 1994. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37(4): 625–69.

[71] In structural terms the post-socialist Czech Republic economic transformation after 1989 bore similar characteristics when indebtedness among firms was one of its major feature (see D. Altshuler 2001 for an

reached the scale known from other transforming economies where it might have represented "a facet of the transformation from shortage economy […] to what could be regarded as *delayed payment economy*" (Chelcea 2002, italics in orig.). In the local context, the case in question was rather exceptional. The exception arose from the fact that both parties involved, the shopkeeper and the customers, were compelled to engage in a system of informal credit: the shopkeeper to retain his business and the customers to secure their subsistence. In this it resembled very much the case from rural Southwest Romania where retailers kept customers (who after 1990 had became dependent on state allowances due to pressure on household disaccumalation) "hooked up" (*agai*) on consumer goods and at the same time themselves became enmeshed in a situation obliging them to continue to sell to their customers on credit (Chelcea 2002).[72] This mutual dependence forced both parties to frame their interactions in accordance with values of trust and cooperation. Given the context under which the *večerka* started operating, the practice of informal credit was somehow logical. There was not a particular moment at which Martin announced his will to sell on credit. It had arisen from ordinary interaction: Martin was aware that social benefits came on more or less fixed dates and that the Roma were always short of cash for a couple of weeks before payday. In what follows I will simultaneously show how the practice of informal credit operates and how it further induces divisions, this time in the context of daily interactions pertaining to questions of subjective integrity and household sustenance. Thus I will try to show how informal credit in the *večerka* in Tercov established an arena where social relations were put into play.

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account of "tunnelling", an original Czech form of high-level corruption based on an elaborate system of juggling liabilities) (Altshuler, David. 2001. Tunnelling towards capitalism in the Czech Republic. *Ethnography* 2(1): 115-138).

[72] I randomly investigated the practice of informal credit in other villages in South Bohemia. Although regularly present in many of them, in economic terms it was mostly a very innocent practice. Both customers and shopkeepers considered it more as part of usual everyday service. For example, on their way home people would pass by the local grocery store and grab some missing goods without paying for it because they did not have enough cash on hand. It was not an economic necessity for either of the parties; it was just a convenient way of shopping and paying at once every two weeks.

I suggest that there are three main features of informal credit as I encountered it in the *večerka*. Firstly, the credit establishes an informal relation between creditor and debtor in the sense that the validity of credit depends solely on its mutual recognition by the parties. Although Nadia kept a book of debts, this was only for her personal use as a memory aid. Debtors didn't know what was written in the book; neither did they refer to it when they wanted clarification about their balances. Secondly, the range of products that could be purchased on credit depended on the debtor's credit history. I will provide some examples later, but for the moment it will suffice to say that this feature is essential to the quality of relations established through informal credit. The creditor at this moment works as a credit analyst who questions the capacity of the debtor to pay up his debt. In particular, the credit analysis is directed at household expenditures and thus introduces into the monetary transaction implicit judgments about a debtor's life-style. In this feature informal credit resembles market credit, something which is further confirmed by the inclination of the creditor to formalize credit repayments in cases of notorious debtors with a low willingness to payoff. At the same time it cancels out, to some extent, the original imbalance in handling the risk of informal credit, which rests almost entirely on the shoulders of the creditor. This, then, is the third feature of informal credit in the *večerka*: Martin is the only one who might be sanctioned by the fiscal authorities for irregularities on his balance sheet or in his account book.[73] However, this eventuality was never really taken into consideration either by Martin or by his customers, as if possible consequences were largely compensated for in advance by the arrangement itself.

[73] See Chelcea 2002 for a different definition of the contrast between informal credit and proper market credit practices.

4.2.2.1 Gaining Dignity through Credit

Ad 1. Martin and his wife established a series of individual relations with each of their debtors in which they set the terms of the creditor/debtor relation. To accentuate the colour-blind attitude of an entrepreneur, Martin took an individualist approach and meticulously upheld the conviction that everybody should be treated accordingly. It was this ideal of equal and individual treatment[74] which made informal credits noteworthy in the eyes of Roma. It matched with their desire not to be seen through an essentializing prism equating Gypsy-like behaviour with gregariousness. Once having been established, this ideal depended upon how each Rom negotiated the credit with Martin or his wife. An overwhelming majority of the cases where money was lent was never placed in doubt. Every Rom actually believed that he or she could buy on credit and they all did. And indeed, there was not a single family, household or person who did not use the opportunity and all did so regularly. Informal credit could thus be understood as a rehearsal of the ideal of equal treatment. And, since credit history is at the same time the history of mutual trust, informal credit is a framework whereby every Rom could ideally establish him/herself as an individual entity with its own dignity.

4.2.2.2 From 'trust' to 'lust'

Ad. 2. This notwithstanding, the individualized approach became untenable when informal credit became regular and routine. With the passage of time, Nadia was increasingly faced with the necessity of consolidating the list of debts. Keeping track of dozens of individual

[74] Understandably there are also some "general" rules. For example, the credit extended to a given household should not have exceeded a tolerable rate, this being established between 500 and 1000 CZK depending on the circumstances. However, there was always a certain amount of leeway. For example, shortly before receipt of welfare checks Martin's attitude tended to be rather lax. The same applied if there was a special occasion, as for example a birthday party.

credit lines was no longer possible. Owing to the fact that social benefits are perforce defined as household income that obliges recipients to spend the bulk of their resources on common needs, the debts predominantly involved expenditures on household needs. Nadia's originally individual entries in the debt list were consequently regrouped into more general categories representing households. Interestingly enough, these were not headed by a single name—let's say the father or family name—but by two names, most often the names of the partners or spouses. This signalled a shift in credit negotiation which no longer revolved around individual credit history but around the credit history of a given household. Thus, paradoxically, although both the debtor and the creditor held to the ideal of an individualized evaluation of a person's credit history, the fact that the money was obtained from welfare benefits marked the practice of informal credit in a way that favored households over individual customer/debtors and had a significant effect on the relations established by informal credit.

Take the example of Šafrán. He had the reputation of "running on beer" (*jede na pivo*), the beer was his fuel. Especially in the summer months when Šafrán pursued seasonal works the beer was a necessity. Thanks to his talkative nature Šafrán would often be able to negotiate another beer on credit. However, over a two-week period the few beers a day would come to represent a sizable budget item. After a few weeks into the month Nadia would stop giving him more. The reason would be that taken together with household purchases his credit balance would exceed the agreed-upon credit limit. The expectancy for repaying depended either on the income level from welfare benefits, which differed according to the size of families, or on the status of the debtor (a retiree with a regular pension, for example). Clearly, Šafrán always knew about his household purchases so there was no question of his challenging Nadia's accounts. However, the beer was for him something personal that he had

to procure on his own. At times like this it was evident how values of trust in fact meant something different to the creditor and the debtor. Nadia and Martin believed that Roma could repay their debts for most of the year only from welfare benefits. When they refused to accord Šafrán another beer on credit, they also imposed their ideas about responsibility for the household on him. They would not accept, at least rhetorically, a further debt burden on the ground that household needs should be given preference over individual whims. In the *večerka* Šafrán would not question this logic as such. His success in negotiating a credit to buy beer would be framed in terms of trust in his personal ability to cover his own personal needs. The negotiation of credit thus often opened up a discursive field in which the creditor and the debtor staked out the subjective characteristics of the customer. As a result, in critical situations Šafrán's otherwise entertaining and well-liked personality came to represent a symptom of lust which caused him to be perceived as a truly intemperate Gypsy. In a condensed résumé such as this one this may make the impression of a linear and causal story. In reality this was never the case. Martin, Nadia, Šafrán and his wife continuously attempted to regain each other's trust. Nonetheless, the experience of being turned down as well as of being duped left its mark and the ideal relationship promised by informal credit was never again achieved. On the part of Martin and Nadia this sometimes meant being cautious, sometimes being formalistic when dealing with Šafrán. From Šafrán's point of view, on the other hand, it strengthened his conviction about their greed.

Drawing on this example and many others of the same kind I assume that the fact that Nadia opted for recording the credit line of a given household under the name of both spouses reflected her confusion about the organization of Romani households. She might have simply put the family name (truth of the matter, this would bring some confusion since some of the family names—Benák, Horvát or Gaži—are shared by several households), but she opted for

a more concrete entry as if she was expressing uncertainty about competencies and hierarchies in the household. The confusion is not groundless, as Biba and Šafrán's case demonstrates. No matter how much welfare benefits obliged recipients to spend on common needs, Nadia couldn't definitively assess the "quality" of the money handed over to her. This is precisely the distinction Šafrán referred to when he insisted on meeting his personal needs: debts accrued for household consumption should not be confused with a credit he requested for his own personal consumption. What Šafrán was asking for and what caused confusion on the part of Nadia was the differentiation of money according to their differing trajectories. Šafrán was asking Nadia to accept him as a sovereign economic actor regardless of his social status as a recipient of welfare benefits. Money assessed as household income should go for covering household needs, but this should also allow the assumption that there is money other than that derived from welfare benefits. Throughout the year long Šafrán was always earning some money from various activities, even if they were very irregular and odd (like scrap collecting). It was precisely this conviction—that he could always find a way to earn money for his personal consumption—that he was trying to advocate in credit negotiation. This didn't mean that he always bought his beer from the money he earned. Nonetheless, his sheer potential for acquiring outside income legitimated in his eyes the claim to an individualized approach and for being perceived without reference to household obligations. However, this differentiation of money according to its origin eluded the purview of the creditor, who was assessing the overall indebtedness of the given household. The names of spouses in the debts list then capture the experience of the creditor of the two voices speaking from within the household. Though Nadia attempted to merge the voices by placing them under the same credit line while retaining the distinction between spouses, for the Roma it opened up a potential for subverting the credit plan in its function as a control mechanism over their pattern of consumption. Biba could thus, depending on the availability of resources,

sometimes decide to repay the credit opened by her husband and sometimes not, namely by referring to the "quality" of the money at hand.

Other examples reveal a more profound impact of credit negotiation on the delineation of customers' subjectivities. Despite her natural politeness, Nadia sometimes questioned the selection of articles for purchase. After a long day of collecting birch foliage Laci and Dáša needed a quick meal. Because they still had not cashed in their harvest, they came to the *večerka* to buy a few things on credit to prepare a dinner for their family. They ordered three cans of processed Bolognese tomato sauce and two packages of pasta. They also ordered sausages, bread, lemonade and a variety of candies. The price of the purchase was approximately 300 CZK. They already had some credit due so it caught Nadia's attention while they were making the order. It turned out that they were well over the credit limit. Moreover, two days before a similar situation had taken place. Nadia thus ventured to question the necessity of the purchase. According to her Laci and Dáša had spent 700 CZK in three days and, more importantly, they had been left with nothing to eat the day after, so it could only be presumed that the situation would get worse. With that kind of money, she continued, it should be possible to keep them fed for much longer. Instead of buying expensive canned food at the end of the day, Nadia suggested, she would have bought cheaper fresh food in bigger quantities and prepared it in advance. Nadia thus unwittingly acknowledged that the manner of consumption to which the *večerka* had adjusted its inventory (remember, it offers no fresh meat) had in fact contributed to the creation of continual indebtedness. As she was talking, Laci and Dáša started to sort out some of the articles and give them back. At the end they reduced their purchase to 100 CZK and ate sausages for dinner. At home Dáša said: "We bought on credit, we got even more into debt and we still wind up eating sausages. And all that because she doesn't like canned food?" The

situation grew even more disconcerting when other Roma mocked Laci and Dáša's for having been forced to eat a dinner of sausages and bread just like the poor do.

4.2.2.3 The Agency of the Creditor

Ad. 3. The peculiarity of informal credit arrangements consists in the shopkeeper consciously risking potential legal sanctions because of possible discrepancies in the balance sheet. In fiscal terms, when selling on informal credit, there is necessarily a discrepancy between inventory and the cash book. Martin and Nadia never actually mentioned the legal fragility of the arrangement while negotiating a credit. Nonetheless, the threat of a fiscal inspection was theoretically present. In the absence of legal norms to constrain or support his creditor claims when dealing with customers, Martin was left to his performative skills to collect outstanding debts. This created a situation where Martin, as the boss who was not in continual contact with customers as was his wife behind the counter, was obliged to conduct transactions more sternly and on the basis of explicit agreements. Because he was not always present in the *večerka*, he did not actually negotiate every credit himself. It was predominantly Nadia who listened to the demands and pleas of her customers. In consequence Nadia moved within a different context than Martin. Her very accommodating personality invited the Roma to speak openly about their situation. Not only did they disclose the details of their financial situation, they also expressed their worries. Hence the positions of Martin and Nadia constituted two differing natures of interaction which consequently gave rise to different responses to the exigencies of trust. Agreements concluded with Martin were more similar to a formalized credit arrangement in that Martin demanded their timely fulfilment and sanctioned breaches with a temporary suspension of the credit line. Nadia, on the other hand, was put in a more

complex situation in which economic considerations, values of reproduction and human worth came into conflict with one another.

There were, for example, numerous situations when somebody waited for the moment where he or she would be left alone with Nadia in the shop so that they could launch a more private conversation about their distress. Nadia thus often had a unique access to stories of suffering. She was particularly sensitive to the predicaments of children and women. Contrary to Martin, whose preoccupation was more with the rationality of the requests, Nadia's insights allowed her to reflect on the "sociology of poverty." In practice, informal credit negotiation offered Nadia a window into an unfamiliar world she was eager to grasp:

> "Back home I never met a single Rom personally. People would occasionally talk about Gypsies but only as if they were fairy-tale figures, unreal and frightening. I never paid attention to it, it was something of this world but at the same time it was about things that were not important for my real life. But when we eventually moved to Děčín with my husband I realized Gypsies were very real. There were many of them although I rarely came in contact with them. Only here in Tercov I could really meet Roma personally, first at work in the saw-mill, then in the *večerka*. And here in the *večerka* I've got to know them really very well close up, every day we talk about all kinds of things, just like I would talk with anybody else. With most of them I get by very easily… with others I learned to keep them at distance because if you don't, they take advantage of you."

In her interactions with Roma in the *večerka* Nadia arrived at the conclusion that they were living in a vicious circle of poverty which prevented them from undertaking any long-term planning of resources. She often listened to stories which emphasized the helplessness of women to come to terms with their deeply felt need to ensure household subsistence. Hence

she was very sympathetic to individual attempts to reverse this habitual course of events. Quite instructive in this regard was her support for Marko and Margita's efforts to establish their household on principles of self-sustenance and independence.

4.2.2.3.1 Breaking away

After Margita's parents left Tercov she was able to move with her boyfriend Marko into a one-bedroom apartment in Block Three that her parents had left behind. Until then Marko and Margita occupied one room in Marko's parents' two-bedroom apartment, where they spent almost two years after the birth of their first daughter. Although they cohabited in one apartment with Marko's parents and three brothers, legally they constituted a separate household. As such they were eligible for welfare support for low-income families. This consisted of a child and parental allowance and an variable sum of money guaranteeing the minimum household subsistence level, which in their case amounted to about 7000 CZK[75] a month. Had they "really" been a separate household they would have been eligible for an additional housing allowance, which in this case accrued only to Marko's parents as the official heads of the household.

Marko and Margita's attempt to separate from his parents and to establish a genuine household on their own was for a long time a story of failed efforts. Under the existing conditions they had to be resourceful and reconciled with the fact that such a separation could be achieved only partially. Hence they tried to construct a household within a household both spatially and economically. They restored an annexed room from the abandoned apartment next door and made it into a kitchen. The symbolic separation culminated in Marko's placing

[75] Euro 280.

a door in the doorpost from the outside of the corridor to mark the main entry to their part of the apartment. The fantasy of an independent household was almost complete when they bought a small refrigerator and a stove, the signs of independent sustenance. However, the ideal repeatedly collided with details which eventually ruled out real independence. Regardless of the original parental endorsement of their decision to found a family, in practice it gave rise to a series of difficulties revealing the generally constraining conditions impinging upon social welfare recipients.

Because their little "apartment" did not have any functioning sanitary facility they were obliged to use the bathroom in the parent's space. The newly installed kitchen also did not have its own water supply; water had to be carried in buckets from the main part of the apartment. Consequently, their household budget was locked into the budget of Marko's parents by contributions to electricity, water and other bills. And, even this did not take place on equal terms: they contributed by half to every bill, although in number they didn't constitute half of the occupants of the apartment, and their contribution was not measured against their real consumption. This yearning for an autonomous source of income applied no less to Margita. Before their first daughter was born and Margita was still a minor (17 years old), and since the couple has been living out of wedlock, her parents' social benefits were officially still calculated as if she were part of their household. The additional welfare support which adjusts household incomes to the level of minimum subsistence is calculated after all benefits received by the household have been added together. Thus when Margita left to live with Marko, she also left with her social benefit check, which was intended for a dependent and which was issued in her name. However, her parents kept receiving welfare support as if her benefits were still part of the household income. Her parents thus insisted that they were entitled to her welfare money and kept claiming it. Caught in the middle of disputes between

parents from both sides, Margita had to balance the claims of both families every month. And since there wasn't any particular rule or reason which would favour one over the other— both were legitimate[76]—Margita and Marko were constantly badgered by both sides for their lack of attachment and loyalty.

Later, after the birth of their daughter, Marko and Margita started being confronted with yet another pressure: to merge their income from social benefits with those of Marko's family. This they resisted with varying degrees of success. The main mechanisms involved in the household economies of the long-term unemployed has to do with one of the principal survival strategies among the unemployed, namely to amass the largest possible resources needed to carry out collective bulk spending within a given period of time. In the case in question, pressure was exerted on Marko and Margita to contribute significant sums to household subsistence. For Marko and Margita, yielding to this pressure would have meant giving up any semblance of self-sustenance and independence. Typically, they would start the month as they wished: refill their stocks, contribute to the bills, and put some money aside for the rest of the month (as Marco said, "I would always have 'a thousander' in my pocket to buy cigarettes or drinks for myself. At that time, I believe, I was the only Gypsy (*cigán*) who had any 'spare dough' (*volný prachy*).") As the end of the month would approach and their parents' reserves would drain, Marko and Margita would be compelled first to lend them money and later to share the remainder of their own reserves with the rest of the family. Naturally the reserves corresponding to their needs as a small two-person household would be insufficient to provide for a household that was three times larger for any length of time. As a

[76] In Tercov both patterns of residence, patrilocality and matrilocality, are represented (4/3). Although patrilocality is considered as the preferred option, due to the shortage of housing it is practiced only sporadically. In the case under discussion the fact of patrilocal residence did therefore not justify claims to money from welfare benefits.

result, Marko and Margita would suffer shortages much earlier in the month than they had planned.

For Nadia their plight was the axiomatic expression of how poverty reproduces itself. In her eyes, the young couple had broken away from their parents' untenable way of life by consolidating their patterns of spending and by setting up their priorities according to common family values. Marko never declared his wish to "break with the gypsy way" (*po cikánsku*) – which he ascribed not only to his parents but to most Roma in Tercov – as openly in public as he did to the anthropologist. Instead, he expressed aversion to what he considered to be various expressions of this life-style. In contrast to the "gypsy way" he sought a life without malnutrition, to be independent from the exigencies of sharing with his larger family and to escape the communal life without privacy typical of gypsy settlements. For Nadia Marko and Margita's failure to follow their chosen way of life was caused solely by their social environment, for which the principles of long-term household consolidation were not a priority. Her approach towards the couple was thus often marked by a patronizing ethos symbolized, for example, in unexpected gifts of clothes for their children. If they found themselves in critical circumstances, Marko and Margita could rely on Nadia's willing spirit to give them credit. Paradoxically, Nadia's sympathies for their attempt to break away out of the vicious circle of poverty meant a more easy access to credit (often without the knowledge of Nadia's husband) which was, after all, a practice tailored to the economy of the poor. Eventually, her caring attitude towards the couple proved to be a kiss of death: as soon as the parents of both Marko and Margita found out about their children's favorable position in obtaining credit they started require them to take on credit for them after they had reached their own limit. Although Nadia never found out about it, Marko and Margita's disposition to repay their debts was no longer in their own hands.

To complete the picture we need to go back to the contrasting relation Martin established with his customers. Whereas Nadia responded to the complexity of circumstances of her customers by adopting various attitudes resulting in differentiated apprehensions of their situation, Martin's attitude was driven by the logic of standard agreements which erased the traces of the special circumstances in which his customers found themselves. However, this attitude was constantly clashing with the exigencies of the life from day to day his customers often maintained. The effort to fix a date for paying off debts was manifestly dependent on Martin's capacity to assess the right moment to do so. As he gradually got to know the dates when people cashed their benefits or pensions (welfare checks are received around the 23rd of each month, pensions arrive around the 7th), this moment became firmly fixed in time. The problem was that it reduced the time span between cashing the checks and spending the money in bulk to one to three days. Even when Martin attempted to keep tabs on what went on in this short time span (as, for example, when he went to the post office and waited at the entrance for indebted recipients of social benefits to cash their checks), it was much easier for his notoriously indebted customers to avoid repayment by going to cash their checks elsewhere. It is not surprising, then, that Nadia was much more successful in recovering debts than was Martin.

4.2.2.4 The "Take-over" of the Večerka

As soon as Martin had adjusted to his customers and their tastes, the Roma initiated a concomitant take-over of the *večerka*, which very soon gained the reputation of a "Gypsy store," signalled not only by the regular presence of a cluster of Roma outside and inside it but also by its unorthodox organization and animated ambience. The *večerka* was almost never visited by those who could not bear the idea of sharing a space where the hierarchy they

were used to was not respected (and there were even few people who publicly expressed disgust over the idea of sharing the space physically with Roma). Throughout my fieldwork, the customers of the *večerka* were predominantly the same people. Besides Roma these were also Czechs who in some way resembled Roma. They were equally marginalized in the village social order. They were either long-term unemployed or unskilled labourers who worked seasonally as loggers. Although informal credit was designed uniquely for Romani customers, the Czechs coming regularly to the *večerka* were often in a similar economic situation as the Roma. However, neither Martin nor the Czechs thought of the practice of informal credit as an option for them. For Standa, a young man in his twenties who worked as logger, it was acceptable to borrow money from a Romani friend but he would never take part in informal credit. And this was very typical of all the Czechs having close contact with the *večerka*: they were all very careful about keeping a public distance from informal credit. Through informal credit the *večerka* developed into an imaginative space where village social divisions materialized. The reluctance to be associated with informal credit would sometimes lead to absurd situations. When Standa was temporarily broke he would ask his Romani friend to buy for him on credit. A Romani friend helping Standa to escape association with Gypsyness reveals the fragility of the existing categories that associate poverty with Roma. At the same time it highlighted the fact that from the point of view of the Roma the *večerka* often offered a context in which they had the upper hand. What seems to me important here is the fact that the Roma integrated the *večerka*'s system of informal credit into their range of possible actions to such an extent that using the *večerka* became a regular strategy in their economic behaviour. What their more respectable and fortunate Czech neighbours considered shameful and humiliating, the Roma turned it into an economic device which allowed them to juggle the meagre resources they had in a way that it made them central to the functioning of exchange. The examples of how credit negotiations prompted actors to draw on a repertoire of

character roles would be infinite. But most importantly, in conjunction with this economic strategy, the *večerka* produced situations in which Roma restated their relations with their "significant others." Besides the *večerka* being a site of exchange its genuine contribution to social life consisted in the practice of informal credit as a new framework within which actors could claim a subjectivity denied to them outside of this framework. Those without money (the poor), by becoming moneyed (customers) reinvent the meaningless (being recipients of social benefits) as meaningful (objects of attraction).

4.2.2.5 *Postscript to Elias in Tercov: Pars pro* toto

The analysis of informal credit hence complements the previous analysis of sociability in that it brings to light one of the arenas where notions of Gypsyness are charged with yet another power. This time the division between Roma as Gypsies and Roma as non-Gypsies was marked by the negotiation of credit, which brought to the fore a different register relating to trust as the central value of socialization. All the Roma appearing in the account above belonged to Block Three. Actually Šafrán and Biba are Marko's parents. The conflicts between the generations were made more visible only because the *večerka* offered a context where they could have been articulated. And the conflict would have never come to light were not there the choice available to Marko and Margita to envisage a separate life after the departure of Margita's parents. This was an absolutely exceptional circumstance. In Tercov it is common that three generations live in one apartment. Marko's peers in Block Two, often his cousins, also resolved to found families but they didn't have the choice of leaving the apartment of their parents. Not only they shared the same apartment, they even shared with them the same room. Under such conditions the thought of coming off with their own ideas how to organize household sustenance and reproduction was not even a potentiality. There

was only one fridge and one stove for storing and preparing food. The strategy of amassing the maximum of resources at a time for the eventual bulk spending was unquestionable. Nadia did not have the counter example against which she could measure the readiness to abandon the vicious circle of poverty for her customers from Block Two. From her point of view most of the households from Block Two did not speak with two voices: Ferko never ever went shopping to the *večerka*, this was a duty reserved to his wife Helena. He also for most of the year did not search for possible earnings like Šafrán and was not therefore in possession of different money than the money from social benefits. The economies of households of Ferko's family in Block Two were organized like a network. If one of the households reached the credit limit, another household would come to help taking a credit on its name without the creditor necessarily knowing about it. Requests for postponing the repayment or for raising the credit limit were exceptional. Thus to Nadia and Martin Block Two always seemed to comply with the trust they built with them. More importantly, people from Block Two fuelled this feeling by stressing their different credit history in comparison with people from Block Three. Helena for example never missed the opportunity to distinguish herself from Biba by gossiping about Biba's constant failure to regularly assure hot meals for her household. Other people from Block Two gossiped about Laci and Dáša and their repeated indebtedness. Regularly the "bad" characteristics of the "worst" households or persons from Block Three were attributed to the entire Block. And vice versa, Block Two was envisaged through the example of its "best" representatives. The principle of *pars pro toto* whereby the *anomic* minority of the outsider group comes to represent the group as such and the *nomic* minority of the established group comes to represent the other governed the mechanism confirming the distinction between the blocks regardless of the factual circumstances and comportments of the households (see Elias 1994: xix).

5 Conclusion: Is Escaping Gypsyness the same as Escaping Poverty?

Drawing on the evidence presented so far the answer to the question in title of this concluding chapter would be positive. The coincidence of Gypsyness and poverty was demonstrated on several levels. The power relations between the fractions of Roma in Tercov are to big extent vehicled by ideas of Gypsyness associated with a destitute life-style. One of the major idioms in the perception of the Roma which creeps into their sensitivity is that of spatial segregation and poor housing conditions. In the realm of employment the mutual complementarity of Gypsyness and poverty is recast in the discourse of deservingness which efficiently transforms social categories into cultural schemata and creates in the negative sense the exclusion of the Roma from the "moral community". The same mingling of the social into cultural and back could be in fact also demonstrated on the interaction between the Roma and the social workers at the Social welfare department. Here the dialectic is recast yet in another correlative categorization of social welfare abuse and the impecunious claimant. The real needy are imagined as pious and vulnerable, demonstrating humility and willingness for cooperation. Although the Roma claimants fall according to the official measures among the neediest, their bodily prowes, temper, insistence and disorientation happen to fall in how the social workers imagine the immodest abuser of social welfare.

Yet all this evidence pertains to how the Roma encounter the ideologies and practices that oblige them to escape the harming misrepresentations in what I dare to call the "natural setting". It is all too different a situation when the same happens to jam into a wider public debate in which helping the Roma is at stake. How to escape Gypsyness rehearsed under the "great new global vulgate" of culture of poverty? (see Hegburg 2007: 16). I am raising a

question to which this essay cannot give an answer. The reason is precisely that it stops short when it should have tackled the other domain participating at the production of poverty discourse and specifically in relation to the 'new Gypsy question': the helping sector whose double visage of an agent of emancipation and policy designer places it at the conjunction of the State, social sciences and civic society.

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