

5 Into the 1960s

Politics Gets Personal

A teenage Roma girl sits in a bathtub in a run-down shack while a portly trade union official, fully dressed, soaps down her naked body with a sponge. At the same time the man delivers a political speech. ‘Who is the new socialist person?’ he asks. ‘Me!’ replies the girl, her face covered in bubbles. The unsettling scene appears in *Larks on a String*, a provocative comedy made in 1969 by Jiří Menzel, a rising star of the Czech New Wave whose first feature film, *Closely Observed Trains*, won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1967. But *Larks on a String* was filmed in the uncertain months following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and was immediately banned, being released only after the Communist regime had collapsed.¹ The film satirised the Stalinist terror of the 1950s by poking fun at the political re-education of a motley band of ‘bourgeois elements’ sentenced to hard labour at the Kladno steelworks. Caricatured representations of ‘wild’ Gypsies are used to mock the Communist regime’s obsession with social hygiene and discipline. Thus a prison guard marries a Gypsy woman, who makes a fire on the floor of their brand-new apartment, while the trade union official sneaks after Gypsy children, creepily brandishing a face cloth. By invoking sexualised Roma bodies as symbols of freedom in the face of Stalinist political repression, *Larks on a String* exemplifies a shift in the politics of the Gypsy Question by the late 1960s.

As post-Stalinist regimes retreated from defining equality solely in terms of paid work, Roma were increasingly viewed not as workers and citizens but as objects of care.² The perception that Gypsies were failing to integrate into socialist society drove planners, bureaucrats, and experts to develop new policies to combat poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion amongst Czechoslovak Roma during the 1960s. Informed by

¹ Jiří Menzel, *Larks on a String* (*Skřivánci na niti*, 1969, released 1990).

² On the reformulation of welfare on the basis of ‘need’ in socialist Hungary, see Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

deeply gendered assumptions about Gypsy culture and ethnicity, these included the revival of eugenic policies – in particular, the coercive sterilisation of ‘socially unadaptable’ Romani women – to control the ‘quality’ of the Gypsy population.³ As in Western Europe, Gypsies in socialist countries were frequently characterised as ‘deviant’ or belonging to ‘problem families’, whose needs required managing by medical, health, and welfare agencies. The social exclusion of the Gypsy population was medicalised and pathologised by doctors, social workers, educators, and public health experts.⁴

An increasing number of other social groups – such as abandoned children, the mentally ill, alcoholics, rebellious teenagers, and single mothers – were also categorised in euphemistic terms as ‘socially unadaptable people’ whose citizenship rights were reformulated as ‘needs’ to be managed by the socialist state.⁵ This tendency became more pronounced as socialist regimes retreated from the Stalinist insistence that a full employment economy would eliminate poverty and social inequality by turning all citizens into workers and socialising the unpaid labour of child-rearing and housework. In 1965, government officials introduced an ambitious new policy of resettling rural Gypsies in industrialised regions. But the resettlement programme, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, was a failure. Moreover, the scheme provoked criticism from Czechoslovakia’s leading critical cultural magazine, *Literární noviny*, demonstrating that utopian schemes of herculean social engineering had lost their grip on the socialist society of the 1960s. As Czechoslovakia edged towards the Prague Spring, a wider range of social actors – including writers, artists, activists, and social scientists – began to redefine the Gypsy Question as a litmus test for individual autonomy and civil rights in the socialist state.

The discursive link between Romani bodies, individual autonomy, and citizenship rights has been central to international campaigns around the human rights of Roma in post-communist Europe, above all in claims about the forced or coerced sterilisation of Roma women. This was exemplified in *Body and Soul: Forced Sterilization and Other Assaults on Roma Reproductive Freedom in Slovakia*, a 2003 report produced by the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights in cooperation with

³ Věra Sokolová, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity: Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2008).

⁴ Eszter Varsa, ‘Child Protection, Residential Care and the “Gypsy Question” in Early State Socialist Hungary’, in Sabine Hering (ed.), *Social Care Under State Socialism, 1945–1989: Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen: Barbara Budich, 2009), 149–159.

⁵ Haney, *Inventing the Needy*.

Poradňa, a Slovak advocacy organisation. Arguing that discrimination against Roma is ‘historically based’, the report claimed that policies of forced sterilisation under the Nazi regime were ‘continued during Communist times in Czechoslovakia, when Romani women were specifically targeted for sterilization through government laws and programs that provided monetary incentives and condoned misinformation and coercion’. The report concluded that Slovak government officials and health care providers continue to ‘openly condone attitudes and practices that violate the bodily integrity, health rights and human dignity of Romani women’.⁶ But communist-era sterilisation policies (which, unlike Nazi programmes, have been the main target of contemporary human rights campaigns in post-communist Europe) were not simply a continuation of Nazi policies. Nor were such practices specifically Communist, as demonstrated by the use of sterilisation as a eugenic measure targeting allegedly ‘asocial’ or ‘feeble-minded’ individuals (including Gypsies and Jenisch) in Scandinavia or Switzerland until at least the 1970s.⁷ Government programs targeting Roma women for sterilisation in Czechoslovakia, alongside housing and education programmes aimed at Gypsies deemed socially ‘unadaptable’, were developed in the context of changing – and contested – conceptions of social rights during the 1960s.

Social Rights and Private Life

After the violence and arbitrary rule of Stalinism, citizens across the Eastern bloc were promised a whole range of expanded rights – to education, health, decent housing, rest and relaxation, and even limited ownership of private property.⁸ Socialist citizens enjoyed higher living standards, longer periods of leisure as a result of shortened working days and extended holidays, and a more robust sense of protection from the state.⁹ But at the same time, as a wealth of scholarship by historians of

⁶ Center for Reproductive Rights, *Body and Soul: Forced Sterilization and Other Assaults on Roma Reproductive Freedom in Slovakia* (New York: Center for Reproductive Rights, 2003).

⁷ Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996); Thomas Huonker, *Diagnose: Moralisch Defekt. Kastration, Sterilisation und Rassenhygiene im Dienst der Schweizer Sozialpolitik und Psychiatrie 1890–1970* (Zurich: Orell Füssli, 2003).

⁸ Paul Betts, ‘Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights’, *Humanity* (Winter 2012); Mark B. Smith, ‘Social Rights in the Soviet Dictatorship: The Constitutional Right to Welfare from Stalin to Brezhnev’, *Humanity* (Winter 2012).

⁹ Betts, ‘Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights’.

gender and sexuality has shown, societies and states across East Central Europe were challenging the ideal of the worker-citizen as the sole bearer of those rights.¹⁰ As Barbara Havelková writes, policies towards women in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s marked a turn ‘from equality of paid work to care’.¹¹ With birth rates declining at a precipitous rate, socialist governments refocused their attention on the protection of motherhood and the family to counteract the effects of women entering employment in massive numbers since World War II.¹² The post-Stalin era saw the ideology of equality challenged by debates about ‘natural’ differences between men and women. Gender was thus central to the broader critiques of everyday life under socialist rule that emerged during the 1960s in the aftermath of public debates about the injustices of Stalinism, such as campaigns for the rehabilitation of victims of the Terror.¹³ Private life – the worlds of home, sexuality, and family – became a key site for struggles over the expanding range of social rights that Communist regimes, seeking legitimacy, offered their citizens in the wake of Stalinism.¹⁴

Social rights were a crucial battleground between reformists and conservatives within the Czechoslovak Communist Party during the 1960s.¹⁵ Yet this has often been neglected in scholarship on the movement for ‘socialism with a human face’, which has focused on the links between economic reform, cultural liberalisation, and political change culminating in the revival of ‘civil society’ during the Prague Spring of 1968. According to this narrative, the defeat of the Czechoslovak movement for a democratic socialism by Soviet tanks in August 1968 heralded an era of ‘normalised’ socialist rule, in which the Communist Party maintained

¹⁰ Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Shana Penn and Jill Massino, *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹¹ Barbara Havelková, ‘The Three Stages of Gender in Law’, in Hana Havelková and Libora Oates-Indruchová (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism: An Expropriated Voice* (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹² Haney, *Inventing the Needy*.

¹³ See Paulina Bren, ‘Women on the Verge of Desire: Women, Work, and Consumption in Socialist Czechoslovakia’, in David Crowley and Susan Reid (eds.), *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 177–195.

¹⁴ The most eloquent exploration of this theme is Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Tomasz Inglot, *Welfare States in East Central Europe, 1919–2004* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

control over the population by means of a social contract that promised material security and a quiet life in return for political quiescence. Social welfare, in this version of Czechoslovak history, thus appears as a handmaiden of political repression, clothed in a petty-bourgeois language of family values, consumerism, and peace of mind. But as this chapter shows, the welfare reforms of the 1970s actually originated in the years before the Prague Spring.

In 1960, a new constitution declared the ČSR to be a ‘developed socialist state’ with an obligation to guarantee positive social rights to all citizens.¹⁶ The preamble stated that the destruction of capitalism had eliminated economic crisis and unemployment, along with the ‘exploitation of man by man’.¹⁷ At the same time, Czechoslovakia became the first state to codify the supremacy of the Communist Party in the constitution. Yet almost immediately the country experienced a severe and unexpected economic recession. At the start of the third Five Year Plan, this highly industrialised economy nearly collapsed. Although not the only factor, the economic crisis contributed to a sense among younger party functionaries that the new ‘all-people’s state’ should be more than a triumphalist device to suppress mass resistance but rather the start of a change in the way the country was governed.¹⁸

Rethinking the role of the all-people’s state prompted the emergence of new approaches to citizenship, previously dismissed as a bourgeois fallacy by Marxist thinkers. The new system of economic management, announced in 1965, proposed to give enterprises greater autonomy to plan production and boost productivity by incentivising workers through performance-related bonuses. Some reformers, especially Zdeněk Mlynář and Michal Lakatoš, recognised that economic reform would require a deeper rethinking of law and democracy.¹⁹ Revisionist Marxism provided an ideological underpinning for legal scholars who began to reconsider the relationship between the state and its citizens in a socialist democracy.²⁰ In his 1964 essay *State and Man* the lawyer Mlynář – who later drafted the political recommendations in the 1968 Action Programme – suggested that the idea of ‘man as citizen’ (or as a holder of

¹⁶ Zdeněk Jičínský, *Právní myšlení v 60. letech a za normalizace* (Prague: Prospektrum, 1992).

¹⁷ Prohlášení, *Ústava Československé socialistické republiky* (11 July 1960).

¹⁸ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16.

¹⁹ H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

²⁰ Michal Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce: Zrod a počátky marxistického revizionismu ve střední Evropě 1953–1960* (Prague: Argo, 2009).

equal and natural rights) might be a necessary stage on the path towards the final negation of citizenship under Communism. A year later the Slovak legal scholar Michal Lakatoš provided one of the earliest theoretical formulations of a socialist society based on conflicting interests, not only different relationships to the production process but also ‘natural’ differences such as ethnic origins or gender.²¹

As the socialist regime began to question the assumption that integrating Roma into paid employment would turn ‘Gypsies’ into fully assimilated worker-citizens, questions of natural or ‘biological’ difference re-entered officials’ vocabulary. Across Eastern Europe, as the anthropologist Michael Stewart writes, ‘the Gypsies became proletarian and yet stayed Rom.’²² Recalling the gendered dynamics of modernising welfare states across Europe, socialist governments displayed a revived interest in regulating the private sphere of Romani family life. Romani culture, rather than the legacies of capitalism, was once again seen as the major obstacle to assimilation. Thousands of Roma were still living in isolated settlements in rural Slovakia, officials noted, while in the Czech lands migrant Roma tended to form close-knit communities in cities and towns. Party officials fretted about the continuing residential segregation of Gypsies, which they saw as a major barrier to integration. Women, in particular, became the main target of criticism. A report submitted to the Politburo by Slovak Communist Party officials in 1961 blamed the unfinished process of integration on ‘Gypsy women, their frequent pregnancies, tendency to laziness, and unwillingness to work’.²³

The ‘protection’ of Romani children from the allegedly corrupting influence of their families exemplified the care and coercion exercised by the socialist welfare state over the private lives of Romani citizens. A semi-official practice of placing Roma children in schools for children with special educational needs was a central pillar of the state’s assimilation policy. In 1958, the Education Ministry issued a directive instructing head teachers and National Committees to place ‘neglected’ Gypsy children with a history of absenteeism and truancy in separate schools or classrooms for ‘young people requiring special care’. However, the directive warned, under no circumstances were such schools to be marked with the sign ‘For Gypsy Children’. The ministry further

²¹ Michal Lakatoš, ‘On Certain Problems of the Management of Our Political System’, *Pravny Obzor*, 48:1 (1965), 26–35, cited in Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

²² Michael Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 138.

²³ NA, AÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 331, a.j. 422/10: Politické byro Ústředního výboru KSČ: *Plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem*, 14 December 1961.

instructed schoolteachers and local officials to prosecute the parents of Gypsy children who were persistently absent from school, by either imposing criminal sanctions under the Law on the Protection of Youth or placing the children in care by a decision of the court. Further directives were issued in 1961 and 1963. Pedagogical handbooks focusing on the education of Gypsy children continued to speak of the need to raise ‘new people’.²⁴

The decision to place a Gypsy child in a ‘special school’ was made by psychologists on the basis of IQ tests that were strongly reliant on cultural knowledge. Insufficient knowledge of the Czech language, in particular, was frequently used as a reason. The cultural rights of Roma were reframed as social problems during socialist rule, above all concerning the status of the Romani language. This was partly a legacy of the national traditions of the interwar years when, as we have seen, the cultural rights of minorities were interpreted as collective rights belonging to national communities rather than individual human rights. The nation, as Tara Zahra writes, became the privileged liberal subject in interwar Czechoslovakia, and individuals lost the right to freely choose their nationality. By the 1960s, the socialist government had granted limited cultural rights to speakers of German, Hungarian, and Polish, but Gypsies continued to be defined as a ‘backwards ethnic group’ rather than a nation. Romani was dismissed as a dialect or cant, and Roma children who spoke Czech or Slovak imperfectly were frequently assigned to separate classrooms or schools for children with special educational needs.²⁵

Official policy refused to acknowledge the existence of a Romani language that could potentially support Roma claims to nationhood. In fact the survival of Romani, not as a relic of primitive society but as a language being used in everyday life, was tacitly acknowledged by the KSČ Ideological Committee when it commissioned a *Handbook of the Gypsy Language [Příručka cikánštiny]* from an academic philologist, Jiří Lípa, in late 1959. Local activists in Slovakia had already experimented with cyclostyle ‘Gypsy-Slovak’ dictionaries, but this handbook, which appeared in 1963, was the first to be published by a state publishing house.²⁶ It aimed ‘to familiarise non-Gypsies, at least passively, with the basics of the most widespread dialects of Czechoslovak Gypsy groups

²⁴ Vladimír Predmerský, *Rastú nám noví ľudia.: Problémy výchovy detí cigánskeho pôvodu* (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvá, 1961).

²⁵ Iulias Rostas, *Ten Years After*.

²⁶ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, (1960–1969), Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, kart.7, sp. 47, *Alfabetizátor. Bulletin pre MNV, OZ, ZDS, ZV-ROH o práci medzi občan. cig. pôvodu*, March 1965, vydal Okr. Osvetový dom v Bardejove, p. 8 – refers to ‘the first cyclostyle “Slovak-Gypsy” dictionary’ produced in 1958 by J. Novák and A. Sivák.

from the area of Humenné in eastern Slovakia'.²⁷ Jiří Lípa had started to research Romani dialects in Slovakia as a student in 1949. The idea of recognising Romani as a language rather than a collection of dialects – and by extension recognising the Gypsies as a nationality – seemed to be anathema to Lípa. At the 1953 conference of Gypsy activists at the Oriental Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Lípa had strongly criticised efforts by activists such as Karel Holubec to claim cultural rights for the Roma. Holubec later reported to the KSČ that 'the philologist Dr. Lípa claimed that under socialism the conditions for creating a literary language for this minority don't exist (!) and that there are only gypsy dialects, and spoke strongly against using the Gypsy language in basic political and health education (!!).' ²⁸

That a Romani grammar and dictionary – even if aimed only at teachers and policemen – was deemed necessary by KSČ ideologists indicated that the Romani language could not simply be dismissed as 'jargon' or 'thieves' cant', as party ideologists had done in a manner reminiscent of a nineteenth-century criminologist. According to Marxist linguistics, the author of *The Gypsy Question in the ČSSR* stated, *cikánština* 'has no future as an independent language'.²⁹ In practice, however, matters were not so simple. A heated row broke out between the Ideological Committee, the Academy of Sciences, the state publishing house for pedagogical literature, and the Education Ministry about the correct form the 'Gypsy language handbook' should take. Otakar Zeman, the party ideologist responsible for policy on the Gypsy Question, had commissioned Jiří Lípa – then working at the Czech Language Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences – to write a 'popular handbook' on the Gypsy language' for 'non-linguists'.³⁰ The book was to include three Gypsy dialects: 'Czecho-Slovak', 'Hungarian', and 'Vlach'. Two years later, Dr Lípa was outraged to be told by the publisher that his seven-hundred-page manuscript did not meet the requirements of either brevity or accessibility.³¹ Moreover, the academicians became irritated when Eva Bacíková, the indefatigable and long-serving Education Ministry official, tried to turn Lípa's 'handbook'

²⁷ Jiří Lípa, *Příručka cikánštiny* (Prahague, : SPN, 1963).

²⁸ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv 36, a.j. 295: Letter from Holubec to J. Köhler, Secretary of ÚV KSČ, 23 May 1954.

²⁹ Jaroslav Sus, *Cikánská otázka v ČSSR* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1961), 32.

³⁰ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv 36, a.j. 296: Letter from Jiří Lípa to Otakar Zeman, 21 December 1962.

³¹ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv 36, a.j. 296: Letter from Jiří Lípa to Otakar Zeman, 21 December 1962.

into a 'textbook'.³² Fuming, Dr Lípa wrote a furious letter to Otakar Zeman in which he accused the publisher and Bacíková of 'demagoguery' and voiced a suspicion that their doubts about the viability of his weighty tome were not only related to practical problems caused by 'the current paper shortage' but also 'might be connected to their interest in publishing a dilettantish *Gypsy Language Textbook* by M. Hübschmannová'.³³

The battle over Dr Lípa's 'Gypsy language handbook' was not, of course, purely academic. While the academicians asserted that the handbook should merely aid a passive understanding of Romani dialects, Eva Bacíková seems to have argued that a 'textbook' for the active use of Romani was needed instead. The head of the Institute for Czech Language, Professor Bohuslav Havránek, claimed that this was nonsense. 'Almost no-one is going to study the Gypsy language in the same way as Spanish, for example,' he objected in a letter to Zeman. Jiří Lípa was even more explicit. The handbook should answer practical needs, he explained: 'This becomes clear when we consider how most people will use my handbook. Someone who knows nothing about the Gypsy language – a teacher, for example, or a member of the police force [SNB] – will hear some Gypsy word and will want to understand what it means.' For this purpose, Lípa continued, a dictionary and a grammar would suffice. Lípa warned that publishing a textbook would 'give the impression that we are putting emphasis on non-Gypsies *learning* the Gypsy language'. For Lípa this idea was apparently so ludicrous that it required no further qualification. Finally, still smarting under the indignity of having to cut his voluminous draft to a paltry 150 pages because of the paper shortage, Lípa retorted that a textbook – far from being more economical than his lengthy grammar – would actually be a complete 'waste of paper'.³⁴

The desegregation of school education for Romani children has become a feature of human rights campaigns in post-communist Europe. A 2007 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *D. H. v. Czech Republic* found that Roma children in Ostrava had suffered from indirect discrimination on the grounds that they were placed in 'special schools' rather than mainstream elementary schools. Such cases are interpreted as evidence of racial discrimination against Roma.

³² NA Praha, ÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv. 36 a.j. 296. Letter from Bohuslav Havránek, Director of Czech Language Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, to Eva Bacíková and Otakar Zeman, 28 February 1962.

³³ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv. 36 a.j. 296. Letter from Jiří Lípa to Otakar Zeman, 11 March 1962.

³⁴ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv. 36 a.j. 296. Letter from Jiří Lípa to Otakar Zeman, 11 March 1962.

The practice of segregated schooling immediately suggests a comparison with the United States before the era of civil rights; lawyers such as Jack Greenberg, who as head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund litigated school desegregation cases including *Brown v. Board of Education*, have advocated for Roma in cases of school desegregation in post-communist Europe.³⁵ A much-cited article by Greenberg draws a clear parallel between the histories of Roma in Eastern Europe and African Americans, both turning on experiences of slavery and persecution. For the purposes of this chapter, however, Greenberg's essay is more relevant as evidence of the transnational circulation of civil rights movements during the Cold War and the translation of notions such as 'racial discrimination' in the process.

The legal backgrounds to the cases of *Brown* and *D. H. v. Czech Republic* were, as Greenberg notes, very different. In the United States, state laws mandated the creation of separate schools for black and white students, while in the Czech Republic, the European Court of Human Rights was trying to enforce the implementation of laws that already existed. The tension between official discourses of equality in Communist Czechoslovakia and cultural constructions of racial difference has been brilliantly explored by Věra Sokolová.³⁶ Yet the official ideology of equality was itself undergoing a significant transformation during the 1960s.

Official refusal to treat Romani as a language rather than a dialect or cant was rooted in Czech-Slovak traditions of 'national' culture and had clear parallels with the treatment of other minority languages in nation-alising states throughout Europe. Yet the reformulation of Roma culture as a 'social problem' was reinforced by social scientists and experts in the fields of social welfare and health, who insistently framed Roma culture in terms of deviant social behaviour.³⁷ By the mid-1960s, debates about the social rights of Roma citizens – to education, decent housing, and health – saw a marked change from the earlier emphasis on equality in paid work and citizenship. Gendered assumptions about the private lives of Roma and in particular the role of 'Gypsy women' as a barrier to assimilation shaped a new set of policies that redefined Roma as objects of care within the socialist state. By law, Roma were equal citizens, but as

³⁵ Jack Greenberg, 'Report on Roma Education Today: From Slavery to Segregation and Beyond', *Columbia Law Review*, 110:4 (May 2010); see also Iulias Rostas (ed.), *Ten Years After: A History of Roma School Desegregation in Central and Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Roma Education Fund and Central European University Press, 2012).

³⁶ Sokolová, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity*.

³⁷ Vladimír Srb and Olga Vomáčková, 'Cikáni v Československu v roce 1968', *Demografie* (1969), 221–230.

Věra Sokolová has written, social scientists and experts in the fields of social welfare, education, and health pathologised Gypsy culture and ethnicity as deviant. However, both the socialist state and society recognised that the time for radical social engineering had passed.

Managing the Gypsy Population

The KSČ adopted a new policy on the Gypsy Question in 1965, ahead of the Thirteenth Party Congress, for which major reports on social problems, such as youth, had also been prepared. A Government Committee for Questions Relating to the Gypsy Population was established. The State Statistical Office was instructed to collect statistics on the number of Roma in each district and found that more than 220,000 ‘Gypsies’ were living in Czechoslovakia, the fourth largest Roma population in socialist Europe after Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. At the first meeting of the new committee in October 1965, KSČ functionary Otakar Zeman proudly declared that ‘No other country in the world has such a high-level governmental body devoted to solving the gypsy question.’ Composed of planners, ministry officials, prosecutors, the trade unions, and the youth organisation, the committee was also given a budget of Kč 75 million. Zeman claimed that Western countries were fascinated by the Czechoslovak approach, adding that ‘our methods serve as a model for other countries in the socialist camp. The gypsy question and its solution is a global problem’.³⁸

Functionaries in the Central Committee were certainly keeping an eye on developments in the West. In June 1965, leading party ideologist Jiří Hendrych reported that a ‘World Gypsy Society’ had been established in Montreuil, France, and was aiming to unite ‘the “roma people” [sic] with the rest of the population across borders, race, class and religion because – they say – “we are all brothers on the earth”’.³⁹ This referred to the Communauté Mondiale Gitane, founded that year by Ionel Rotaru, a Romanian émigré in France, which was the forerunner to the Comité International Tsigane. (The committee was banned in France in 1965, but the KSČ report did not mention this.) Hendrych’s report also noted that the Catholic Church was taking a greater interest in the problem of ‘nomads’ and that the Papal Consistorial

³⁸ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, kart 9, sp. 10: Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvatel'stvo: *Zápis z jednání Vládního výboru pro otázky cikánského obyvatel'stva dne 18. prosince 1965.*

³⁹ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ f. 01/1, sv. 110, a.j. 114/4: Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ: *Kontrolní zpráva o plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvatel'stvem v ČSSR, 15 June 1965.*

Congregation had issued instructions on ‘adapting religious ceremonies to the psychology of gypsy populations’. Pope John Paul VI had created an international secretariat for the pastoral care of nomadic peoples within the Consistorial Congregation in 1965.

Regional and local Committees for Work Among the Gypsy Population were established across the country and staffed by National Committee officials, as well as volunteers. Otto Ulč, a young judge from Plzeň who volunteered to join his local Gypsy Committee, claimed in his memoirs that this position was just one of many voluntary roles he was expected to perform. Writing from the vantage point of exile in the United States after 1968, Ulč remembered his work on the Gypsy Committee as time-consuming, pointless, and frustrating.⁴⁰ ‘Anyone with any stake in society had to be “involved”’, wrote Ulč. While Ulč’s émigré perspective suggests that volunteering during socialism was not an authentic expression of ‘civil society’, research by Czech sociologists on practices of volunteering reveals a more complex picture, highlighting the social meaning of participation in collective social work, such as participation in labour brigades or Action Z.⁴¹

Romani activists, meanwhile, had to tread a fine line between voluntary work and activities that might be construed as supporting Romani nationalism. When Gustáv Karika wrote to Otakar Zeman, the party functionary responsible for Gypsy affairs, asking how he could apply for a position in the new committee, he was rebuffed. An impersonal note from the Ideological Committee informed Karika that ‘submitting an application for this position is pointless. This is not an administrative role but a political function, for which applications are not accepted.’⁴² This was partly the result of a broader shift away from mass agitation and ideological work, as the Czechoslovak regime instead embraced a less militant concept of ‘cultural and educational work’ with socialist citizens.⁴³ Local party activists who happened to be of Roma origin, however, were obliged to defend themselves against more specific charges of ‘Gypsiology’, which implied politically disloyal Roma nationalism. Thus a member of one regional branch of the Gypsy Committees, who

⁴⁰ Otto Ulč, *The Judge in a Communist State: A View from Within* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1972), 54.

⁴¹ Tereza Pospíšilová, ‘Dobrovolnictví v České republice před rokem 1989: Diskurzy, definice, aktualizace’, *Sociologický časopis*, 2011, vo. 47:, no. 5 (2011), 887–910.

⁴² NA Praha, AÚV KSC, f. 05/3, sv 37, a.j. 301: Z materiálů s. Zemana k otázce Němců, cikánů, mládeže, k mezinárodním vztahem: Letter from GK to Zeman, Ideological Committee, 29 June 1964.

⁴³ Martin Franc and Jiří Knapík, *Volný čas v českých zemích 1957–1967* (Prague: Academia, 2013), 71.

apparently was accused of ‘Gypsiology’ in his work to improve the social conditions of Roma in western Slovakia, retorted in a letter to the Central Committee that he was simply trying to ‘uproot citizens of gypsy origin from the inhuman environment in which most of them live, so that they can live like people and become useful to society, rather than being a burden’.⁴⁴

Yet reports compiled by the State Security (StB) about Milena Hübschmannová, who would become the leading activist on behalf of Romani culture in Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring, reveal that her interest in ‘Gypsies’ was not yet seen as politically subversive. In the early 1960s, when she was working for Czechoslovak Radio, the StB attempted to recruit Hübschmannová as an informer on the ‘former bourgeois resistance’, whom the regime suspected of trying to sabotage the socialist economy.⁴⁵ The young woman was viewed as a potential agent because she knew foreign languages and had contacts with the ‘bourgeoisie’, either those who had emigrated or those in Czechoslovakia. Despite her own ‘petty bourgeois’ class origins, the StB believed that Hübschmannová was ‘devoted’ to socialism and had displayed no signs of ‘intellectual liberalism’.⁴⁶ The StB official assigned to recruit Hübschmannová described her as ‘an intelligent woman’ who was ‘courteous, polite, good-natured and sociable’, ‘principled and serious’. Her attempt to enter the Foreign Ministry as an interpreter in 1956 had failed because of her father’s past. Interviewed by an StB agent, Hübschmannová explained her father had been a lawyer who was interned in 1942 in the Svatobořice concentration camp. After the war he was freed but lived estranged from his family outside Prague, having been forced into manual labour in the Kladno mines, and then as a technician for the state railways in Prague. Tactically – and perhaps also truthfully – Hübschmannová claimed that poverty and the absence of her father at home led her to seek ‘a collective outside the family’. She began studying Hindi and Bengali at the age of fifteen and in 1951 entered Charles University to study Indian languages, literature, and journalism. Her StB file presented her work with Roma as an issue of marginal interest, proof only that she was a good socialist citizen who ‘studied the Gypsy language and . . . collected songs and fairytales.’⁴⁷

⁴⁴ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 05/3, sv. 36, a.j. 297: Letter from JK to ÚV KSS, 9 December 1964.

⁴⁵ ÚSTR ČR, 565307 MV: MV – *Osobní svazek spolupracovníka – Krycí jméno MILENA – registrovano u I. zvláštního odb. MV č sv 12210.*

⁴⁶ ÚSTR ČR, 565307 MV: MV – *Osobní svazek spolupracovníka – Krycí jméno MILENA – registrovano u I. zvláštního odb. MV č sv 12210.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Debates about economic reform, however, threatened to politicise the Roma question in new ways. Government officials worried about the consequences of the New Economic Model for unskilled Roma workers, especially in Slovakia. There was already widespread concern within the Communist Party about the socially destabilising effects of planned reforms. In March 1966 the Central Committee discussed public opinion surveys that registered strong dissatisfaction with the perceived decline in living standards over the past five years.⁴⁸ Wages were still rising, but consumers were unable to satisfy their demand for goods, and there was a widespread perception that Czechoslovakia was lagging behind the West. Since the legitimacy of the party-state was tied to its promise of delivering higher living standards, party officials worried that citizens' dissatisfaction would spill over into political unrest.⁴⁹ A policy paper on the 'Main Aspects of Social Policy' in early 1966 defined social policy as a crucial means of ensuring that economic reform did not endanger social security. The report proposed larger contributions from citizens to finance subsidised services, in particular crèches and kindergartens, school meals, and the provision of cultural goods.⁵⁰

With the introduction of self-management looming, officials suggested that companies should receive subsidies to employ Roma and set up separate schools for their children.⁵¹ Contemporary reports were full of complaints about illiteracy, low qualifications, job-hopping, and absenteeism among Roma workers. A 1966 sociological survey of nine hundred Roma workers in eastern Slovakia found a disproportionately high number in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs as bricklayers, electricians and tractor drivers on cooperative farms. More than half were living in dormitories, thus travelling for work and probably able to visit their families once a week at most. Workers were forced to move because permanent jobs in local agriculture or forestry in eastern Slovakia were scarce; most companies preferred to keep a fairly small permanent labour force, supplemented by large numbers of casual labourers in the spring and summer to plant trees or cut the hay. Seasonal agricultural labour, mostly performed by women and teenagers, was correspondingly low

⁴⁸ Jiří Kocian, 'Soziale Aspekte der Wirtschaftsreform in der Tschechoslowakei in den sechziger Jahren', in Christoph Boyer (ed.), *Sozialistische Wirtschaftsreformen: Tschechoslowakei und DDR im Vergleich* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 477–500.

⁴⁹ Kocian, 'Soziale Aspekte der Wirtschaftsreform', 490; Karel Kaplan, *Kořený československé reformy 1968* (Brno: Doplněk, 2002).

⁵⁰ Kaplan, *Kořený*, 20–21.

⁵¹ Anna Jurová, *Vývoj rómskej problematiky na Slovensku po roku 1945* (Bratislava: Goldpress, 1993), 81.

paid. Officials assumed that practices such as job-hopping were proof of social ‘unadaptability’. In fact, the opposite was true. High-status families in the Roma villages studied by British sociologist Will Guy were the ones who migrated first to the Czech lands and later became the first co-op workers. ‘The most highly motivated Gypsies were constantly watching for better opportunities and made tremendous sacrifices to attain their goals.’⁵²

The new Government Committee for Questions Relating to the Gypsy Population worried that under the new system of economic management, it would be impossible ‘simply to force enterprises to employ these people’.⁵³ Yet officials worried that positive discrimination towards Gypsies would be unconstitutional. Considering the possibility of amending Law 74 on Nomadic Persons for this purpose, one bureaucrat declared that ‘we cannot interpret the Constitution that strictly and juristically . . . I still say that the proposed measures are not unconstitutional.’⁵⁴ Officials fretted that it was ‘annoying that we are afraid of saying openly that we are trying to solve the gypsy problem’. Once again, grumbled another, ‘they tell us to create sanctions in some camouflaged form, when what we really need is to tell these people openly how they should behave, if they don’t want to face criminal charges’.⁵⁵

The Government Committee for the Gypsy Population introduced a new administrative classification that divided Gypsies into three groups according to ‘objective indicators’ of social ‘adaptability’ (*přizpůsobivost*).⁵⁶ The 1958 party resolution had loosely categorised the Roma as ‘settled, semi-settled or nomadic’, but with the exception of ‘nomadic’ Gypsies – who had been targeted by the Law on the Permanent Settlement of Nomadic Persons – these categories were not used by the state administration. National Committees were henceforth instructed to collect statistics on Roma regarding their assimilation into socialist society.⁵⁷ Government guidelines for classifying Roma assumed that ‘lifestyle’ was an objective factor ‘influencing and accelerating the differentiation process among the Gypsies themselves’. Statistics on the Gypsy population were supposed to accelerate assimilation, enabling

⁵² Will Guy, ‘The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia to Assimilate Its Gypsy Population’ (Bristol: PhD dissertation, University of Bristol, 1977), 496.

⁵³ ABS, f. H 1–4, inv. 762, sv. 1: *Zápis z meziresortní porady konané dne 7. října 1966.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvatel'stvo, č. kart. 9, č. sp. 10, *Hlavní směry k řešení cikánského obyvatel'stva (výťah z referátu prvního zasedání Vládního výboru).*

⁵⁷ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvatel'stvo, č. kart. 9, č. sp. 10, *Úkoly KNV, ONV k zajištění a rozpracování směrnice ÚV KSČ a vládního usnesení č. 502/1965.*

the state to ‘capture the [integration] process at a certain point, abstract from it and express it, by dividing the Gypsies into groups according to their levels of development and then finding the most effective solution for each group’.⁵⁸ The rhetoric used to define ‘unadaptable’ Gypsies, as Věra Sokolová has written, institutionalised the cognitive union that already seemed to exist in the minds of many government officials between Roma ethnicity, social deviance, and the disorderly ‘Gypsy family’.⁵⁹

National Committees were required to use these categories when collecting statistics on the Gypsy population. Crimes committed by ‘Gypsies’ (unlike any other ethnic or national group) were included in the national police statistics.⁶⁰ Demographers at the State Statistical Office launched nationwide statistical surveys of the ‘Gypsy population’, classified as Category I, II, and III: ‘advanced, most adaptable and most backward’. Echoing Nazi rhetoric, the official definition of Category III Gypsies implied that moral ‘degeneracy’ was breeding ‘chronically sick individuals, retards and invalids who don’t even seek treatment because they make a living from their illness without having to work’. Category III Gypsies were described as ‘living in filth, producing parasites and criminals’, working irregularly if at all, and refusing to send their children to school. The Gypsy Committee warned that all the ‘instruments that our society and legal order has at its disposal’ should be used to assimilate these Gypsies, including ‘coercive measures’ used for crimes such as ‘parasitism, disturbances of public order, and theft’. Moreover, the Gypsy Committee recommended removing Gypsy children from their parents, and placing them in state institutions.⁶¹ Policies that promised to ‘protect’ Romani children from the allegedly corrupting influence of their families, based on concerns about the quality as well as the quantity of the Gypsy population, recalled older nationalist debates about protecting the health of the nation.

⁵⁸ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 9, č. sp. 10, *Hlavní směry k řešení cikánského obyvatelstva* (výťah z referátu prvého zasedání Vládního výboru).

⁵⁹ Sokolová, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity*.

⁶⁰ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1961–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart 10, sp. 93, Ministerstvo vnútra, Hlavní správa VB, *Vyhodnocení účinnosti právních norem z hlediska zkušenosti VB, dotýkajících se cikánské problematiky*. Zpráva podává: plk. Jindřich Thon, náměstek MV, náčelník HSVB, člen Vládního výboru pro řešení cikánské otázky, Praha, červen 1966.

⁶¹ ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 9, č. sp. 10, *Hlavní směry k řešení cikánského obyvatelstva* (výťah z referátu prvého zasedání Vládního výboru).

Resettlement

The centrepiece of the 1965 KSČ programme to ‘solve the Gypsy question’ was a nationwide programme to ‘liquidate undesirable concentrations of gypsies’ – if necessary by demolishing Roma villages and resettling their inhabitants in distant parts of the country. The scheme envisaged a large-scale ‘transfer’ of Slovak Roma to the Czech lands.⁶² National Committees were supposed to agree to quotas of unemployed Roma for resettlement to Bohemia and Moravia, where they would be provided with jobs and homes. In May 1967 the state set an incredibly ambitious target of re-housing nearly half the 120,000 Roma allegedly living in ‘unhygienic’ dwellings. Roma neighbourhoods were presented as a breeding ground for ‘backwardness’ and the ‘greatest obstacle to the re-education of the gypsy population’.⁶³ National Committee officials responsible for administering the scheme were instructed that only Roma in Category II – ‘demonstrably trying to adopt the basic conditions for a more cultured way of life’ – were eligible for resettlement.

Regional inequalities were, once again, a significant factor leading to the introduction of the scheme. Senior officials in the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) had been lobbying for an ‘organised’ resettlement of Roma to the Czech lands since 1958, when the KSČ pledged to accelerate the industrialisation of the Eastern Slovak Region.⁶⁴ In late 1961, KSS First Secretary Karol Bacílek circulated a photograph album of Gypsy settlements to the Politburo to shock senior officials into action.⁶⁵ The black-and-white images showed dilapidated wooden shacks in scrubland, disintegrating caravans (their wheels having been removed by the police), and ragged, dirty children – flatly contradicting the party’s promise of eradicating poverty and material want. Taken from a distance and at odd angles, presumably by police or government officials, the photographs were accompanied by sarcastic captions: an

⁶² ŠoBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cig. obyvateľstvo, kart. 8, sp. 109: *Zásady pro org. rozptylu a přesunu cikánského obyvateľstva za účelem likvidace nežádoucích cik. soustředění ve smyslu usnesení strany a vlády.*

⁶³ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ f. 02/2, sv. 331, a.j. 422/10: Politické byro Ústředního výboru KSČ: *Plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvateľstvem*, 14 December 1961.

⁶⁴ On Karol Bacílek and contemporary politics in Slovakia, see Jan Pešek, *Slovensko v rokoch 1953–1957: Kapitoly z politického vývoja* (Brno: Edice Krize komunistického systému v Československu 1953–1957 svazek 4, Prius / USD AV ČR, 2001); Jan Pešek et al., *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku 1948–1989: personifikácia politického vývoja* (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2003); Jan Pešek, *Slovensko na prelome 50. a 60. rokov: Politicko-mocenské aspekty vývoja* (Brno: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2005).

⁶⁵ NA Praha, f. ÚV KSČ, 02/2, sv. 331, a.j.422/10: Politické byro Ústředního výboru KSČ, *Plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvateľstvem, Annex IV: Fotodokumentace z cikánských osad*, 14 December 1961.



Figure 5.1. Roma in Kendice, eastern Slovakia, 1960. Photographer: Eva Davidová. From the Gypsy Lore Society Collections, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives.

image of a Roma family seated around a campfire was labelled ‘The family of Eliáš Kotlár, waiting for lunch. They cook on the ground, even though they have an oven at home.’⁶⁶ The KSS report complained vehemently about the social problems caused by the 1,400 Gypsy settlements in Slovakia, of which more than half allegedly lacked basic amenities and posed – according to senior communists – a serious threat to public health.⁶⁷

The resettlement scheme was launched in a spirit of optimism about the capacity of technocratic planning to achieve social progress. National Committees were keen to reflect this in their reports to central government. Functionaries from the Czech industrial town of Přerov, for instance, highlighted the bureaucratic efficiency of their visit to Bardejov in Slovakia to select suitable Gypsy families: ‘They photographed the families, obtained all the necessary information and arranged the method

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ f. 02/2, sv. 331, a.j. 422/10: Politické byro Ústředního výboru KSČ: *Plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem*, 14 December 1961.



Figure 5.2. Exhibition of photographs by Eva Davidová entitled *Gypsies yesterday, today and tomorrow*, Košice, Czechoslovakia, 1962. Photographer: Eva Davidová. From the Gypsy Lore Society Collections, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives.

and the date of the transfer.’⁶⁸ In 1966, the Gypsy Committee for eastern Slovakia commissioned the local museum in Košice to produce a set of documentary photographs as a ‘historical document and as technical guidance when liquidating the settlements, and as proof that government funds are being used properly’.⁶⁹ National Committee reports frequently contained hand-drawn plans of Gypsy settlements, such as the one produced by the Michalovce National Committee for the planned liquidation of the Čolaková settlement, with individual houses represented by small boxes, each marked down for demolition at a certain date.⁷⁰ These reports continually emphasised the non-stop stream of cultural activities,

⁶⁸ Report cited in Guy, ‘The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia’, 280.

⁶⁹ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánské obyvateľstvo (KCO), kart. 10, sp. 84: *Návrh na presun finančných prostriedkov do Východoslovenského múzea v Košiciach pre zabezpečenie fotodokumentácie osad vo Vsl. Kraji*, 16 May 1966.

⁷⁰ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, Komisia Vsl. KCO, kart. 4, sp. 31: Komisia pre riešenie otázok spoluobčanov cig. Pôvodu pri rade ONV v Michalovciach: *Plan likvidácie cig. Čolákovej osade v Michalovciach*, 29 November 1964.

public health programmes, and building work that National Committees were supporting in the settlements.⁷¹

Yet in practice, resettlement was not implemented according to plan. Initially Roma in rural Slovakia greeted the programme with enthusiasm. In Spišská Nová Ves, a small town in north-eastern Slovakia, the district National Committee reported ‘crowds of Gypsies (40 to 50 people)’ visiting the secretary of the Gypsy Committee every day in the early months of 1966. But local officials complained that the situation was ‘utterly confused’.⁷² Research carried out by Will Guy in the 1970s and confirmed by the archives of the Eastern Slovak Gypsy Committee revealed ‘urgent and recurring problems – often related to difficulties in obtaining and procuring accommodation’.⁷³ In private, members of the national Gypsy Committee in Prague recognised that housing shortages and the system for allocating apartments put National Committees in charge of re-housing Roma in an impossible situation. Housing was divided into state-owned, company-owned, cooperative, and private sectors. One official summed up the problem: empty flats in the state housing fund were ‘mostly slated for demolition’, cooperatives were not able to build enough flats to meet the demand, and although they had little information about the ‘number of works flats, we’ll be lucky if we can get one flat in a hundred for a gypsy family’.⁷⁴ Self-help seemed the only solution, yet subsidising the construction of family houses was deemed too costly.

Within months, the resettlement programme seemed to be collapsing in chaos. Harassed regional officials were filing exasperated reports to Prague. The chairman of the Gypsy Committee in eastern Slovakia, with the largest number of Gypsy settlements, reported that Roma were taking matters into their own hands by demolishing their huts and presenting themselves at the nearest National Committee, claiming they had nowhere to live.⁷⁵ Officials also worried that the original idea of paying compensation in cash to Roma for the ‘liquidation’ of their houses would encourage speculation and thus suggested that future payments should be made into blocked accounts that could be used only to buy building materials and furniture.⁷⁶ On the other hand, there were also reports that

⁷¹ See the ten cartons of reports in the archives of the Eastern Slovak Gypsy Committee, f. Vsl. KNV (1960–1969), KCO, ŠObA Košice.

⁷² Report cited in Guy, ‘The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia’, 278.

⁷³ Guy, ‘The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia’, 278.

⁷⁴ ABS, f. H 1–4, inv. j. 562, sv. 1: *Zápis z jednání Vládního výboru pro otázky cikánského obyvatelstva dne 16.6.1966.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

local National Committees were using the Resettlement Programme as licence to evict Roma from their homes. The ethnographer Eva Davidová warned the Central Committee in a letter dated January 1966 that ‘incorrect’ approaches to resettlement on the part of local National Committees were spreading panic among Gypsies in eastern Slovakia.⁷⁷ This particularly concerned Vlach Roma who had recently been banned from travelling. A government official had threatened one ‘formerly nomadic’ Vlach family, now living in a large family house near Prešov, that he would ‘send them to the Czech lands – “to the Sudetenland” – as the Gypsies still call it’.⁷⁸ Terrified, the family had decided to sell their television and all their furniture. Davidová claimed that Roma from other areas in eastern Slovakia had also reported ‘similar fears of “forced” movement’.⁷⁹

Complaints that reached officials working for the Committee to Solve the Questions of the Gypsy Population in Košice, the region with the largest Roma population in the country, provide an insight into the ways in which individuals negotiated resettlement and administrative categories of ‘Gypsiness’. Roma judged too assimilated were not eligible for the scheme, for example. Thus a worker from Košice was refused housing assistance under the scheme when he moved with his family to Pardubice. Mr V. was deemed so assimilated that he no longer counted as a Gypsy: ‘He is a fully civilised citizen and therefore this case cannot be classified as a Gypsy problem.’ As a good worker, party member, and trade union member, the council claimed, Mr V. had moved to the Czech lands ‘simply because he liked it there’ and had been unable to build a house in his native district near Košice on ‘health grounds’ because of its proximity to the Eastern Slovak Steelworks. ‘If we had more Gypsies like him,’ the official concluded rather tautologically, ‘we would be solving the problems of other people than the Gypsies.’⁸⁰

Conflicts also emerged when officials attempted to prevent Romani families from living near each other.⁸¹ The 1965 government resolution had claimed that ‘dispersing’ the Gypsy population would overcome their isolation from society by breaking up ‘disorderly’ Gypsy families.

⁷⁷ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV (1960–1969) KCO, kart. 9, sp. 26. Eva Turčínová-Davidová to ÚV KSČ: *Upozornění na některé nesprávnosti současného řešení cikánské otázky v praxi (námět)*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, KCO kart. 19. Complaint letter from JV., 7 March 1967, and reply from the Commission for the Gypsy Population, 10 March 1967.

⁸¹ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19: Vládní výbor pro otázky cikánského obyvatelstva, *Dopis AA., Sečovce, okres Trebišov* 22 August 1967.

For Romani communities, however, this could represent the loss of deeply important social and emotional connections. Mr A., for example, was refused permission to buy a house on the main street in a village in the Magyar-speaking borderlands of south-eastern Slovakia because local officials claimed this would result in an ‘undesirable concentration of Gypsies’. This referred to the fact that five Roma families were already living on the street where the man wished to buy a house. The council was adamant that no more ‘large Gypsy families’ should move into this street, where the houses were ‘already marked down for liquidation’. Nor was Andrej A. allowed to move in with his brother or buy a house from him: ‘The local national committee gave your brother permission [to buy a house] on the condition that he would live properly, like other people, not so that another 10 people should move in with him.’ Mr A. was told that he could buy a house elsewhere in the village but not on the main street where his brother lived. ‘I didn’t make the law,’ the committee secretary wrote to the man, ‘but we have to make sure that we don’t end up with big concentrations of gypsy citizens. Our task is to disperse them.’⁸²

Roma often wanted to move to a particular town not only because employment prospects and living conditions were better, but because they had relatives living there.⁸³ Where government officials saw an ‘undesirable concentration’ of Gypsies, men like Mr A. saw an extended family, able to provide invaluable support networks in everyday life. This was also illustrated by the case of Mr B., who sold his home to the Rožňava National Committee after a state-owned forestry company in Bohemia recruited him as a contract labourer. The man stayed on after the contract expired, even though he had only a temporary residence permit. He was finally awarded permanent residence status in the area after finding a job with the State Forestry Administration, which provided him with a company flat. However, after two months he stopped going to work, claiming his family allowances had not been paid. In response, his employer claimed Mr B. had lost his legal right to benefits because he had so often been absent from work. For the next two months the man did not go to work at all, and the company evicted him from his apartment. The man then moved in with his extended family in a nearby town, and officials claimed he was living off the proceeds of the sale of his house in Slovakia. Using the excuse that neither Mr B. nor his twenty-six family members had permanent

⁸² ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19, Vsl. KNV v Košiciach, Komisia pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, ‘O.A., *Sťažnosť na MsNV*’ 5 September 1967.

⁸³ Guy, ‘The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia’, 311.

residence rights in the district, the local National Committee paid for their railway tickets and sent them back to Rožňava.

A recently widowed woman from Ľubeník was refused a state-owned flat in autumn 1968 on the grounds that she and her husband had already benefitted from the resettlement scheme three years earlier. Officials claimed that the family was ‘disorderly’ (*neporiadný*) and always causing fights: ‘Last year they beat up a policeman so badly that he had to go to hospital. They walk around with razorblades in their pockets.’⁸⁴ Yet the reasons for the family’s ‘disorderly’ conduct seemed clearer when the report continued: ‘The citizens of Ľubeník want to kick them out of the municipality and have already gone after them with petrol, saying they were going to set them alight. They were only stopped when the National Committee Chairman intervened.’ The state had purchased the woman’s house in 1965 and allocated land on which to build a new home, allowing them to use material from the old house, ‘even though it was already state property’. After the family rejected the plot, the National Committee ‘allocated the land to a *white citizen* [emphasis added]’. Officials claimed the woman’s husband had sold the building materials and ‘drank the money’ he got for his house, but then contradicted this assertion by acknowledging that the widow had used at least some of the proceeds to help her sons build their own houses in the same municipality. ‘She writes that she’s living in a wooden hut? Well, she doesn’t have to live there . . . Her son has a big house nearby with an empty room . . . Not one of them wants to take in their own mother. I don’t know who is supposed to help her if her own sons won’t.’⁸⁵

Local officials were frequently unwilling to grant permission to Roma to build houses in the main village. One female claimant was finally allocated a plot of land after a two-year battle between the regional, district, and local National Committees responsible for her case. Demand for building plots massively outstripped supply in Nacíná Ves near Michalovce, but the Košice Gypsy Commission judged Mrs T. as ‘a person of gypsy origin living at a very proper (*slušný*) level’ and accused local officials of foot-dragging: ‘This is a premeditated and unjustified refusal to provide assistance for individual housing construction which – aside from the fact that, in this case, it also helps solve the gypsy problem – is one of the main forms of housing construction in Slovakia and is

⁸⁴ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19, Vsl. KNV v Košiciach, Komisia pre cigánske obyvateľstvo.

⁸⁵ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19, Vsl. KNV v Košiciach, Komisia pre cigánske obyvateľstvo: ONV Rožňava: *Objasnenie situácie MS v Ľubeník*, 27 September 1968.

thus supported by the state.’ Finally the Nacina Ves MNV found a solution, granting Mrs T. and her husband the right to build a family home on a piece of land apparently expropriated from a Jewish family. Officials described the land as ‘an abandoned plot: the owner is in Israel, or perhaps is no longer alive’.⁸⁶

A dispute among the tenants of an apartment block in Košice showed how rumours about the ‘dispersal’ of Gypsies by government decree could be used in personal feuds among neighbours. In early 1966 Ján S., a tenant in the block, lodged a complaint against a Roma family for violating the principles of socialist coexistence by spreading ‘dirt’ around the whole house, screaming, and abusing the other inhabitants. Appealing directly to the Government Resolution of 1965, Comrade S. claimed that the authorities had ‘no right’ to move a Gypsy family into the block because ‘the directives say that gypsy families have to be dispersed to big blocks on the edge of towns. Now they make up almost half of the people living in our block’.⁸⁷ After investigating the complaint, the local government Gypsy Committee reported that this Roma family were definitely not ‘in the category of backward Gypsies’, as an official visit had revealed that ‘their flat was kept in order, the parents are employed and the children go to school.’⁸⁸ Apart from some dust, the female committee secretary noted, ‘there was no dirt on the stairs or in the courtyard as comrade S. wrote in his complaint.’ The real problem, she continued, was the ‘other tenants’ general hostility to the gypsies, despite the fact that there are far worse white families living in the block, where the head of the family is constantly drunk and rowdy’.⁸⁹

Conflicts over resettlement also revealed the thriving second economy – usually labelled by officials as ‘speculation’ or ‘parasitism’ – that existed in parallel with the official socialist economy in rural Slovakia. ‘Speculation’ conjured up visions of capitalist exploitation or the thievery and shady deals stereotypically associated with Gypsies in folk tradition, but the reality was often more prosaic. Mrs L., a middle-aged Roma woman from Prešov, was accused of ‘speculation’ by the Košice local council after it was discovered that she owned three small properties in Prešov: one house which she part-owned with a relative, another house which she had bought illegally and which remained registered in the

⁸⁶ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19, Vsl. KNV v Košiciach, Komisia pre cigánske obyvateľstvo: Mária T., Nacina Ves – sťažnosť ve veci stavebného pozemku, 26 January 1968.

⁸⁷ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, kart. 9, sp. 57, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo: *Súдруh J.S. – Sťažnosť*, February 1966.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

previous owner's name, and an empty plot of land. Mrs L. was unmasked as a 'speculator' after she complained to her local Communist Party representative that the local council had stopped her from buying a house from another resident. When the KSS asked for an explanation, the council explained that the woman had been evicted from her previous home when it was 'liquidated'. Having received her compensation, the woman then refused to buy the three-room house that she was offered by the council, claiming that she no longer wished to live with her partner. Suspecting that 'speculation' was her real motive, the council in turn refused to allow Mrs L. to buy the bigger house that she had chosen herself. The council believed that the enterprising woman was planning to sell part of this new house to 'another Gypsy'.

Further investigations dredged up more details about Mrs L.'s apparently shady and speculative past. It emerged that she had been prosecuted on six occasions for 'infringing the principles of socialist coexistence' and 'illegal trading'. Her sister-in-law testified to the police that she, her husband, and Mrs L. herself had 'travelled through the villages during the summer and autumn of 1965, when religious pilgrimages and other celebrations were taking place, selling sweets and small factory-made goods supplied by Mrs L.'s lover. They also sold such goods around Giraltovce and Bardejov.' Finally, the local council passed judgement on Mrs L.'s case: 'I do not see this as a gypsy problem, in the sense that she is a fully civilised person, and uses her [gypsy] origin in a calculated way.'⁹⁰ In this case, a person of Gypsy origin had managed to speculate her way to 'civilisation'.

Within a few years, the government quietly wound up the resettlement scheme. Conceived as a way of providing 'adaptable' Gypsies with employment and a home in a different part of the country, the scheme could not overcome the broader structural problems of regional inequality. In many cases, Slovak Gypsies were offered homes in rural parts of Bohemia and Moravia, which were suffering from shortages in the agricultural labour force due to poor working conditions and low wages. As Will Guy wrote, 'Gypsies, therefore, were expected to take up the jobs and houses of Czechs who had left the farms for the factories but understandably the Gypsies, too, preferred the better pay of urban areas – a fact which central government and local authorities seemed unable

⁹⁰ ŠOBA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, č. kart. 19, Vsl. KNV v Košiciach, Komisia pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, 'Vec: I.L., vyjadrenie k sťažnosti' 8 March 1968, also Rada MsNV v Prešove, *Uznesenie z 92. schôdze, 13.1.1968 'K sťažnosti I.L. proti MsNV Prešov vo veci kúpy domu'*, and MsNV v Prešove, Odbor pre vnútorné veci, 24 January 1968, 'I.L., Prešov: priestupková činnosť.'

to appreciate.’ Evaluating the programme in 1969, Labour Ministry officials noted that ‘gypsy families mainly want to live in towns, where the housing situation is also most critical.’⁹¹ In the longer term, a 1967 reform of Czechoslovak agriculture would provide greater opportunities for rural Slovak Roma by allowing collective farms to set up in business as subcontractors for construction work, recruiting gangs of labourers to travel on contract work all over the republic. Will Guy suggested the cooperatives had a significant effect on the Gypsy Question, for not only did many Roma join co-op units – which were compensated for long hours and difficult working conditions by extremely high piece-rate work and bonuses – but the Roma unions formed in 1968 were also permitted to operate a similar cooperative scheme.⁹²

Child Protection, Eugenics, and Sterilisation

The failure of the resettlement scheme leads to one of the most controversial chapters in the history of Roma under state socialism: the revival of eugenics as a social policy measure aimed at ‘deviant’ Gypsies. The history of sterilisation in the Third Reich, where Gypsies had been targeted on racial grounds, cast a long shadow over debates about regulating the fertility of Roma women.⁹³ For a regime committed to eliminating discrimination on the basis of race, the notion that a eugenics policy should target – or be seen to target – an ethnic group was anathema. There were, however, older national traditions of supporting eugenic measures as a solution to social problems. Eugenic research was institutionalised in Prague as early as 1913, and Czech scientists were at the forefront of eugenics in East Central Europe during the 1920s.⁹⁴ A Czechoslovak Institute for National Eugenics was established in 1924, and a Czech Eugenics Society was revived after the liberation and shut down in 1952.⁹⁵ Eugenic ideas, however, continued to

⁹¹ NA Praha, MPSV, inv. č. 8820, 1969, uncatalogued: MPSV, Odbor sociálních služeb: *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva v ČSR*, 2 December 1969.

⁹² Will Guy, *The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia*, 310, 312.

⁹³ Hansjörg Riechert, *Im Schatten von Auschwitz: Die nationalsozialistische Sterilisationspolitik gegenüber Sinti und Roma* (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 1995); Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986).

⁹⁴ Marius Turda (ed.), *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900-1945: Sources and Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Jan Janko, ‘K eugenickému hnutí v českých zemích’, *Dějiny věd a techniky*, 30 (1997), 4.

⁹⁵ Jan Janko and Emilie Těšínská (eds.), *Technokracie v Českých zemích (1900 – 1950)* (Prague: Archiv AV ČR a Institut základů vzdělanosti, společné pracoviště a AV ČR, Studie z dějin techniky, sv. 3, 1999).

influence policies on social welfare and public health.⁹⁶ Personal connections played a role here: the anthropologist Helena Malá, who conducted research on Roma children in the 1960s, was the daughter of Jiří Malý, a leading anthropologist and eugenicist during the First Republic.

The connections between older traditions of anthropology and eugenics were in evidence in a large research project launched by Helena Malá on the physical anthropology and biology of Roma children at the Charles University in Prague in 1961.⁹⁷ Focused overwhelmingly on the physical and psychological development of Roma children, these studies revived older traditions of explaining Romani cultural and social identities in terms of biological difference.⁹⁸ Similarly, after the Law on the Permanent Settlement of Nomads was adopted in 1958, a doctoral student at the Comenius University in Bratislava conducted an anthropological study of one hundred young men enrolled in a special course for ‘recruits of gypsy origin’ during their compulsory military service. This study aimed to measure the legal category of ‘formerly nomadic person’ against the anthropological characteristics of Vlach Roma.⁹⁹ Later the results of this study were published as a popular textbook entitled *The Gypsies Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*.¹⁰⁰

The educational theories of the Soviet pedagogue I. A. Kairov, who focused on genetic factors as well as the social environment, also influenced Czechoslovak debates. In the Soviet Union, eugenic ideas continued to influence social policy, notably Stalin-era policies on abortion.¹⁰¹ In 1965 a debate about eugenics and heredity among prominent

⁹⁶ Janko, ‘K eugenickému hnutí’, 4; see also Marius Turda and Paul Weindling, *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007); Marius Turda, Christian Promitzer, and Sevasti Trubeta (eds.), *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011).

⁹⁷ Jaroslav Suchý, *Vývojová antropologie obyvatelstva ČSR* (Prague: Sborník Pedagogické Fakulty UK Praha, 1972).

⁹⁸ Helena Malá, ‘Současný stav antropologického výzkumu cikánských dětí v ČSSR,’ *Čs. Paed.*, 9, (1977); Jaroslav Suchý, *Jak se mění člověk.: Základy vývojové antropologie* (Prague: Socialistická Akademie, 1972); Helena Malá and Jaroslav Suchý, *Speciální příprava učitelů pro práci s cikánskými školními dětmi* (Prague: Socialistická Akademie, 1979).

⁹⁹ Josef Novaček, ‘Potřebují naši pomoci’ (‘They need our help’), *Lidová armáda*, 19, (1962), 1354–1363.

¹⁰⁰ Josef Novaček, *Cikáni včera, dnes a zítra* (Prague: Socialistická Akademie, 1968).

¹⁰¹ Nikolai Kremenstov, ‘Eugenics in Russia and the Soviet Union,’ in Alison Bashford and Phillippa Levine, (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mark B Adams (ed.), *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Czech biologists, geneticists, paediatricians, and members of the State Population Commission and the Czechoslovak Women's Union was published in *Věda a život* (*Science and Life*), a popular science journal.¹⁰² The possibility of sterilising women with hereditary diseases and 'feeble-minded' women was raised, and although few of the scientists supported the idea, this debate shows that at least the idea was being discussed in public. A historian of policy towards the disabled in Communist Czechoslovakia suggests that this debate was inspired by a crisis in the underfunded, overstretched system of institutional care for orphans, pensioners, and the disabled and more broadly, by the ideological dogma of the 1950s that the 'problem' of the mentally and physically handicapped would simply disappear under socialism.¹⁰³

The idea of offering material incentives to Romani women to undergo sterilisation emerged in the context of broader changes in family planning and population policy in Czechoslovakia. Sterilisation was not encouraged as a method of birth control on the grounds that it was 'unnatural' with a potentially negative impact on a woman's personality, notes the sociologist Alena Heitlinger, but it was permitted for women with medical problems and those past their prime reproductive years (thirty-five and over). Abortion was decriminalised in December 1957 but remained a medicalised and arduous process. An estimated one in three pregnancies was aborted in Czechoslovakia, a much lower figure than in the Soviet Union (where the annual number of abortions substantially exceeded that of live births), but also in Hungary, where legal abortions also exceeded births from 1959 to 1973.¹⁰⁴ Czech-produced contraceptive pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs) became available in the mid-1960s but were subjected to periodic shortages, like other consumer goods.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, research by the State Population Commission in the 1960s on the sexual life of young married couples showed that more than half the women and a quarter of the men considered their sex education insufficient. By 1977 a survey showed that 30 per cent of women in the cities and 45 per cent in rural areas had no knowledge of contraception at all; half of Slovak women aged eighteen to forty-four used coitus interruptus as the main method

¹⁰² 'Diskuse o problémech lidské genetiky a eugeniky', *Věda a život*, 3 (1965), 129–150.

¹⁰³ Boris Titzl, 'Politika totalitního (totalitárního) režimu vůči zdravotně postiženým občanům', in Helena Nosková et al. (eds.), *K problémům menšin v Československu v letech 1945–1989, Sborník studií* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 2005), 21–55.

¹⁰⁴ Alena Heitlinger, *Reproduction, Medicine and the Socialist State* (London, Macmillan, 1987), 152.

¹⁰⁵ Heitlinger, *Reproduction, Medicine and the Socialist State* 135.

of birth control.¹⁰⁶ Such reports suggest that the attitudes towards contraception and sexuality that officials criticised among the Roma were widespread among the majority population, especially in rural and religious areas.

Public debates about motherhood and women's status in the decade of reform were shaken up further by a controversial 1963 study by child psychologists and pediatricians that sharply criticised the effects of institutional child care, especially children's homes and week-nurseries, on the psychological well-being of children.¹⁰⁷ These studies also pointed out that Roma children were over-represented in orphanages and children's homes. State provision of child protection had expanded massively after 1948, while fostering was practically abolished, with the result that most children taken into care were placed in state-run institutions. Moreover, the vast expansion of family and child benefits and institutionalised welfare – from kindergartens and crèches to orphanages and asylums – had provided a whole range of opportunities for women to share the burden of responsibility for their families with the state.

In response to these wider debates, officials in the KSČ Presidium instructed the Central Council of Trade Unions (ÚRO) to draft a regulation imposing harsher penalties on parents who neglected the interests of their children in the context of a larger review of policy towards the Gypsy population in June 1965.¹⁰⁸ The ensuing Law on Child Neglect (*Zákon o některých důsledcích zanedbávání péče o děti*) enabled National Committees to stop child benefit payments in cases of prolonged truancy or if the child's guardians were suspected of using the money for the 'wrong' reasons.¹⁰⁹ Internal reports by trade unions and government officials made clear that the 'gypsy population' was the main target of the law, although like the 1958 Law on the Permanent Settlement of Nomadic Persons, the published text made no explicit reference to ethnicity. An internal ÚRO report of August 1965 described the law as 'a tool to improve school attendance and general upbringing, especially

¹⁰⁶ Both cited in Heitlinger, *Reproduction*, 136–137.

¹⁰⁷ Josef Langmeier, and Zdeněk Matějček, *Psychická deprivace v dětství* (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1963); on the longer history of debates about children, the nation, and the family, see Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children.: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Michal Shapira, *The War Inside.: Psychoanalysis, Total War and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁸ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ f. 02/1, sv. 110, a.j. 114, bod. 4. Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ: *Kontrolní zpráva o plnění usnesení ÚV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem v ČSSR*, 4 June 1965.

¹⁰⁹ Zákon č. 117 ze dne 15. prosince 1966 o některých důsledcích zanedbávání péče o děti.

among the gypsy population'.¹¹⁰ Government reports to the Committee for the Gypsy Population claimed that truancy was 'most common' among the Gypsy population, 'even though these children are the ones who need continuous, intensive education and upbringing more than any others'.¹¹¹ Officials alleged that Roma were 'speculating' with child benefits and hoped the law would prevent this practice by allowing National Committees to make payments in kind rather than cash, while punishing parents who abandoned their infants in state homes.¹¹²

In 1966, the State Agency for Social Security (Státní úřad sociálního zabezpečení, SÚSZ) suggested that IUDs could be distributed free of charge to Roma who fell into the category of 'socially weak' citizens. The suggestion was included in a report on the contribution of the social security agencies to 'solving the Gypsy Question'. The SÚSZ asserted that during the 1950s, 'gypsies often resisted desperately when their children were taken away to institutions. Today the situation has been reversed: often they themselves ask these institutions to look after their children.' Repeating the conclusions frequently made by medical doctors, social hygienists, and pedagogues, the SÚSZ claimed that Roma poverty was caused by deficient 'socio-psychological ideas about good housekeeping, and the continuation of (deformed) ideas from their traditionally nomadic, or at least unstable, lifestyle'.¹¹³ Citing a recent State Population Commission proposal to distribute IUDs free of charge to 'socially weak' citizens, the SÚSZ specified that the Gypsy population – 'which certainly falls within this [weak] social group' should also receive free contraception. But when the Government Gypsy Committee discussed the SÚSZ report, members concluded that it would be premature to speak of providing certain forms of contraception specifically to Roma. One official claimed it would encourage black-market trading.

More intrusive interventions were demanded in an April 1967 proposal on 'regulating the fertility' of Roma in eastern Slovakia, submitted by the government Gypsy Committee in Košice.¹¹⁴ Basing their arguments on

¹¹⁰ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, 1960–1969, KCO, kart. 8, sp. 92: ÚRO: *Návrh zákonného opatření předsednictvo Národního shromáždění o některých důsledcích při neplnění povinné školní docházky – připomínkové řízení*, 5 August 1965; emphasis added.

¹¹¹ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo, kart. 8, sp. 9: *Zmocenc rad Vsl. KNV pre riešenie otázok obč. cig. pôvodov*, 26 August 1965.

¹¹² ABS, f. H 1–4, inv. j. 762, sv. 1, fol. 5–16, *Zápis z jednání Vládního výboru pro otázku cikánského obyvatelstva dne 28. března 1966*.

¹¹³ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, kart. 9, sp. 43: Státní úřad sociálního zabezpečení: *Podíl orgánů sociálního zabezpečení na řešení cikánské otázky*, 28 February 1966.

¹¹⁴ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl. KNV, kart. 15, sp. 83: Komisia Vsl. KNV pre cigánske obyvateľstvo: *Podklady k rokovaniu o populácii cigánskeho obyvateľstva vo Východoslovenskom kraji a návrhy na reguláciu pôrodnosti*, 19 April 1967.

population quality rather than quantity, officials argued that the Gypsy population was growing faster than the majority, especially in Categories II and III. The report claimed that ‘undesirable’ population growth was most visible among alcoholics, the mentally retarded, tuberculosis carriers, recidivists, underage girls, parasites, and Category III families who were using their children ‘primarily as a source of income’. Proposals included compulsory gynaecological examinations of teenage Roma girls in the settlements every two months, followed by the compulsory fitting of IUDs, cost-free abortions for Gypsy women after their third child, placing all disabled children in institutions, and compulsory abortions for all ‘diseased’ (infected with tuberculosis or sexually transmitted diseases) Gypsy women with four or more children. Such proposals were not confined to confidential government reports. In October 1967 the chairman of the Košice Gypsy Committee told *Obrana Lidu* – the army newspaper – that a ‘degenerate’ population of ‘rowdies, recidivists, vagrants and prostitutes’ was emerging from Slovakia’s ‘gypsy hovels’. The solution? At least in part, ‘planned parenthood’ – including ‘regular examinations of Gypsy girls from the age of 12 or 13’. Was it humane, the newspaper asked, ‘to allow psychologically damaged people to conceive degenerate offspring without love?’¹¹⁵

In a report on ‘limiting the undesirable population amongst Gypsies’, Slovak Health Ministry officials explicitly suggested that a ‘more flexible’ policy on sterilisation could help limit ‘undesirable’ reproduction among ‘asocials and those with a lower mental level, when all other methods of persuasion have been unsuccessful’.¹¹⁶ Teenage mothers and women with many children were singled out as factors contributing to the Roma birth rate rising at twice that of the ‘average Slovak’. The report alleged that Roma women rarely used contraception, that abortion was potentially harmful to a woman’s health, and that sterilisation offered the ‘radical’ solution that was ‘urgently’ needed. Although controversial in a socialist state committed to guaranteeing the racial and ethnic equality of its citizens, proposals to regulate the fertility of Roma women deemed ‘asocial’ were later included into the first draft of a Czech Labour Ministry report on Roma in late 1969.

In 1969, officials at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs drafted a report on the implementation of Gypsy population policy

¹¹⁵ ‘O cigánoch s porozumením, ale nie sentimentálne,’ *Obrana lidu*, 14 October 1967, no. 41, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ ŠObA Košice, f. Vsl KNV v Košiciach, KCO, kart. 19, sp. 95: Povereníctvo SNR pre zdravotníctvo: *Správa o probléme obmedzovania nežiaducej populácie u cigánskeho obyvateľstva – Materiál na rokovanie Komisie Predsedníctvo SNR pre otázky cigánskeho obyvateľstva na Slovensku* (Bratislava, November 1968).

that included statements about high birth rates among ‘socially pathological’ Roma creating ‘negative effects, including a *deterioration in the quality of the gypsy population itself and of the population as a whole* (regarding the proportion of the gypsies in relation to the total population) and the deterioration of the social, economic, and cultural level of gypsy families themselves’.¹¹⁷ The Labour Ministry report asked if ‘society should have to support large families who do not provide their children with security or a satisfactory upbringing’ and whether ‘it would not be more effective for society to provide a financial allowance or material incentive for the use of contraception or sterilisation’. This proposal to offer material incentives for sterilisation was the most controversial aspect of the report, which was circulated to representatives of the trade unions, government ministries, the Academy of Sciences, and social organisations, including the Unions of Gypsies-Roma.

In their responses, officials recognised that coercive sterilisation was an infringement of the civil rights of Roma citizens, although this was not necessarily seen as a reason for dismissing the idea. The Trade Unions representative recommended deleting references to sterilisation because ‘the gypsies are extremely sensitive about such things, not to mention that sterilization is tightly regulated under current legislation, which means that the desired results would still not be achieved.’¹¹⁸ Officials at the Ministry of Health warned that ‘limiting population growth amongst socially pathological groups of Gypsies is an intervention into citizens’ rights with far-reaching consequences, especially in political terms’, especially at a moment when the new Union of Gypsies-Roma was calling for recognition of Roma as a national minority ‘with all the rights that such a status entails’.¹¹⁹ Thus the Health Ministry argued that the decision to limit the fertility of ‘socially weak and psychologically defective gypsy families should be issued by the highest state authorities in the form of relevant legal norms’.

Eugenic measures to limit population growth amongst Roma could be introduced only if this did not entail ‘an unjustified intervention into

¹¹⁷ NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued: *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva v ČSR*, 2 December 1969; emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued: ROH to MPSV, *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva v ČSR*.

¹¹⁹ NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued: Comments from Ministry of Health on *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva v ČSR*.

citizens' rights', the Ministry of Justice agreed.¹²⁰ Yet in support of a proposed revision to the Act on Health Care, officials from the legal department suggested the Danish sterilisation law of 1935 as a model, since it provided state authorities with 'the right to submit a request for sterilization of a person of unsound mind if it is in the public interest'. Labour Ministry officials also supported a revision of the Act on Health Care to permit 'voluntary sterilization in socially pathological gypsy families with the possibility of offering material incentives to women and men when such an intervention is desirable for society as a whole'.¹²¹ References to improving 'the quality of the population' in 'the interests of society' were also made by Labour Ministry officials in a proposal to distribute contraception to Roma women in the form of 'social benefits'. In addition to legislative measures, ministry officials emphasised that local health care workers should be instructed to persuade Roma women to apply for sterilisation.

The timing of the Labour Ministry report was important, since it was drafted at a moment when the liberalisation of the Prague Spring meant the report was circulated to activists outside the official structures of power. Milena Hübschmannová and Eva Davidová received the report in their new capacity as researchers at the Academy of Sciences. Their reply noted that the report did not define the term 'social pathology', that 'social pathology' could not be equated with mental handicap (*debilita*), and that in any case society had no right to limit population growth, even amongst the mentally ill. Framing their criticism carefully, Hübschmannová and Davidová took issue with the subjective interpretation of 'social pathology' that would render any possible sterilisation decree a means of intervening in the reproductive rights of any Roma woman. They also called for 'Roma' to be used instead of 'gypsy' or at least for 'gypsy' to be written with a capital G to underline that the term referred to an ethnic group.¹²² Subsequent revisions to the Labour Ministry report suggest that officials took some of this criticism seriously. Sterilisation was deleted from the final version submitted to the Central Committee in August 1970 but not the references to the 'population explosion', the

¹²⁰ NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued: Response of Ministerstvo spravedlnosti – ředitel legislativního odboru to *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva*.

¹²¹ NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued. Comments from Department for the Elderly, Invalids and Institutional Care on *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva*.

¹²² NA Praha, Ministerstvo práce a sociální věci, f. MPSV 1969–1970, inv. č. 8820, uncatalogued: Československá akademie věd – sociologický ústav – reply based on the material from Milena Hübschmannová and Eva Turčinová-Davidová to *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva*

‘deterioration’ in population quality, or the proposal to offer ‘financial and material incentives for families to use contraception in their own interest and the interest of society’.¹²³

Towards 1968: The Politics of Marginality

By the late 1960s, Czechoslovak society was shaken to the core by a mass movement to democratise socialism in a Communist regime that had been one of the most conservative in the Soviet bloc. The [next chapter](#) will explore the carnivalesque months of the Prague Spring and what this meant for Roma. Before this, however, it is important to counter the narratives of medicalisation and pathologisation of Roma with another story. The influence of New Left movements on students and other activists in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s, coming from Western Europe as well as the United States and postcolonial countries, would redefine the politics of the Gypsy Question and community activism with Roma after 1968. The loosening of restrictions on foreign travel created opportunities for Czechoslovak students to experience life outside the socialist bloc. Visitors from the West, meanwhile, could visit Czechoslovakia in even greater numbers. This enabled Roma activists to make contact with the emerging communities of Gypsy pressure groups in Western Europe, as well as reigniting an interest in Roma as a marginalised group in socialist society.

Literární Noviny, the most outspoken cultural journal in Czechoslovakia in this period, published a number of critical pieces about the status of Romani citizens during the 1960s. In October 1965 the journal devoted an entire issue to debates about Roma. On the front page, the text of the Government Decree on the Gypsy Question was reproduced in full. Karol Sidon, a young writer and later Charter 77 signatory and rabbi, published a long report about rural Roma in eastern Slovakia that referred to ‘blacks and whites’ in a provocative allusion to the racially segregated American South.¹²⁴ The article, which also made reference to Western popular culture, for instance by comparing a young Roma woman to a character in Fellini’s *Eight and a Half*, deliberately criticised the gap between official rhetoric and social reality. Less than a year later, an article by Milena Hübschmannová in the same journal – simply entitled ‘Fellow Citizens’ (*Spoluobčane*) – alleged that the enormous

¹²³ NA Praha, AÚV KSČ, f. 02/7, sv. 32, a.j. 58, bod. 2: Býro ÚV KSČ pro řízení stranické práci v Českých zemích: *Zpráva o současném stavu řešení otázek cikánského obyvatelstva v České socialistické republice*, 20 August 1970.

¹²⁴ Reportáž Daniely Sykorové a Karola Sidona o životě cikánského obyvatelstva na východě republiky, *Literární noviny* 30 October 1965, 1–9.

difficulties faced by Roma seeking adequate housing were mainly due to racial discrimination. The 'pejorative undertone' that accompanied the official label 'citizen of gypsy origin', noted Hübschmannová, made a mockery of state policy towards Roma, 'as if we wanted to save the Gypsies, simply by not calling them Gypsies'.¹²⁵

In 1967 an article in *Literární noviny* pointed to the total absence of official interest in the Romani language: 'At a time when there is such a huge discussion about the Gypsy Question, Gypsy illiteracy, the dispersal of the Gypsies, and the fact that there will be a million Gypsies in our country by the end of the millennium etc', *Literární noviny* found it astonishing that the most recent conversational handbook for the Gypsy language available in Czechoslovakia dated from 1908. One of a series by František Vymazal, this book 'conjugated verbs by referring to the model *to steal* and used *criminal* as an example when declining nouns'. *Literární noviny* asked its readers to

compare this with a small report in Slovak *Pravda*, which notes that the Enlightenment Club in Bardejov would publish a Gypsy-Slovak and a Slovak-Gypsy dictionary with 4000 entries, and with tips on reading and writing – if there were at least 700 orders, and not only 120, as there have been so far. And thus you can draw a conclusion: whether the people who are making such a fuss about the uplift of the Gypsy population or who are making decisions on their behalf – from teachers to publicists, employees of the social organisations or the state administration – do not need such a dictionary because they have no interest in it, or whether the knowledge they have gleaned from Vymazal's handbook is enough for them.¹²⁶

Creating a Romani cultural identity based on the Romani language would become one of the main demands of the Romani unions set up from 1969–1973 by activists such as Gustáv Karika.

Meanwhile, the language of citizenship appeared again in a piece that Milena Hübschmannová wrote about Vel'ká Ida, a Roma settlement on the periphery of the Eastern Slovak Steelworks, a showpiece industrial development near Košice. Hübschmannová compared the comfortable life of Mr X, an average Czech citizen, with that of a Rom, Mr Horvát, living in a dilapidated wooden settlement hut. Challenging her readers to imagine themselves in the position of a Roma citizen whose tiny house had recently collapsed, she asked, 'How would a non-Gypsy behave? Write a letter to the authorities. How would he (Mr. Horvát) manage? He learnt how to read and write in the army, but would he know what an official letter was? Would he know to whom he should write? A non-Gypsy would have his house insured, but who would insure a

¹²⁵ Milena Hübschmannová, 'Spoluobčane', *Literární noviny* (5 March 1966), 10–11.

¹²⁶ Jeroným Baloun, 'Cikánsky nesnadno', *Literární noviny* (29 April 1967), 2.

Gypsy shack? ... You would know you have a right to compensation. If you had any problems you would turn to the ROH (trade union) committee, the KSC, the legal department, the social department. Then you would write to the newspaper, the radio, the television.' Concluding, Hübschmannová warned, 'You are Mr. X, you have your name, your profession, your social position, which you rely upon, you are a citizen ... No-one just calls you "that Czech!" ... but for "us" Mr. Horvát is only a Gypsy. A Gypsy from a gypsy settlement.'¹²⁷

A photograph by Josef Koudelka, who would later achieve global recognition for his iconic photos of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, appeared alongside Milena Hübschmannová's article about Vel'ká Ida. The image of a man in a white shirt and broad-brimmed hat, holding a tiny child on his shoulder against a stark, bare horizon, presented the world of rural Roma as a symbol of alienation from a dystopic industrial modernity. This was reflected in the language employed by Hübschmannová, which described the factory towering over the Roma settlement as 'incomprehensible ... nauseating, fascinating, redeeming, terrifying'.¹²⁸ Josef Koudelka's photographic series *Gypsies* encapsulates a new humanitarian sensibility towards the marginal subjects of socialism. As a young documentary photographer, Josef Koudelka travelled through eastern Slovakia during the 1960s. From intimate portraits of grieving families at home by an open coffin to a haunting image of a young man in a suit, handcuffed and escorted by police from his isolated village while a crowd of onlookers stands silent, Koudelka's *Gypsies* cycle interpreted poverty and social isolation in a completely different light to official narratives of backwardness.

Exhibited in the foyer of a small Prague theatre in the summer of 1967, the *Gypsies* cycle left Czechoslovakia when Koudelka emigrated the following year. As the anonymous Prague photographer who documented the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on the night of 21 August 1968, Koudelka was soon working for the Magnum agency. His photographs of the invasion – a wristwatch ticking against an empty street, women and children motionless with horror, crowds of unarmed demonstrators confronting Soviet tanks – were circulated around the globe and universalised the invasion of Czechoslovakia as an assault on the ideals of revolutionary socialism.¹²⁹ The *Gypsies* cycle was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1975 and published by

¹²⁷ Milena Hübschmannová, 'Vel'ká Ida', *Literární noviny* (8 July 1967), 2–3.

¹²⁸ Hübschmannová, 'Vel'ká Ida'.

¹²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, Marc Weitzmann, and Magnum Photos, *1968: Magnum Throughout the World* (Paris: Hazan, 1998).

Robert Delpire.¹³⁰ The visual aesthetic borrowed from the realism of the documentary tradition and ethnographic photography. But rather than victims of history, Roma were presented as transcendental and timeless, emblematic of universal themes of human alienation, exploitation, and suffering. Against the rhetoric of care deployed by the socialist state, Koudelka's photography looked forward to a new language of humanitarian compassion, which would envelop the Roma in the decades following the Prague Spring.

¹³⁰ Josef Koudelka (Afterword by Willy Guy), *Gypsies* (New York: Aperture/MOMA, 1975).