Roma-ness in Music, Music in Roma-ness: The Musical Craft of Slovak Roma in Klenovec and Kokava

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

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By Petr Nuska

This PhD thesis is an ethnographic case study exploring practices of professional music-making among Roma in two municipalities in south-central Slovakia: Klenovec and Kokava nad Rimavicou. It is based on long-term ethnographic research carried out from 2013; most of the ethnographic data presented in this thesis were collected between 2018 and 2019 during a dedicated period of PhD fieldwork. The introductory chapter outlines the main research questions by describing the development of the research focus for the thesis, and it introduces the principal research methods – ethnographic and visual. The first findings chapter is an ethnographic description of the location in question, with a special focus on socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic conditions and the lives of local Roma under these conditions. The second chapter deals with Romani ethnic identity in the locality; it employs theories of (Romani) ethnicity, describes how this is typically manifest and discusses its significance for professional music-making. The third chapter is based on theories from economic anthropology and looks at Romani professional music-making from the perspective of economic exchange, considering it as an income-generating activity and a distinctive cultural practice. The fourth and last findings chapter looks at Roma-ness in music – a form of enactment of Romani ethnic specificity in the context of professional music-making – framed by impression management theories. The concluding chapter revisits the research questions, indicates paths for further research, critically evaluates the research methodology and reflects upon the positionality of the research. The thesis is complemented with audio-visual material resulting from various visual methods – work with photographs, video and film. These are accessible online through links and QR codes.

Statement of Copyright

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Preface

The *Rázovitý* Region of Klenovec and Kokava and the *Rázovitosť* of Romani Music-Making

> Klenovec is a *rázovitá* municipality situated in the Veporské Rudohorie valley. The municipality's name is derived from the sycamore maple [*klen*] tree.

This is how the introductory text about Klenovec begins on the information board in the municipality's main square, just meters from the place in which I stayed for several dozen months of my life. Many other texts on Klenovec begin with the same phrase, including those on its official website, financial reports, and Wikipedia page. The archaic adjective in italics – *rázovitá* – brings an air of mystery thanks to its ambiguity. Slovak dictionaries assign to the word *rázovitý* various meanings (Pisárčiková, 2004).[1] Most frequently in contemporary language, it carries two: something "distinctive," "unique", or "peculiar" on the one hand, and "remote" and "isolated" on the other. One interesting thing about these introductory texts about Klenovec is lack of any explanation about how it is *rázovitý*. I walked around this word - both physically and virtually - for many years without paying any attention to it. When I noticed that locals also associate this mysterious adjective with nearby Kokava (in full, Kokava nad Rimavicou) – the second most important place in my research – I felt intrigued to resolve this linguistic mystery. So, I asked native Slovaks living outside Klenovec and Kokava how they understand the phrase "*rázovitá* municipality." I received a great variety of responses.

For some, the expression *rázovitá* municipality had positive connotations ("distinct in folklore and culture"; "with specific characteristics, personality and tradition"). For others, it was neutral, bringing to mind the nature of the surrounding area ("geographically rugged"; "positioned in the mountains"). For the great majority, though, it carried negative connotations associated with a set of socio-cultural stereotypes about lifestyles in the Slovak countryside ("a village so distant that even woodsmen don't go there"; "where they drink a lot, and a stranger easily gets a slap in the face at a local party.") One of the most insightful answers I received was the following: "It is a hollow term of folklore marketing [...]; that is, if you don't have anything to say about the municipality, this is the word you use." It seems that the *rázovitosť* (the noun form derived from the adjective) of Klenovec and Kokava comprises two distinct qualities that exist in a somewhat

[1] Note that like any other Slovak adjective, this adjective changes suffixes according to the gender of the noun to which it is attached (e.g. *rázovitý* region [m], *rázovitá* municipality [f], *rázovité* town [neutral]). These suffix changes also apply for other Slovak expressions – whether nouns, adjectives or verbs – to which I will refer in the thesis.

paradoxical relationship. Later, I realised that this ambiguity and paradox around *rázovitosť* is significant not only for the locality in question but also for my research topic of Romani music-making.

Many Slovak ethnomusicologists, ethnologists and folklorists I met were familiar with the *rázovitosť* – distinctiveness and uniqueness – of the locality's folklore and culture. Particular attention was often drawn to the *rázovitá* interpretation of folk songs by local Romani musicians. When I gave a paper at a conference in Slovakia, Oskár Elšek, a Slovak Professor Emeritus of ethnomusicology in his late 80s and the chairman of my panel, noted that the region is well-known for having "the perfect musicians."[2] On the other hand, in the view of its locals, the latter meaning of the word comes more often to the fore in everyday conversation. Klenovec was often spoken of to me as "a village in the middle of hills" [*dědina v horách*; *uprostred hôr*], sometimes even as "*lost* in hills" [*stratená v horách*]. Occasionally, I was asked strangely phrased questions such as "How did you end up *all the way* out here?" [*Ako si sa dostal až sem?*] or "How did a Czech person end up in Klenovec?" [*Ako sa stane, že Čech skončí v Klenovci?*]. Therefore, it seems that cultural experts appreciate the locality's folklore and culture for its *rázovitosť* – its distinctiveness and uniqueness – while both locals and non-locals consider it *rázovitý* for its remoteness and isolation.

While writing up this thesis, I found ambiguity around the word *rázovitý* reflective of some of the disproportionate preoccupations in the study of Romani music-making in Slovakia. Expert discourse tends to focus on the first meaning of *rázovitosť*; Romani music-making is often studied and celebrated as a *rázovitý* – distinctive – cultural manifestation of an overlooked ethnic minority. Thus, a lot of literature is dedicated to ethno-/musicological analysis of 'Romani music's' unique repertoire and to discussion of the *distinctive* role of Roma in the interpretation of various musical genres. In the course of my research, however, I have noticed that it is difficult to understand Romani musicianship without framing it in reference to the other kinds of *rázovitosť*. Romani music-making should also be seen and studied as a response to the *rázovitosť* of the socio-cultural context that Roma experience in their everyday lives. It is formed in significant part by *peculiar* inter-ethnic relationships between non-Roma and Roma and determined by the socio-economic *remoteness* and *isolation* of the peripheral Slovak regions in which the majority of Slovak Roma live.

This thesis, thus, is another scholarly contribution to understanding the *rázovitosť* of Romani music-making. Its main challenge is to uncover the *rázovitosť* in the broad complexity of this word.

[2] I gave the paper on 17th of October 2018. The talk is available online (Nuska, 2018b). Elšek's comment starts at 29:03; the mention of "the perfect musicians" from Kokava is at 35:01. The conference was titled 'Traditional Music and Dance in Contemporary Culture(s)' and was organised by Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra.

Introduction

Introducing the Research Focus and Development

The 'Magical' Beginning of the Research Journey

I first came to the *rázovitý* region of Klenovec and Kokava on the 19th of May 2013. I was an MA [*Mgr.*] anthropology student, pursuing a university course in anthropological research led by Jan Havlíček and Ivan Murin. During a week-long stay in Klenovec, my classmates and I were expected to try out various research methods, including in the form of a so-called "micro-ethnography project," the most important part of the course assignment. The task, carried out in three-member teams, first meant choosing a topic closest to the group's combined interests. For my colleagues – Jan Kozák and Tomáš Marek – and myself, selecting the topic was quite easy. As practising musicians, we were surprised to see how many brilliant musicians – specifically Romani ones – this little municipality contained. We spent a week exploring Romani music-making in Klenovec. We interviewed musicians of all generations and actively participated in jams with various bands, including one from Dolinka – Klenovec's segregated Romani settlement – equipped with electronic instruments, and a Romani string band we met at a local folklore ensemble rehearsal.

After our return from Klenovec, I sat down and easily filled up the pages required for the micro-ethnography assignment (in fact, my first piece of ethnographic writing). It was fascinating to see how much anthropological significance lay behind Romani music-making there. Quite naturally, this first text generated more questions than answers. The intense ethnographic experience and my anthropological curiosity led to a turning point in my research path, and in fact, in my entire life. Long before I first set foot in Klenovec, I had decided on the topic of my MA thesis and was expected to continue expanding my BA thesis on the anthropology of magic. Returning from Klenovec almost exactly one year after defending the BA thesis, I felt that the old topic did not speak to me with the same passion as it once did. Yet, changing my thesis topic required many administrative procedures that I was uneasy about tackling.

It was just five days before the final deadline for changing the topic of my MA thesis that I finally decided to drop an email to Zuzana Jurková – a recognised Czech ethnomusicologist with profound expertise in the field of Romani music. Thanks to her prompt response, we were able to meet soon afterwards. From today's perspective, I am indebted to her for accepting the research proposal (defined somewhat vaguely) despite my complete lack of background in ethnomusicology or Romani studies. In fact, she had every reason to reject me after receiving my first email, in which I stated: "I was supposed to be writing a

MA thesis on magic, but after my last visit to Slovakia I realised that the greatest magic in the world is Romani music." Not only did I have almost no prerequisites for carrying out good research on Romani music, but I was also full of essentialising ideas about the topic. Despite that, I got Zuzana's signature on my fresh research proposal on the 30th of June 2013, the strict deadline for the thesis proposal submission.

It was only then that a long research journey began. This journey has had several important milestones. The most significant include my first period of independent research in spring 2015, defending my MA thesis in September of the same year, starting my PhD in October 2017, and conducting long-term ethnographic research in 2018/2019. Indeed, this PhD thesis is the biggest materialised milestone on the research journey. From mere fascination with the 'magic' of Romani music to serious scholarly work, my research has undergone significant development. The topics for this work have emerged after numerous false starts and overestimation of several initial findings, all of which, nevertheless, allowed me to define a coherent and valuable set of questions for this thesis. Hence, before outlining what this thesis *is about* by introducing its main research questions, I will briefly point out what this thesis is *not about* by telling the story of how my research focus developed. In particular, I have made three major scope-defining decisions on my research journey, and here I will dedicate a short subsection to each of these.

From 'Romani Music' to the Romani Musical Craft

The first important thing to note is that this is *not* a thesis about Romani *music*. Rather, it is about Romani *music-making* and, more specifically, about *professional* music-making in the locality of Klenovec and Kokava. What may appear a mere issue of phrasing actually represents one of the most important premises of the thesis and a crucial scope-limiting decision that I needed to make in the early stages of my research. It relates to a popular (or perhaps classic) dilemma in Romani (music) studies: is it appropriate to talk about "Romani music" or should we refer to it as "music of Roma" – the various music cultures of various Romani people (e.g. Jurková, 2003a, pp. 5–8; Sárosi, 1978, p. 23)? Struggles to pin down 'Romani music' are significant in this entire discourse, especially with scholars' inability to define 'Romani music' cross-culturally. As Andrš summed it up: "In principle, there is no musical genre or style that represents Romani musical culture as a whole. [...] That is why ethnomusicologists today are abandoning the attempt to find an umbrella definition for so-called Romani or Gypsy music, preferring instead to speak of 'music of Roma'" (Andrš, 2019).

Even after accepting the category 'music of Roma' and resolving to pursue it in a particular ethnographic site (such as Klenovec and Kokava), there are various ways it can be approached. On the one hand, it can be defined merely empirically, for instance by calculating the statistical modus of Romani people's musical

preferences in Klenovec and Kokava. The other way of approaching this category is to tackle it as an anthropological question and explore how the people who use it define and understand it. This approach has proven to be more relevant for the context of my research. It became obvious during my preliminary field research trips that the term 'Romani music' means different things to different Romani musicians and different Romani (and non-Romani) audiences. Furthermore, some of my research participants defined 'Romani music' exactly by its variability. I also learned that not all music-making among Roma necessarily results in 'Romani music' and that, in certain cases, Romani musicians even consciously distance themselves from what is broadly understood as 'Romani music'. Throughout the thesis, I will offer audiovisual examples (featured in what are labelled boxes) of songs that I found to occupy a significant place in the repertoire of Romani professional bands from Klenovec and Kokava. Surprisingly, though, just a minority of these songs could be classified as pure Romani ones.

Thus, this thesis does acknowledge the term 'Romani music', but rather than accepting it as a descriptive category, it aims to analyse it as *a construct*. It will consider what the 'Romani' is when it comes to 'Romani music', and who the 'Roma' are when it comes to the 'music of Roma'. In other words, it will look critically at the *Roma-ness* of music and the Roma-ness *in* music.

Furthermore, the primary focus of this thesis falls on music-making as a human activity, and more particularly on music-making that Roma carry out for audiences (both non-Romani and Romani) with whom they have a professional relationship. As in any other musical culture, performances of Romani musicians in professional contexts have very different dynamics and socio-cultural significances from performances not shaped by economic bonds. In the ethnographic material that follows, I will sometimes mention musical events unrelated to professional music-making. I will refer especially to informal music jams among family members and friends, which Roma commonly call *bašávely* [music parties]. Although I was lucky enough to attend many such occasions during the years of my research, I mostly left them out of this thesis to maintain its central focus on the anthropological and ethnomusicological analysis of professional music-makers' practices. I do acknowledge, though, that *bašávely* carry a lot of anthropological significance for Roma in K&K, and it would certainly be worth exploring them in a standalone research project (cf. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #1). This thesis, thus, features mainly those musicians who make their living – whether exclusively or partly – with music, and young musicians learning to make music with this ambition in mind.

Lastly, yet importantly, due to my primary focus on the musical craft, the ethnographic material presented has a considerable gender disproportion: the vast majority of musicians with whom I worked were male. This disproportion reflects the traditional male dominance in the Romani musical craft and the male-only access to learning to play a musical instrument. The case of Roma in Klenovec and Kokava clearly confirms the position of gender as the "most-reported social

factor limiting access to music learning" (Rice, 2013, p. 71). In the concluding section of my MA thesis, I anticipated that this might change in the future thanks to the proliferation of institutionalised systems of musical education, which I observed as welcoming to young Romani girls (even if in a great minority) (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 84–85). Yet, a longer-term perspective has not yet shown a significant trend in this direction. Women I got to know making their way through formal musical education almost never found a place in professional music-making, instead ending up in what Roma consider the natural state of affairs: taking care of children and households. Although this thesis will introduce a couple of exceptions (especially Romani female singers), it will be consistently male-dominated, just as the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava is.

From Transmission & Enculturation to Adaptation

In my MA thesis, I explored the musical enculturation of Romani professional musicians; in other words, how musicians grow into their musical craft. I identified a major component of these enculturation processes as the *transgenerational transmission* of musical knowledge and skills. These words in italics appeared in the title of the thesis, and later they reappeared in the title of my PhD research proposal. Yet, it was only after conducting long-term PhD fieldwork that I realised how troublesome and binding these terms are. Not only are they an excellent tongue-twister (not to mention that I often used them along with the word *traditional*), but I also began to think of them as conceptually problematic and even partly misleading.

My passion for this original focus was likely nourished by a typical temptation experienced by MA students: the desire to fill a gap in knowledge. When reviewing literature for this MA thesis, I realised that transmission of musical skills among Roma was a black hole in the scholarly market – I did not find any piece of writing dedicated to Romani music skill transmission. Instead, I found a lot of insights into the topic scattered in various works on Romani music and culture. And it was promising that these scattered notes pointed out similarities across various Romani (music) cultures. For instance, scholars consistently highlighted the importance of early musical experiences and the fact that Romani children are surrounded by music from early childhood, sometimes as early as "nine months before birth" (Dregni, 2004, pp. 13–16; Hübschmannová, 1998, p. 260; Kertész-Wilkinson, 2000, p. 364; cf. also L'Huillier & Yates, 1956, p. 136). Music skill transmission processes among Roma have also been described as starting (and often being carried out exclusively) outside institutionalised musical education. And as Roma employ specific forms of skill transmission, in turn, specific musical aptitudes emerge. This includes, for instance, the ability to perform music from memory (i.e. without written music), musical adaptability, musical creativity, improvisational skills and so forth (Horváthová, 1997; Mann, 1999; e.g. Starkie, 1937).

This background knowledge formed the main argument of my MA thesis. I tackled the popular-discourse misconception that Roma become musicians without any music education. Instead, I argued, there is a specific (I often used the term 'traditional') system of music skill transmission among Roma in Klenovec and Kokava, which unfolds mainly in Romani family settings. It differs significantly from the institutionalised system of wider Slovak musical education and forms Romani musical skills and knowledge in a specific way. And, although lacking schooling, their specific system should be seen as equivalent to other systems of musical education (cf. also Merriam, 1964, pp. 145–163; Nuska, 2015b, pp. 57–64). Hence, in my MA thesis, I described this Romani musical education system in comparison to the institutionalised one in Slovakia, pointing out the main differences. I noted various degrees with which individuals participated in music skill acquisition (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 64–67; Turino, 2008, pp. 23–65). I found that a holistic (rather than an analytic) approach to music and musical repertoire dominates among Romani musicians (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 71–78; cf. also van den Bos, 1995). And these approaches form the musical aptitude of Roma in Klenovec and Kokava. The skills especially promoted include the art of improvisation and musical creativity; the ability to perform songs in various keys; musical adaptability and flexibility etc. (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 71–78, 2016).

However, perspective gained through longer-term research has forced me to reconsider some of these initial findings. The greatest issue was assuming a dualism of the so-called 'traditional' musical transmission of Roma versus the formalised music educational system. Over the years, many young musicians with whom I worked on my MA research have started attending music schools. This has especially been true for the youngest generation of musicians who were about 13 years old during my MA research. For instance, I became reacquainted with a young cimbalom player at the beginning of my PhD fieldwork in 2018 and asked him: "So have you carried on your musical training with your uncle?" I remember well my disappointment when he told me: "No way, now I go to music high school!" The source of my disappointment was the thought that I had lost one brilliant example of 'traditional transgenerational transmission'. Nevertheless, later I realised that this case was part of an important trend to which I did not (and perhaps did not *want to*) pay attention while working on my MA thesis.

I found that almost the entire generation of my former research participants has started to attend (or at least dream about attending) formal music education institutions – whether as pupils of Primary Art Schools [*Základné umelecké školy*, commonly abbreviated to ZUŠ] or as students of Music High Schools [*Konzervatóriá*]. More recently, I have also met older musicians who started music school education as mature students, in the hope that it would open up suitable work opportunities (typically as music teachers). And I have also become acquainted with older musicians in the locality who underwent formalised education earlier in their lives, including those with music degrees from prestigious Hungarian universities. Some of them considered formal musical education an important sign of serious musicianship. This proliferation of formalised musical education among Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava

has forced me to stop thinking of musical transmission in dualistic terms – 'traditional Romani' and 'institutionalised non-Romani' – but rather as a continuum. And moreover, seeing music skill transmission and enculturation from this perspective made me think about how their specific forms change over time and in various conditions; in other words, their functions in the processes of socio-economic adaptation.

This adjustment of my research focus should not be read as an attempt to deny everything that I unearthed in my MA thesis, though. There certainly is a specific way in which Roma grow into the musical craft. A particular form of transgenerational transmission affords Roma acquaintance with the musical wisdom of their ancestors and encouragement to grow into the musical craft. But forms of music enculturation have always primarily reflected the current needs of musicians. In relation to the musical craft, transmission is merely a means to achieve a goal: to perform the musical craft successfully. In Klenovec and Kokava, the goal of musicians has never been to play what and how their ancestors did but to make a living with music-making. This thesis will show that the means of achieving this goal have been changing and gaining various significances in relation to changes in socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions. In this light, music skill transmission does not seem to be the only (and perhaps not even the *major*) component of music enculturation in Klenovec and Kokava, but only one part of the puzzle.

These observations have led to another important adjustment to my research focus: shifting emphasis from the transmission of music skills to adaptation as an aspect of the musical craft. The thesis, therefore, aims to look at the professional music-making in Klenovec and Kokava as a way of adapting to *rázovité* socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions. It will explore the phenomenon as a distinctive income-generating strategy and a unique way of performing Romani ethnicity.

From 'Musical blood' to Roma-ness in Music

The last important correction that I need to make concerns another of the central premises of my MA thesis: I argued that the myth of Romani musical distinctiveness – in popular discourses often articulated in terms of 'Romani musical blood' – could easily be explained by the differences in musical enculturation and transmission I have just discussed. In my MA thesis, I took it almost as my personal challenge to dismantle this myth. Thanks to my later ethnographic work, I realised that dismantling a myth without attempting to understand its construction is not a well thought-through approach.

I considered the myth of Romani 'musical blood' mainly a construct advanced by non-Roma, who rely on it to explain the distinctiveness and otherness of Romani music-making. In this respect, I omitted a very important perspective: that of the Romani side. Roma in Klenovec and Kokava, both musicians and non-musicians,

broadly identify with this idea of musical distinctiveness. On various occasions, I have encountered the phrase 'musical blood' used verbatim to describe this distinctiveness. Roma employ this expression as if to confirm their ethnic exclusivity. For instance, I received occasional mockery over my dancing skills at Romani *bašavely*: "Oh God, you *gádže* [non-Roma] really don't know how to dance, do you?" (I need to admit that dancing has never been my strong suit). In the course of my research, I started sensing signs of ethnic empowerment in this friendly mocking; as if my research participants were saying 'no matter what you – *gádže* – think about Roma, music is the thing you'll never be our equal at'. Later, I also started seeing fragility in certain layers of this construct. For instance, I noted how Roma proudly relate to the ethnic origin of certain popular musicians, such as the Czechoslovak singer Waldemar Matuška (1932–2009), Czech singer Lucie Bílá (b. 1966), and the king of rock-n-roll Elvis Presley (1935-1977). Although the Romani origin of these musicians is just partial or a matter of speculation (Chauhan, 2019; cf. also Hancock, 2002, pp. 125–138; Romea, 2009, 2017), I often heard Roma from the locality take the supposed ethnic origin of these individuals as evidence for Romani musical distinctiveness.

Romani 'musical blood' is a myth that goes far beyond Klenovec and Kokava. It has been invented and re-invented for centuries and consists of many layers. From the perspective of non-Roma, this myth reflects the local historical experience of the Romani musical craft but also racial ideologies and myths emanating from a much deeper past, as I will show later in this thesis. One of the important goals of the thesis, nevertheless, is to look also at the other part of the construct. I will discuss how the 'musical blood' may function as a self-imposed feature of ethnic identity with empowering potential. I will show that 'musical blood' is a vital facilitator for the development of musical aptitude and an important trademark in the Romani musical craft, one that is convenient to enact and trade on the musical stage. From today's perspective, thus, my original endeavour to dismantle the myth of 'Romani musical blood' may seem naïve or even inappropriate. The fact that Romani 'musical blood' is a construct should not come merely with the imperative to dismantle it, but instead it offers an opportunity for exploration. So this thesis looks at the construction processes behind Romani 'musical blood'. It will frame the phenomenon in the theories of Romani ethnicity performance and will consider it as one of the vital components of Roma-ness. Importantly, it will seek to understand its important role in the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava.

Introducing Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore the musical craft of Roma in Klenovec and Kokava. It will approach this phenomenon from the perspective of three anthropological topics that, based on my ethnographic research and contemporary scholarship, I consider essential for understanding local Romani professional musical practice: *Romani ethnicity*, *Romani economy* and *Roma-ness in music*. The thesis aims to show how these topics are interrelated and how they form and affect the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava (cf. **Fig. 1**).

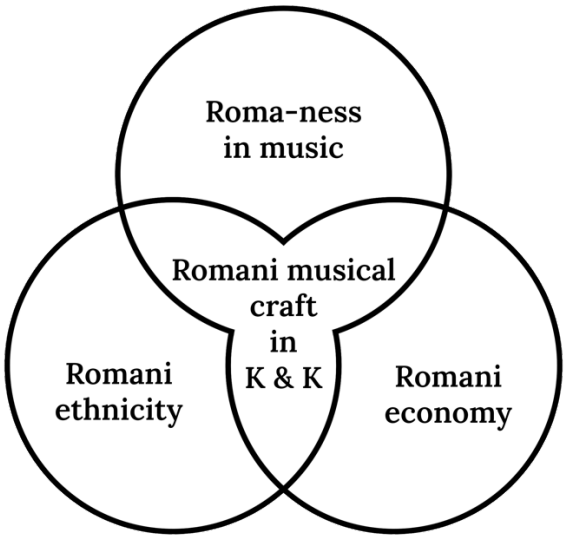

Fig. 1. The scope of the thesis

The key research questions of the thesis have been identified as follows:

1) What role does the Romani musical craft play in the socio-economic and socio-cultural adaptation of Roma in Klenovec and Kokava?
2) How is Romani ethnicity performed in the locality, and how is the musical craft constitutive of the performance of Romani ethnicity?
3) To what extent, and how, does the Romani musical craft constitute a form of economic exchange?
4) How does Roma-ness manifest itself in Romani professional music-making?

Introducing the Findings Chapters

There are four findings chapters in this thesis, each of which will immerse itself in one of the research questions just outlined. This section briefly clarifies how each of these questions relates to the central topic of the thesis – the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava – which theoretical perspectives the findings chapters employ to answer them and how they contribute to contemporary scholarship. It will also briefly preview the content of the findings chapters.

All of the findings chapters follow the same structure, starting with an introduction previewing their content and outlining specific research sub-questions. Each introduction is followed by an essential note that narrows the scope of the chapter and/or points out an important issue related to terminology. Then, each chapter features four to five sections of critical literature review establishing theoretical outlines for the topics discussed (except for Chapter 1, which is dedicated to ethnographic description). These literature reviews are followed by four to five sections of ethnographic analysis, bringing together ethnographic material with the theoretical concerns outlined. At the end of each findings chapter, a section of concluding remarks contextualises the chapter's findings against the background of the entire thesis and connects it with wider scholarship.

The first chapter will function as a frame for the ethnographic picture drawn in the three chapters that follow. It will introduce the socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic context within which the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava operates. It will depict the locality in question through detailed ethnographic description, in particular by combining primary and secondary written sources, the testimonies of local people, and my ethnographic observations. In the first part, I will focus on the locality's characteristics, framing them into a broader context, both geographically and temporally. In the second part, I will describe the everyday life of Roma under these conditions, while sketching out the general position of the musical craft in this context. This chapter aims to be an original contribution to understanding of the socio-political and socio-economic features of the region, going beyond prevalent scholarly works focusing on its rich culture and glorious past, and instead scrutinising why this formerly prosperous region has turned into a social and economic periphery, and what the consequences for its inhabitants – especially the region's Roma – are.

The second findings chapter will analyse the role of Romani ethnicity in the musical craft of Klenovec and Kokava. I will look at Romani ethnicity especially from the perspective of its construction and performance. In the theoretical part, I will follow up on scholarly debates concerning theories of Romani ethnic identity, pointing out the peculiarities of this phenomenon and considering conceptualisations potentially relevant for my ethnographic analysis. In the analytical part, I will then describe typical manifestations of ethnicity among Roma in Klenovec and Kokava. I will show how Roma are categorised and perceived

based on their ethnicity and what this categorisation and perception means for (and does to) their everyday lives. Then, I will consider professional music-making practices from the perspective of these theories – as a specific case of Romani ethnicity performance. The chapter aims to contribute to tangled academic discussions on Romani ethnic identity by proposing an original theoretical model for understanding various forms of ethnicity performance among a group that may appear to be unitary at first glance.

The third chapter will explore the economic aspects of the Romani musical craft in the locality. Firstly, I will ground Romani professional music-making in economic-anthropology theories. I will compare it with other Romani economies in various locales, seek principles upon which these all operate, and analyse their anthropological significances in Romani societies and cultures. Then, I will describe the economic specifics of the Romani musical craft in the locality and describe the set of approaches and activities with which Romani musicians sustain their livings. The chapter will contribute to the anthropological discourse on informal economies and enrich the growing body of work on economic practices of Roma, with an original focus on the complexities of the relationship between Romani music professionals and non-Romani clientele.

The fourth chapter will look at the role of Roma-ness – the enactment of Romani ethnic specificity – in the Romani musical craft. I will frame Roma-ness with reference to theories of impression management and discuss how it is constructed both in the performance of Roma and the perceptions of non-Roma. In the ethnographic part of this chapter, I will scrutinise the case of professional musicians from Klenovec and Kokava from the perspective of these theories. I will describe a set of techniques and strategies that Romani musicians use to fulfil the audience's expectations about Roma-ness in their performances, discussing the role of these strategies in the Romani music economy and their further impact on the lives of Romani musicians. The key contribution of this chapter lies in uncovering the anthropological principles behind Roma-ness, through analysis of performances by Romani bands across various genres and styles of music in one ethnographic location – and in exploring its further significances in the lives of Romani musicians.

In the concluding section of the thesis, I will summarise the key contributions of the entire piece of work, propose questions for further research and critically reflect upon my research methodology, whose basics I introduce now.

Introducing the Research Methodology

Along with the topics of my research, my research methods have been developing as particular objectives have emerged at different stages. In this section, I will briefly outline this methodological development, describe my training in particular methods, and introduce the main methodological approaches that I used to complement this thesis. The two sub-sections below will each introduce one side of my principle methods – the *ethnographic* and the *visual* respectively. Note that a detailed evaluation of and critical reflection on these methods forms part of the final section of this thesis (cf. ⇨Reflections).

Ethnographic Methods

My methods for ethnographic data acquisition have changed in alignment with the developing focus for my inquiries over the course of my entire research history. After my first trip to Klenovec in 2013, when I pursued the "micro-ethnography project" mentioned above (something I was very proud of at the time of its creation, but that would be an exaggeration to call a piece of 'pilot research' now), there was an almost two-year break. This was because I spent the academic year 2013/2014 at the University of Durham as a visiting student in the Department of Anthropology. I used this distance from the field to connect with contemporary scholarship on Romani music and anthropology of Roma and, importantly, to extend my knowledge about research methods.

The courses in the Department of Anthropology helped me to deepen my understanding of qualitative ethnographic methods, in which I had been formally trained during my BA course in Cultural Studies and MA course in Anthropology (both at the Charles University in Prague), yet, with which I had had little practical experience. I also attended two ethnomusicological courses in the Department of Music during this visit, thanks to which I became acquainted with the basics of ethnomusicological methodology. I extended my ethnographic and ethnomusicological training further during the second year of my MA degree in Anthropology at Charles University.

After returning from Durham, I started preparing a grant application for submission to the Grant Agency of Charles University (GA UK) aimed at pursuing research in Klenovec and Kokava for my MA thesis. The project was approved in April 2015, and so in May 2015, I arrived in Klenovec as an independent researcher for the first time. I designed interviews to be the key method in this research. I used contacts from my first trip in 2013 to build a body of research participants with snowball sampling. While the time spent in the field was rather short – lasting about three weeks – I managed to meet and interview 18 Romani musicians from Klenovec and Kokava. The sample of interviewees reflected the gender disparity that I have mentioned (17 of the musicians were men), and the age of the interviewees ranged from 13 to 69. The interviews were semi-structured, lasting

40–90 minutes, and I used a handy audio device to record them. I took various field audio recordings from *bašávely*, rehearsals, and concerts alongside the interviews. I did not, however, use any of these recordings in the analysis. Instead, I distributed them on CDs as gifts to my research participants during my return trip in summer 2015.

This first research period was followed by another two-year break, during which I maintained contact with my research site rather sporadically. I was working outside academia and applying for funding to pursue further research in the locality. I succeeded in 2017 when I was accepted for a PhD course at Durham University. My PhD fieldwork commenced in the second year of my PhD studies in September 2018, and it lasted until September 2019 with a three-month interruption due to a professional placement, which was an obligatory part of my PhD research programme. During these nine months, I lived continuously in the rectory in Klenovec (the choir house of the ECAV church) and, at regular intervals (two to five times a week), I travelled to see the musicians in Kokava (cf. ⇨ Essential Note #1).

For my PhD research, I almost entirely abandoned the interview method and shifted my attention towards observational methods, upon which the core findings of this PhD thesis are based. During this period of fieldwork, I focused on the practice of professional music-making by exploring the pursuits of Romani bands from Klenovec and Kokava that I had met during the preliminary fieldwork, eventually expanding my focus to other bands from the locality and near surroundings. I accompanied these bands in their various activities related to professional music-making – including at concerts, so-called 'entertaining performances' [*zábavy*], rehearsals, studio recordings and so forth. I will critically evaluate the significance of this methodological shift from interviews to ethnographic observation in the final section of the thesis (cf. ⇨ Reflection on Ethnographic Methods).

Furthermore, the reader should be aware that this thesis engages with the ethnographic material in the form of *vignettes*, which usually are employed for providing context in the sections of ethnographic analysis. Some of these vignettes come from interviews and are the closest English translations of verbatim quotations from my research participants, as recorded with my fieldwork recorder. Others of these vignettes are reconstructions based on my ethnographic fieldnotes and, thus, should not be confused for verbatim quotations. Both types of vignettes are marked, dated, and localised accordingly. Finally, research participants are not anonymised in this thesis (with only a few exceptions when delicate matters are discussed). All participants have agreed to be featured in this work under their real names. Moreover, for most, anonymisation would be highly impractical due to the public nature of their work. This decision was made in alignment with the ethical approval granted by the Department of Music Ethics Committee.

Visual Methods

Since 2015, I have been employing various visual methods as auxiliaries to my ethnographic work. More specifically, I have engaged with photography and video. For my MA fieldwork in 2015, I went to Klenovec and Kokava equipped with a DSLR camera – a digital single-lens reflex camera, *a priori* designed for still photography. Around this time, this type of camera had become a popular device in the toolkit of many ethnographers, owing to its versatility. Firstly, DSLRs took excellent stills. I benefited from this feature when documenting music events and, later, I used digital copies of the photographs as gifts for my research participants on my return trips. Secondly, DSLRs were also capable of taking video that could easily out-perform some of the best digital cameras from the time in many technical and aesthetical aspects while packing the technology into a compact piece of gear. These are just some of many reasons that these cameras caused a significant 'revolution' in the genres of documentary and ethnographic film and in ethnographic practice more broadly. I have addressed the phenomenon of the 'DSLR revolution' in my other scholarly work (Nuska, 2015a, 2018c).

Hence, my first attempts to shoot video in Klenovec and Kokava in summer 2015 were mainly driven by a curiosity about the performance of this technology. I documented various Romani *bašávely* and other music-related occasions. Additionally, I was testing out how my research participants would react to the presence of a camera. I was pleasantly surprised to see that it did not have any noticeable inhibiting effects on Romani music-making. Quite on the contrary, the musicians seemed to react to it in the same way they would to cheering and applauding from the audience. These preliminary observations led me to think about incorporating visual methodologies more extensively into my further research.

I am relatively well-trained in various methods central to pursuing visual-ethnography and/or visual-ethnomusicology research. I have been involved in dozens of projects as an independent film- and video-maker – mainly in the field of documentary, educational and activist videos, and music videos for independent musicians. In my second Master's degree, in New Media Studies, I dealt with theories of visual art and culture and learned how to work practically with digital photographs, video and sound. I have also pursued a course in film production at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) and attended two special courses on ethnographic filmmaking, organised by the Studio of Visual Ethnography [*Studio vizuální etnografie*] at the University of West Bohemia and the Granada Centre for Visual Ethnography at the University of Manchester respectively. Thanks to all these opportunities, I have become well acquainted with the most important skills for producing photographs, sound and video.

It was in my mind for some time that this background might help me ground my later research in visual methods, possibly even enabling me to contribute to the fields of visual-ethnography and visual-ethnomusicology by pursuing certain

methodological innovations. For these reasons, I incorporated visual methodologies into my PhD research proposal, making them an important pillar of my research plans. This proposal was accepted into a unique PhD programme called the Interdisciplinary Training Programme in Visual Culture, which was based at the Centre for Visual Arts and Culture (CVAC) at Durham University. Pursuing this programme allowed me to be supervised across three departments, granting me support in all of the music, anthropology and visual aspects of my research proposal. Embarking on this programme motivated me to live up to my visual methodology commitments.

I spent the entire first year of my PhD reviewing literature on contemporary trends in visual anthropology and visual ethnomusicology. I also dedicated a lot of contemplation to the methodologies of these disciplines (e.g. Nuska, 2018a, 2019b, 2019a), although none of this work has directly found its way into this thesis. However, neither my previous training nor the thorough methodological preparation at the beginning of my PhD provided me with the answer to the most fundamental question: how will visual methods help me fulfil my research objectives, and in what way will they complement my ethnography? Fortunately, I managed to resolve this question in the course of my PhD fieldwork in 2018/2019 (I will explain how in the section concerning methodological reflections). For my PhD fieldwork, thus, I employed two auxiliary visual methods in particular: 1) photographs and photo-elicitation, and 2) video documentation and participatory music video-making.

Regarding the first, I continued my established practice of photographic exchanges – taking photographs of research participants who asked me to and bringing them back printed copies. Soon I learned that I was not the first visitor to carry out this practice in Klenovec and Kokava. Thanks to serendipity, I discovered an extensive collection of documentary photographs taken by Claude and Marie-José Carret – French photographers who have been documenting the locality with a special focus on Romani musicians since 1984. I met with the photographers during my fieldwork, and we agreed on a collaboration. I eventually started visiting my research participants with a selection of the Carrets' photographs for unstructured interviews – employing the so-called photo-elicitation method (e.g. Harper, 2002). Eventually, in collaboration with the photographers and my research participants, we exhibited these photographs at two exhibitions in Klenovec and Kokava (Carret, Carret, & Nuska, 2019). The employment of these pictures in my research was a vital source of information for this ethnography and an important act of reciprocity involving my research participants and myself. I will evaluate in detail the benefits of this method in the final section of the thesis.

Secondly, I continued to employ video in my ethnography. At the beginning of the fieldwork in 2018, I started documenting the various music events of professional musicians (with their consent), providing them with the material I shot. As the musicians were satisfied with (and often excited about) the media I offered, they provided me with repeated chances to document more of their events. Video-

making eventually became the core of our collaboration, allowing me access to the community of professional music-makers in the locality. Much like the photographs, video material has also worked well as a item of reciprocal exchange, exerting a positive effect on our collaboration. After the PhD fieldwork, we transitioned our joint video efforts from quasi-accidental documentation of live events into *ad hoc* video projects – "ethnographically grounded music videos" (cf. Ranocchiari & Giorgianni, 2020). We designed the production of these music videos in a participatory manner so that my research participants stayed in control of how *they* wanted to be represented (e.g. Lunch & Lunch, 2006). I will also bring up more details about video-making in the project and share some outcomes in the final section of this thesis.

Finally, both the employment of photographs and music videos have inspired and influenced the development of ethnographic films, whose production took place mainly *after* the end of my PhD fieldwork. There will be two ethnographic films related to Romani musicians from Klenovec and Kokava: the first – following up on the work with photographs – is now (March 2022) in late post-production, and the second – based on work with music videos – is planned for production in spring and summer 2022. Links for viewing these films (and/or in-progress material) will also be provided in the final section of this thesis.

Although the films are based on my previous research activities and stem from my long-term acquaintance with my research participants, the production timeline for these films has been mostly independent from work on this ethnographic thesis. Thus, the thesis is a standalone piece of work based on ethnography and meant to be comprehensible without the films; and, vice-versa, the films stand alone as comprehensible without the need to engage with the thesis. Yet, filmmaking and other visual methods have been crucial in helping form relationships with my research participants. In the reflections section of the thesis, I will describe the impact of filmmaking on my research (and of research on my filmmaking). In the thesis, I will also feature some sample outcomes derived from these methods. These samples are meant to give a sense of what it is like to experience professional (and other) Romani musical practices first-hand. They are included in the thesis as an appendix, but – unlike a traditional appendix – it is one scattered across the entire thesis in *boxes* containing hyperlinks and QR codes that link to additional online material. Most commonly, these contain videos featuring musicians I had chance to meet during my fieldwork and archival photographs of notable musicians from the past. The boxes can be visited either by clicking on the link (if reading an electronic version of this document) or by scanning the QR codes with a smartphone (recommended especially when reading a printed copy of this work). Although visiting these boxes is not essential for understanding the ethnographic material, it is highly recommended for proper acquaintance with the featured musicians, their music-making and the peculiar soundscapes of Klenovec and Kokava.

Ethnographic Description

"A Valley of Hunger" and "the Gypsy Problem" in Klenovec & Kokava

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the location in question – the municipalities of Klenovec and Kokava – outlining essential ethnographic background for the three analytical chapters. It combines ethnographic description with analysis of written historical and contemporary sources. It starts with an analysis of socio-economic changes in the recent past, which have led to a significant stagnation and turned the region into a *hladová dolina* ('a valley of hunger'). Then, it turns attention to Roma living in the region, focusing on their prevalent social and economic position, uncovering a problematic relationship with the non-Roma majority, and discussing their manners of adaptation to the region's challenging socio-economic conditions.

Essential Note #1: Research Location or a Centre of Research Interest?

> In early October 2018, I was invited to a gig with the band Kokavakare Lavutára; it was my first such occasion since starting my PhD fieldwork. In a deserted parking lot, from which we were heading to Veľký Krtíš, I met Vladimir from Kokava and Janko from Klenovec, both of whom I had known for years. There were three other musicians I had not yet met and with whom I was about to become good friends. They were members of Barnovci – a family band from Hnúšťa. Hnúšťa is situated less than six kilometres from Klenovec and is a catchment town where everyone from Klenovec goes when they need to do shopping or travel to other parts of Slovakia by public transport. In the car on our way to the gig, Barna 'junior' told me: "In Klenovec, the musicians are folkies [*ľudovkári*], they play for peasants of the hills [*vrchári*]. But Hnúšťa – that's an actual town! People listen to modern music, funk and stuff. It's hugely different from Klenovec. But you're not interested in these sorts of things, are you?"
>
> 12th of October 2018, Kokava nad Rimavicou

Following this essential note, I need to clarify the significance of the names of the two municipalities in question – Klenovec and Kokava – for defining the *research location*. These names first appeared in my MA research proposal in 2013, and – seemingly automatically – they also take centre stage in the title of this PhD thesis. It was not until the meeting with Barnovci described in the opening vignette that I was forced to think critically about how these two names define my ethnographic focus. For the first time, this meeting led me behind the 'line' defined by the title of my research – the geographical boundaries of Klenovec and Kokava. It is a line that have I needed to cross many times since.

As already mentioned, my research journey started in spring 2013 with the 'magical trip' to Klenovec. In the summer that year, I passed through the Kokava-

based folklore festival Koliesko. I noticed that many musicians from Klenovec had various professional connections to musicians in Kokava and vice-versa. These connections were inseparable. It made me realised that I could not approach the Romani musical community from Klenovec without the one in Kokava. My later ethnographic research revealed the depth of connection between Roma from Klenovec and Kokava, which lent an ex-post justification to my initial decision. For as long as local people can remember, Romani musicians from both towns have travelled with their instruments over the Chorepa hill – either to perform in one of the towns or to travel together to more distant gigs. Some locals told me that the musicians from Kokava are a branch of the same family of musicians that settled in Klenovec many generations ago (I will unpack similar legends about the origin of the local Romani settlement in the second chapter of the thesis). Thus, for years, I considered Romani musician communities from Klenovec and Kokava as two intertwined trees rising from the same roots. Without probematising this assumption, I referred to Klenovec and Kokava as my 'research location'. This was until I uncovered some troublesome inconsistencies in my fieldnotes.

As the opening ethnographic excerpt suggests, during my fieldwork, I met many musicians who lived neither in Klenovec nor in Kokava. Yet, they played substantial parts in the Romani musical craft there. Musicians in Klenovec and Kokava are by no means hermetically closed communities; rather, they represent wide-spread *networks* of mutually collaborating Romani musicians dispersed throughout the entire county and even beyond (I will talk about the network-like character of the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava in the third chapter of the thesis). Soon I realised that geographic boundaries were not sufficient for understanding the nature of my field. It became inevitable for me to consider my field as "constructed through a play of social relationships established between ethnographers and informants that [...] extend across physical sites" (Amit, 2000; Coleman & Collins, 2006, p. 12; cf. also Olwig & Hastrup, 1997). Thus, I started perceiving Klenovec and Kokava as the *centre of my research interest*; the point where the exploration starts, but with my interest extending far beyond. Based on this precondition, there are some important implications for how the following text should be read:

1) Throughout the thesis, I will be using the abbreviation K&K to stand for 'Klenovec and Kokava' when referring to the locality in question.
2) However, this does not imply that *all* musicians mentioned in the ethnography come from/live in Klenovec or Kokava. The text features many musicians who live outside K&K but are part of K&K musician networks.
3) The text does not aim to reach a balance between Klenovec and Kokava or give both towns 50 percent of the attention. This especially applies to the presentation and interpretation of ethnographic data. Ever since the very beginning of my research, the centre of my ethnography has been Klenovec. While I was home in Klenovec, in Kokava, I was more like a visitor. This is why I often add insights from other ethnographic work when it comes to the latter.

The "*hladová dolina*" of Klenovec and Kokava

> On 11th of October 2018, the bells at the Klenovec Evangelical Church announce noon. It is still sunny and, because of that, there are quite a few people in the square. The bus has just dropped off a little crowd returning from work and shopping in Hnúšťa. They meet and mix with people who have gone to small shops sprinkled around Klenovec's square. There are at least a dozen of these shops; one can find almost everything without leaving Klenovec. They include three little grocery shops, a household goods store, a hardware store, a post office, a newsagent, and so on. With few words, people meet, greet and say goodbyes; they eventually scatter to their homes. Some people stand by a betting shop (serving also as a casino and bar), drinking beer and smoking cigarettes, and observing the square's slow life.
>
> All of a sudden, a rough, loud sound pops into this mild buzz. The sound is heavily distorted as if played under the water and it echoes throughout the town. After a series of cracks, the indistinct noise turns into a song in a cheerful tempo and a major scale. The lyrics are barely audible, but it is evident that it is a Slovak pop song – light, uplifting and positive. The locals hardly pay any attention to the strange sound. These songs introduce the local transmission announcements – the main way the townhall communicates with Klenovec inhabitants. The ancient loudspeakers attached to the lampposts around the town have news for Klenovec's people almost every weekday. The songs are used to grab everyone's attention so that even old citizens have time to move to their windows not to miss the beginning of the announcement. Finally, the loudspeakers proclaim: "Local transmission announcement! [*Hlásenie miestneho rozhlasu!*]. The company APJ Automotive Protection announces to those interested in job opportunities that on Monday, the 15th of October, a meeting of company representatives will take place in Utekáč at 1 pm. The company is planning to offer jobs in Utekáč's workplace to 14 people. The jobs include sewing and assembling protective sleeves for reputable brands of cars. The salary offered is 650 EUR."
>
> Afterwards, the transmission mentions that there will be a sale of potatoes at great prices. Then, as usual, it repeats both announcements from the beginning and, with audible clicks and scratches, the speaker hangs up. Afternoon progresses into early evening. At 4 pm, all the shops around Klenovec close. The sun goes over Chorepa, the steep mountain ridge between Klenovec and Kokava. After that, it gets cold and dark, and the square empties. Two of Klenovec's pubs – Demko and U Sveťa welcome a couple of their regular customers, but as it is just Thursday, it is clear that they are likely to shut before the announced closing hours – neither owner is keen to keep their bar open for just three regular drinkers and one curious Czech anthropologist. Once it gets dark, only the barking dogs and passing cars maintain the soundscape of Klenovec.
>
> 11th of October 2018, Klenovec

This is how my field notebook captured one 'normal day' in Klenovec in October 2018, at the beginning of my PhD fieldwork. In one little detail, though, I was experiencing quite a rare moment, something I realised only at the end of my fieldwork one year later: the local transmission that day announced new job opportunities. Back then, I did not know that, throughout that year, I would be listening mainly to funeral announcements, preceded by *The Air* from Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 3. The most positive announcements concerned bargain sales of textiles, chickens and vegetables. Through the content of the local transmission (and its unwavering routine), I learned things about the region which were hard to grasp from testimonies of local people and from written sources on local topography and history. I encountered a significant shortage of literature on the region's current socio-economic situation. While there is a lot of material –

historical and contemporary – focusing on the region's rich folklore tradition and culture and/or its glorious past, there is very little (if any) that critically reflects on its recent socio-economic and demographic development (its other kind of *rázovitosť*). Later, I found that understanding the current region's situation is crucial for grasping the phenomena discussed in the following findings chapters. Thus, in this section, I seek to make an original contribution and summarise the region's recent socio-economic development with the help of my ethnographic fieldnotes and primary and secondary written historical sources.

Box # 1 – Finding Klenovec on the map

thesis.nuska.me/box/01

Klenovec is a municipality situated in the Rimavská Sobota district in the county of Banská Bystrica, south-central Slovakia, with around 3,000 inhabitants. Its inhabitants like to refer to Klenovec as a *rázovitá* municipality: it is surrounded by the Veporské vrchy mountains, which are a important part of local folklore and carry a sentimental value for some locals. The anthem of Klenovec has lyrics that run as follows: "Under the high Vepor mountain there's a village / It's been called Klenovec for ages / All over the world it's the only one / Our dear beloved motherland (Hruška & Hruška, n.d.)." For an uninitiated visitor, the surrounding picturesque landscape may seem to have a potential for tourism. The Klenovec chronicle[3] summarised the feeling: "In the surroundings, there is a beautiful landscape, the water reservoir, forests with mushrooms. There are grounds for hunting and fishing, preserved folklore and other cultural-historical sites" (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1995], 310). During my research, I noticed flyers produced by the townhall encouraging visitors to pursue paragliding, hiking, cycling, and so forth. Nevertheless, the number of people who would come all the way here for these attractions seemed very low. During my occasional weekend trips around the mountains, I often ended up walking entire days without seeing a single person. Most of the potential paragliders, hikers and cyclists probably visit other Slovak mountains that enjoy greater popularity, such us the Vysoké and Nízké Tatry mountains, the Velká and Malá Fatra mountains, Slovenský ráj and many others. The Veporské vrchy mountains seem to be too *rázovité*; that is, *too far away* for people to pay a visit.

[3] It is common in Slovakia that histories of towns and municipalities are recorded in town/municipal chronicles [*mestské/obecné kroniky*]. These have been complied by persons who were entrusted this duty (usually partially remunerated but not always) by particular municipal/town administrations. Chroniclers take this position for several years (not rarely for several decades). Their names are usually known from the records but, when quoting them, it is more common in Slovakia to supress the name of chroniclers as they speak on behalf of the chronicler's institution. In this thesis, thus, I will cite them as unpublished primary source. Local chroniclers of Klenovec were invaluable source for this thesis (especially for this chapter). Due to a great fire in 1888, older Klenovec chronicles were destroyed, but three of those covering the period between 1934 and 2009 were preserved (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947; Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983; Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009).

Kokava – with around the same population of 3,000 inhabitants – lies on the other side of a mountain ridge, and also on the other side of the boundary dividing two districts – Rimavská Sobota and Poľtár. Klenovec's square is, as the crow flies, less than five kilometres from the square of Kokava; nevertheless, buses take almost 20 minutes to climb the steep ridge of Chorepa. Although the two municipalities are almost identical in terms of area and population proportions, subtle differences can be recognised, especially in locals' perceptions: "Kokava has always been more like a town. Even today, there's a café, a sweet shop [...] it may be because there has always been a train passing through Kokava [...] Klenovec has always been more like a village [*dedina*] of peasants [*vrchárov*]," one Klenovec local told me. Despite subtle differences between these municipalities, the locals agree that Kokava shares with Klenovec the same *rázovitosť* – it is distinctive and unique in its rich folklore and cultural heritage but, simultaneously, remote for potential visitors as well as isolated for its residents.

Box # 2 – Finding Kokava on the map

thesis.nuska.me/box/02

Remoteness and isolation have not *always* been features of these regions, though. The surrounding area used to be a self-sufficient centre upon which many demographic trajectories converged for centuries. In the region's cultural landscape, there are traces of massive industrial development and profitable agriculture. Many locals remember the region as self-sufficient, with a functional economy and plenty of job opportunities. The statistical data from the present time, however, shows symptoms of a major socio-economic stagnation. Population trends, to start with, show noticeable tendencies for people to leave K&K permanently. While in 1920, 4,544 people lived in Klenovec (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947, [1920], 18), the last census in 2017 counted only 3,146 (Bačík, 2020a). The sharpest decrease has taken place in the last 40 years, when the population of Klenovec has fallen by one third. Kokava reveals a similar trend: 4,022 inhabitants in 1970, and 2,849 inhabitants in the last census in 2017 (Bačík, 2020b).[4] This outflow of the population in Klenovec and Kokava goes as deep as the local memory: for as long as K&K inhabitants remember, both municipalities have been emptying. To take an example from another key indicator of socio-economic conditions, in 2017, the Rimavská Sobota district's unemployment rate was 24.65 percent, the highest in Slovakia. This figure was actually the lowest it had been in the preceding ten-year period; around 2008–2013 (i.e. during and after the global economic stagnation) the unemployment rate was close to 35 percent (Goliáš, 2017, pp. 15–24). The average monthly wage in 2015 was 684 EUR, the second-lowest in Slovakia (compared to the Slovak average salary of 883 EUR and

[4] There is, however, a noticeable reverse trend of population increase between the 1970s and the 2000s in surrounding towns (Hnúšťa, Rimavská Sobota, Poltár, Brezno, Lučenec and Detva), the primary targets of these waves of outflow.

the highest average rate of 1,446 EUR in Bratislava[5]) (Ibid., 22–24). Although the Poltár district (to which Kokava belongs) scores slightly better in these indicators,[6] both districts appear on the list of the least developed in Slovakia (Ibid., 17). These decreasing population trends, high unemployment, and poverty result from long-term changes in demographic and socio-economic structure, which have turned the region into an economic periphery, commonly marked by a Slovak idiomatic expression *hladová dolina* – 'a valley of hunger'.

The following sub-sections aim to analyse the causes and consequences of these changes. First, three subsections focus respectively on the decline of three significant economic systems, which once made the region prosperous and purposeful – mining and natural-wealth processing, enterprises manufacturing consumer goods, and agriculture. The fourth subsection discusses macro-economic changes during the transformation after the fall of communism, and the fifth subsection talks about social disintegration and symptoms of anomy as a result of these changes. I focus on the ethnographic perspective and explore how these socio-economic changes have affected the everyday lives of local people.

The Decline of the Mining Industry

> "I'm a miner!" said Ľubo – a Rom from Kokava in his late fifties – proudly. "I was mining for 28 years, so I still feel like a miner, although the mine has been closed for years now. In fact, I miss this work a lot," he continued, turning his glass of transparent liquor bottom-up and looking around the Táňa's pub, where one finds a lot of day-drinking people from Kokava with no current occupation.
>
> Kokava, December 2018

In the past, one of the most important sources of the region's economic wealth was its large amount of natural resources, especially mineral wealth. Throughout the modern age, in various phases and with different levels of importance, there are signs of mining and quarrying in the immediate vicinity of Klenovec and Kokava, especially of gold, copper, silver, iron; later also cobalt, graphite,

[5] Bratislava is an extraordinary place when it comes to economic indicators. It is regularly rated among the top EU regions for GDP per capita. In the latest report (with data from 2017), it occupied 8th position, with higher GDP per capita than Stockholm, Stuttgart, Vienna and other business-oriented European metropolises (Eurostat, 2019). This is despite Slovak GDP per capita the same year being scored as 21st out of the 27 countries in the EU (just behind Greece, which was still recovering from the government-debt crisis) (Eurostat, 2020). One explanation for this paradox is that many people participating in Bratislava's economy do not formally reside there (that is, working there without changing their permanent address) (Liptáková, 2016). This feature is a symptom of regional economic disparities, which will be discussed later in the subsection ⇨The Decline during the Transformation.

[6] In the case of the indicators discussed, the Poltár unemployment rate in 2017 was 17.02 percent (peaking around 27 percent during the time of economic stagnation), and the average salary was 713 EUR (Goliáš, 2017, pp. 15–24).

magnesite and talc (Gaál, 2008; Sokolovský, 1997, pp. 40–42, 2018, pp. 340–341; e.g. Spišiak, 1990). The great history of mining and metallurgy is still apparent in the local topographic names (Rimavská *Baňa* [i.e. Rimavská *Mine*], Cino*baňa*, Lovino*baňa*, Zlatno [from *Gold*], to name just a few in immediate proximity to K&K) and on the appearence of the surrounding landscape, shaped by markers of mining history that also resonate beyond this region.

Approaching the K&K region from the north through the valley of Rimavská dolina makes this glorious mining past observable with the naked eye. In Tisovec, limestone mining bit off a significant part of the Čermošná mountain. The first Slovak lime production started there in 1870 (and to a smaller extent, continues up to today) (Ranostaj, 2012). Just a few kilometres south, in the factory in Hačava, the oldest rotary furnace for processing magnesite in the world was launched in 1909. With some minor technical adjustments, the same furnace functions up to present times (Pulišová & Oštrom Mareková, 2019). Moving south towards Klenovec, in Hnúšťa (Likier), the first coke blast furnace in Slovakia began operating towards the end of the 19th century. As iron ore production became vital (accounting for half of the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire's production), the second and the third furnaces of this kind were launched there too (Pliešovský, n.d.). Naturally, the industry had a significant influence on the demography of the region. Mining professions[7] were the predominant occupation of all Klenovec inhabitants in the 19th century (Mináčová, 2015) and the first half of the 20th century (Murin, 2018, p. 78). In 1944, for example, the mining enterprise Rimamuránska spoločnosť[8] employed 429 people from Klenovec, an estimated 20 percent of its economically productive population (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947, [1944], 93). The industry gave jobs to locals and, in an important sense, granted *purpose* to the entire region.

The mining industry employed many local Roma from K&K too. Milan – the Romani saxophonist from Klenovec and my oldest research participant, now in his eighties – spotted himself in a photo of workers from the 1960s and 1970s during a photo-elicitation session: "That's the Socialist Labor Brigade and me! You know, originally, I was a miner," he said with pride and nostalgia, recalling times when there were enough work opportunities for everyone, including Roma. In an interview with Stanka Zvarová, Milan recalled one particularly interesting memory: "[I]n the 1950s, Roma in the settlement [*osada*] had no clocks or alarms. So, there was a Rom, Vojtěch Radič, who lived in an elevated place in the centre of the settlement. He had a piece of iron rail attached to the corner of his house, and

[7] This, apart from workers mining raw materials, included other essential professions for running the mining industry; for instance, gamekeepers (2), woodsmen (147), coalmen and teamsters (24) and other seasonal workers (352). The numbers in brackets indicate people from Klenovec occupying these professions in 1944 (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947, [1944], 93).

[8] By its full name, Rimamuránsko-Šalgótarjánska železiarska účastinná spoločnosť [Rimamuránsko-Šalgótarjánska Ironworks Join-Stock Enterprise], was the largest mining and metallurgical enterprise in the history of Slovakia. It was founded in 1881 and was involved in much activity in the surrounding region and other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During the times of economic conjuncture in the 1920s, it employed around 12,000 workers (Němec, 1967).

he would bang on the iron rail every day at three o'clock in the morning [...] They would get up at three because they went to work on foot to earn their living" (Zvarová, 2016, p. 25).

However, the importance of the mining industry gradually diminished, most notably after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and subsequent transformation of the economy, which will be discussed later in a special subsection. The diminishment had a radical impact on the demography of the region. Lacko, a historian researching Slovak mining history, was asked in an interview whether any of these municipalities were able to prepare for the decline of mining. He replied: "The problem was that in most municipalities in this region, there was nothing but mining. When mining ceased, their existence was no longer essential" (Sarvaš, Lipták, & Beňák, 2018, p. 2).

The Decline of the Large Enterprises

> I walked through Utekáč during my fieldwork in autumn 2018 to see the decay of the well-known enterprise with my own eyes. The streets were empty, and the ruins of the factory cast a huge shadow over the village. The train was still terminating there, although the ticket office had closed a long time ago. The station building's purpose had changed; it was now a cosy little pub, where I met the only locals I came across – day drinking. They were in their thirties and forties, turning rounds of *borovička* and vodka shots, sinking their change into the jukebox. "And now, let's play our song, shall we?" one younger man shouted. The jukebox started playing a song by the Slovak punk rock band Zóna A with a catchy refrain: "Keď sa chceš dobre mať, tak musíš utekať" – "If you wanna do alright, you need to run away!"
>
> November 2018, Utekáč

Besides the great tradition of mining natural wealth, the region of K&K was also known for large, profitable enterprises. They grew up as a complementary part of the local economy, mainly to process natural wealth and to manufacture consumer goods. Many of them had centuries-long traditions – e.g. glass-making in Kokava (cf. Sokolovský, 1997, p. 140). Others were established during the early era of communism in the 1950s and 1960s in parallel with heavy industries to create jobs for the female labour force (cf. Baláž, 2007, p. 4). The vast majority of these enterprises currently have one thing in common – the significant loss of production they have endured in the most recent past. Some have even gone bankrupt and no longer exist. In this section, I recount the stories of two enterprises – a textile factory in Klenovec and a glassworks in Kokava and its affiliated industrial settlement Utekáč.

The Klenovec textile factory has been located near the Romani *osada* Dolinka for decades, during which time its purpose has changed several times. It has created a significant portion of the area's job opportunities, especially for women from Klenovec. Before the Second World War, the factory was a tannery, taking

advantage of a cowhide abundance from the surrounding agricultural production. After the war, the factory turned to underwear production (the Slovenka factory). In the 1960s, it was changed into a branch of the Zornica factory, one of the largest Slovak enterprises for manufacturing textiles (Zúrik, 2010). It gave jobs to about 300 people, mainly women from Klenovec (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1991], 236). In 1990, Zornica was severely affected by the sudden collapse of Eastern-bloc exports, and the enterprise was forced to lay off a proportion of its employees and to retrain the rest for a different type of work (Ibid., 237). In 1993, a new enterprise was launched on the old factory premises – Evasport, which started manufacturing sports shoes.

Box # 3 – Zóna A: Ludia v pohybe

The song is titled *Ľudia v Pohybe* [People in Motion] and was released on the album V Životnej Forme (by Monitor-EMI Records s.r.o. in 1996). The popularity of this song in Utekáč is apparently contained in a pun: the name Utekáč is derived from the Slovak verb *utekať* – to run (away). The punk band Zóna A was founded in 1984 and is performing to this day. On a side note, their repertoire also features a song titled *Cigánsky problem* [Gypsy Problem] (from the album Potopa, Inflagranti Records, 1990), which features a plethora of racist stereotypes about Roma and calls for "sorting out the Gypsy problem." The album was re-mastered and re-published in 2004, and today this song is the most liked from the album on YouTube. In this sense, Zóna A represents an exception among punk bands, who more commonly endorse anti-racist ideology.

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In present times, Evasport is the largest employer in Klenovec. The enterprise provides jobs to a significant number of Roma from the area, including the poorest Roma from Dolinka. Evasport too struggled with post-communist transformation difficulties, such as people's unpreparedness and unwillingness to requalify for other types of work after the decline of heavy industries and agriculture (Ibid., 498, 556). During my fieldwork in spring 2019, I heard rumours from its employees that the company had severe financial difficulties forcing them to delay payment of salaries. The salaries for workers are below the regional average (which is itself below the national standard). Zuzana, a Romani woman living outside Dolinka, told me that she earns around the legal minimum wage – that is, 425 EUR per month in 2017 (her husband Zolo sitting next to her noted: "You see? Why would I even bother to go to work if I can earn 700 euros in five days of busking?"). Although Evasport today does not seem to be an example of a profitable enterprise, it is one of the few that has survived the transformation after the fall of communism, maintaining a similar number of job opportunities. In 2018, it employed 262 people (EVASPORT s.r.o., 2019). Many other enterprises have not been as successful as the former Klenovec textile factory.

The story of the glassworks in Utekáč (featured in the ethnographic opening above) is a case of the sudden, absolute bankruptcy of a prosperous enterprise – a situation not unique in this region. The enterprise used to be a diamond of the local industry. Its ancestor was built in 1824, and it attracted masters of the glass-

making craft from Bavaria, Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, Romania and Ukraine. This international demographic was the background for varied cultural and sports activities in the town. For instance, there were cinema screenings, regular concerts and dance balls, a swimming pool, and a football pitch. Utekáč became a modern factory town and the regional leader in cultural innovation (Murin, 2015; OZ Iskra Utekáč, 2014; Šesták, 2016). Under socialism, the factory started producing famous vacuum flasks – *termosky* – which were widely exported abroad, including to countries beyond the "Iron Curtain" such as Sweden, Finland and France. The *termosky* from Utekáč were even used by the Norwegian army – quite a rare crossing of boundaries in a world divided by the Cold War (Grosz, 2013).

The factory in Utekáč functioned continuously for 210 years, despite various world economic crisises, two world wars and being destroyed by fire several times. It gave jobs to most of the workforce from Utekáč and to a great many from its surrounding area. Among the workers were many Roma from Kokava. Claude and Marie-José Carret commented on one of their photographs from 1988 of Viktor Samko, a well-known Romani musician from Kokava:

> For us, Viktor Samko was one of the best encounters in Kokava. This musician (just like most of the others) had to do other work apart from music-making to sustain his living. Therefore, like many people in the village, he worked in the factory manufacturing vacuum flasks. When we brought him some pictures, he wanted to return us the favour. So since that day, we have had the most beautiful collection of vacuum flasks in the world!
>
> (Carret et al., 2019)

In 1994, the glasswork factory had 729 employees. The post-communist transformation, however, abruptly turned this reputable glass-making tradition to ruin. At the end of 1995, the glassworks was privatised. By 1998, the factory had shut down, resulting in an almost 100 percent unemployment rate in Utekáč. Although there were some attempts to revitalise this enterprise, in 2006 the factory's new owner sold the manufacturing machines for scrap to make at least some return from the wasted investment. The whole municipality of Utekáč lost its purpose. Today, only the shadow of the factory ruins serves as a reminder of a former modern factory town and its reputable past in glass-making.

The Decline of Agriculture

> I met Július while having lunch at Demko in Klenovec – he was leaning against the bar, drinking shots of *borovička* with his companions, washing them down with beer. He introduced himself as a local folk storyteller [*ľudový rozprávkár*], now in his retirement. I was impressed by his memory as he explained to me the meaning behind Klenovec's street names. He was in a cheerful mood and, for a moment, I felt like I was a student being tested. "And the 1. mája [1st of May] street?" he asked, continuing his list of notable Klenovec streets. "That's the long street where the co-op [*družstvo*] is, isn't it?" "Yes! That co-op! Can you imagine that it once gave jobs to a thousand people?" he said, waving towards the co-op's grounds nearby, where tethered dogs guard dozens of empty rusty agricultural hangars.
>
> Klenovec, January 2019

Traditionally, the K&K region was self-sufficient in terms of agricultural production. Agricultural infrastructure surrounded both Klenovec and Kokava, with some peasants living and farming up to ten kilometres from the villages (cf. Sokolovský, 1997, p. 35). They grew mainly root vegetables (e.g. potatoes) and cabbages. Shepherding on the surrounding hills yielded enough milk for experiments with cheese-making and the discovery of the famous *klenovecký syrec* cheese – a renowned speciality during the Austro-Hungarian Empire era and today one of only ten Slovak food products to have earned a protected designation in the European Union (EUR-Lex, 2014). The abundance of fruit trees (apple, plum and pear) was essential for the production of transparent liquor with a high amount of alcohol, known as *domáca* (i.e. *a home-made* fruit spirit). K&K locals are often referred to as *vrchári* ('peasants of the hills') – proudly by themselves and in jest (and sometimes with contempt) by others, in both cases, emphasising the traditional connection of Klenovec and Kokava with agriculture and herding.[9] Indeed, work in agriculture used to be the most common occupation in the region. After the Second World War, for instance, there were 1,258 independently farming peasants in Klenovec, representing over 62 percent of the economically productive population (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1953], 46).[10] Apart from

[9] This endoethnonym was originally used for peasants of various origins who settled down on the surrounding hills (*vrch* is Slovak for 'hill') in the 18th and 19th centuries (Sokolovský, 1997, p. 38). Today, this word is often used to refer to all inhabitants of K&K. Mostly, I heard it in its unflattering context used by outsiders to point to a conservativeness (and also a certain simplicity) among the local people ("They wouldn't listen to modern music. They are *vrchári*" is a phrase I heard from Romani musicians). At the same time, however, when I heard it used proudly by the locals it was, for instance, in the context of local folklore ("We play *vrchárská* folk music [*vrchárska ľudová hudba*]," members of the Vepor ensemble told me). This perception of *vrchári* plays a vital role in specialisation in the Romani music business and the creation of musical niches, which will be discussed in the chapter ⇨Music-making as Making a Living.

[10] This statistic on the proportion of professions is based on rationing [*potravinové lístky*], which took place in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War (lasting until May 1953). The detailed statistics state that there were 402 workers, 22 lumberjacks, two railwaymen, two hairdressers, 336 other professions, 593 housewives [*ženy v domácnosti*], 113 pensioners and the disabled, and 570 pupils. The rest (750) was made up, in the words of the chronicle, of "children, elders and others." It can be suspected that the term "others" is a euphemism for unemployed Roma. (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1952], 46).

those involved in farming as their primary occupation, there have always been many people who grew crops and bred animals for their own needs, alongside their primary professions. Although more rarely, local Roma were also involved in this subsistence farming – for instance, a Rom nicknamed Gazda, whose story I tell in detail in the following chapter (cf. ⇨Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft). However, the significance of agriculture in the everyday life of people in K&K has certainly diminished. The number of locals whose main occupation is in agriculture has fallen radically, as is well evident in the current state of the farmers' co-ops [*roľnícká družstva*] mentioned in the opening vignette.

The co-ops were created in the process of collectivisation – that is, the integration of individual (privately owned) agricultural lands into collectively controlled "United farmers' cooperatives" [*Jednotné roľnícke družstvá*, abbreviated to *JRD*]. Following the model prevalent across the entire Eastern bloc, in Czechoslovakia, this process started in the 1950s, and the communist political machine used a massive propaganda effort (eventually also legal persecution) to finish this process. In Klenovec and Kokava, however, where the peasants had farmed on their lands individually for generations, this process did not run at all smoothly, especially in its early stages. The chronicler of Klenovec in 1960 complained: "[I]n the entire state [of Czechoslovakia] more than 80% of the land belongs to the socialist sector [but] in our municipality more than 70% of peasants farm privately"[11] (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1960], 106). It was not until the 1970s that the most persistent peasants from K&K finally succumbed to the pressure of propaganda and legal persecution,[12] and finally agreed to transfer their assets to the management of JRDs. In 1973, the JRD in Klenovec swallowed the last individually held land and established a 6,231-hectare JRD with 755 members (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1973], 322–323). In the same year, the JRD in Kokava started a merger with a large JRD, Pokrok Poltár, which began operating with five other JRDs from the Poltár district. In 1974, it had 6,237 hectares of agricultural land (ZPD Poltár, 2020), and by the end of the 1980s, it had over a thousand members (Stará Kokava, 2018). The collectivisation of the K&K JRDs was finally finished and stabilised. It was their golden time, which Július remembered as a period when the JRDs across K&K provided jobs to "a thousand people."[13] From

[11] It is worth noting that the nationwide figures might have been generously rounded up by press propaganda.

[12] The collectivisation process was enforced by law and government regulations; for instance, Government Regulation No. 50/1955 Coll. – "On Measures to Ensure Agricultural Production." This regulation was used against the last six persisting peasants of Klenovec in 1974, who later became subjects of criminal complaints (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1974], 330).

[13] The actual figures are hard to reconstruct today. From JRD Annual General Meetings, information about its membership survives for almost every year. These figures, however, also include members who were retired or "not active" (presumably farmers who "provided" their lands in the process of collectivisation but ceased to participate in farming afterwards). Moreover, the JRD gave jobs to hundreds of seasonal workers [*brigádnici*], sometimes even supported by pupils from the upper grades of primary schools, to manage the crops as required by centrally planned quotas. The figure should thus be taken loosely.

the mid-1970s, Klenovec and Kokava represented typical collectively controlled agricultural municipalities (cf. Murin, 2018, pp. 72–80). This moment, however, did not last long.

In the 1980s, there was a decline in agricultural production. Moreover, in Klenovec, there was a great loss of agricultural land related to the construction of a reservoir (and consequent water protection) in the northern part of its land registry. Last but not least, the depopulation trends I outlined earlier (cf. ⇦"Hladová dolina" of Klenovec and Kokava) had started and the generation of the youngest inhabitants were moving to towns – especially to industrial centres within the wider region, such as Rimavská Sobota, Lučenec, Brezno and Detva (cf. Murin, 2018, p. 70). This gradual diminishment was sharpened with the fall of communism in 1989. Immediately after the revolution, the system of generous state subsidies collapsed. The JRDs were forced to reduce their agricultural production significantly. With immediate effect, there were no resources for paying fixed expenses and staff salaries; the JRDs became insolvent, and they began to dismiss their employees. Although the Slovak government tried to establish a systematic solution, the entire agricultural sector remained paralysed for decades. Slovak farmers were hoping that the situation would change with the accession to the European Union in 2004. They expected "to reach certain stability and clear rules of the game," achieved by a transparent system of subsidies and valorisation of their work. However, "it happened exactly to the contrary" (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [2006], 557). The situation has remained unstable up to the present day, and it concerns the whole agricultural sector in all peripheral regions. The official annual report of the Klenovec co-op from 2018 says:

> We, farmers, are disgusted that discrimination in the direct subsidies is not eliminated. If we have the same obligations in the EU, we should also have the same rights: equal subsidies and equal access to the market. Employment in agriculture needs to be supported to revive the peripheral regions of Slovakia. For years, our government has been expressing how they want to support agriculture and cattle production in Slovakia, but they fulfil nothing. We have survived only by the skin of our teeth.
>
> (RD Klenovec, 2018, p. 3)

As noted in this quotation (and as other parts of the report suggest), a lack of demand for the agricultural work is not an issue; on the contrary, there is a great shortage of skilled workers to meet requirements. Nevertheless, the current market situation, with its unsatisfactory system of subsidies, does not allow for turning this shortage of workforce into actual job opportunities. Today, the co-op in Klenovec gives jobs to an average of 78 people (RD Klenovec, 2018, p. 8); the entire co-op of Pokrok Poltár, which once swallowed the JRD in Kokava and five other municipalities and had over a thousand members, now employs 43 people (ZPD Poltár, 2020). Many rusty hangars, modest loss-making agricultural production, and a tiny fraction of job opportunities needed – this is what remains from the long and vivid agricultural tradition in K&K. Above all, in the process of collectivisation, people lost *their* land – land to which generations of farmers were formerly bound through the sentimental relationships felt by owners, people who

desired to continue magnifying these feelings (cf. Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1990], 195). Unkind collectivisation, coupled with unsuccessful transformation (cf. ⇨The Decline during the Transformation), contributed significantly to a deep social disintegration (cf. ⇨Symptoms of Anomy in K&K).

The Decline during the Transformation

> Klenovec inhabitants went to work in surrounding towns and villages, to Chemical Entreprises [*Lučobné závody*] and Technical Rubber [*Technická guma*] in Hnúšťa, Magnesite Plants [*Magnezitové závody*] in Hačava and to Ore Mines [*Rudné baně*], which [...] started reducing production and laying off employees. That is how the workers from the [Klenovec] municipality have lost their jobs already in 1990. It is a phenomenon that was unknown, as during socialism unemployment did not exist.
>
> (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1990], 206)

> You know – in the past, this used to be an excellent region for living. But in the 1990s, they completely siphoned it off [*rozkradli*]. Ever since, there is nothing but poverty.
>
> Béla, double-bass player from Jesenské, 14th of February 2019

The different sorts of decline mentioned in the three previous subsections have one thing in common – they all massively escalated after the fall of communism in 1989. After the revolution, what was then Czechoslovakia started the process of social, political and economic *transformation*, during which time all post-communist countries aimed to convert their former socialistic economies into capitalist ones – based on free-market principles. This process took various forms in various regions and, in some cases, the transformation did not successfully resume former economic stability. Today, the peripheral regions of Slovakia (such as the region of K&K) are the most typical examples of unsuccessful transformation.

During socialism in Czechoslovakia (1948–1989), interventionism (based on central planning) diminished regional disparities by creating a structure of artificial production, mainly intended for the domestic and Eastern bloc markets. While the Czech part of Czechoslovakia represented one of the most developed industrial countries in Europe, Slovakia persisted as a rural peripheral region until about the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s, the political leadership applied so-called district industrialisation, where all regions were given specific economic activity that would satisfy the employment and national-level product demands. This would mainly include industries requiring a male labour force (in the case of K&K, mining, processing natural resources and agriculture), with complementary enterprises involved in the manufacture of consumer goods employing women (e.g. the Zornica factory in Klenovec). The system was maintained through a generous system of subsidies, which diminished regional differences. The regions were extremely economically homogenous – i.e. overspecialised in particular sectors (Baláž, 2007).

With the collapse of socialism, the generous system of subsidies, together with the artificial demand-supply system, also collapsed. Massive job losses started as early as in 1990. As the Czechoslovak (and, from 1993, the Slovak) government tried to postpone economic collapse by supporting but not re-structuring ineffective industries, gradual economic decline took place throughout the entire 1990s. In 2002, a chronicler noted that Klenovec citizens "do not have many opportunities to find a job [...]" and that "apart from the Evasport and the Farmers' Co-op, there is only community service [*verejnoprospešné práce*]" (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [2002], 482). The economies of some Slovak regions (the capital Bratislava and districts of, for instance, Martin, Zvolen, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava, Považská Bystrica and Košice) successfully transformed, their industries re-structuring and finding new markets. Other districts turned into economic peripheries. Their maladaptation to the new conditions of the capitalistic market was reinforced by bad political leadership, which completely failed to support this transition.

Economists see a key explanation for why some Slovak regions managed the economic transformation relatively well while some did not in the unequal distribution of foreign direct investments. These investments were massively concentrated in Slovak metropolitan regions (especially Bratislava), while the peripheral regions were economically marginalised. They suggested that this unequal distribution was determined by the regions' "remoteness and poor infrastructure" (Baláž, 2007, p. 11) – in other words, by their *rázovitosť*. Other reasons were their disadvantageous demographic composition, with a high proportion of the population at post-productive age, a lack of tertiary education (Commission - EAC, 2019; cf. Murin, 2018, p. 71), and a high proportion of ethnic minority populations – namely the Hungarian (A. Smith, 2000) and the Romani (Baláž, 2007, p. 11). All these aspects put foreign investors off, and the Slovak government did not take any action to stop the rise of regional disparities. Slovakia is today a country with among the highest regional disparities in the world. Higher salary differences between centres and peripheries are only to be found in Turkey, Mexico and Israel (Goliáš, 2017, p. 2).

I have often heard complaints similar to Béla's quotation above, in which people blame *them*. 'Them' often refers to the Slovak government for letting the situation of regional inequalities go so far. Sometimes, 'them' refers to conspiracy theories about the mafia's connections with high-ranking politicians who "siphoned the region off" and used its former wealth for self-enrichment. Recent political events in Slovakia have created firmer grounds for such theories.[14] While the older

[14] In 2018, Slovakia experienced a massive political earthquake after the murder of 27-year-old investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, who was the same age. Slovaks considered it a climax of the long-term collaboration of Slovak politics with big business and the mafia. The murder was followed by the largest protests since 1989 and led to the resignation of premier Robert Fico's entire government. Later, the investigation uncovered that the murder was likely ordered by the influential businessman Marián Kočner, who did indeed have ties to high politics. The case is now (August 2022) in court while Kočner is currently serving a 19-year prison sentence for forging promissory notes (e.g. Mrvová & Turček, 2018).

generations still remember a region in good economic condition, they have experienced an extremely fast decay during their lifetimes. The current political classes in Slovakia are now aware of this problem and are trying to find a structural solution. To reduce regional disparities, in 2015, governmental Act no. 336/2015 came into force with the aim of supporting the least developed districts, a category to which both the Rimavská Sobota and Poltár districts belong. Obviously, though, the government faces massive structural problems that have been ignored for far too long.

Symptoms of Anomy in K&K

> In our municipality, suicides occur almost every year [...] The most frequent cause is excessive alcohol consumption, and ensuing family issues. This year, they were three people who committed suicide by hanging: a bricklayer – an alcoholic (who left a widow with three children), a bachelor – an alcoholic, and a cooperative peasant – nervously ill. It is evident that alcohol brings sadness to families most often. And especially young people do not want to realise that.
>
> (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1978], 414)

> Martin is a former software developer from the Czech Republic, who, by a matter of great coincidence, visited Klenovec in 2015. After paying his visit and becoming familiar with the Romani community living in Dolinka, he abruptly shifted his career path. Martin decided to move to Klenovec to become a full-time missionary. Once, he invited me for dinner and a chat. "When I came here, I thought I'd only be helping Roma. But soon I realised that non-Roma also needed help so much." "What do you mean?" I asked. "Haven't you noticed? Everyone here is a drinker. A drinker without hope."
>
> Klenovec, 30th of January 2019

During my first visit to Klenovec in spring 2013, I recall getting on a bus in Hnúšťa. It was shortly after 5:00 in the morning, so I was perplexed to find that the bus station's pub had just opened. I was more perplexed when I found it full of people, even more so seeing them prepare for their morning shifts by drinking shots of vodka and *borovička*, washing them down with beer. Having subsequently spent several years researching in K&K, I noticed that extensive alcohol consumption is typical for the entire region. It is not a coincidence that all the ethnographic excerpts introducing the previous subsections took place in local pubs – these are indeed the places where people treat the hardships that occur as a consequence of living in the *hladová dolina.*

From the historical record, it is evident that the emergence of alcoholism is deeply connected to the region's gradual socio-economic decline. The Klenovec chronicles have noted clearly how problems with alcoholism have erupted, especially in times of crisis. In 1942, the chronicler noticed the existence of this "sad phenomenon," explaining it as a reaction to the war situation (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947, [1942], 82). The next chronicler to write about it came in 1967. At that time, the collectivisation process was culminating and people were losing

the land on which they had farmed for generations. Five people from Klenovec that year committed suicide by hanging, and the chronicler blamed "alcoholism and ensuing disrupted family life" (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1967], 232).[15] Suicides are another unfortunate feature of the surrounding region. The available statistical data show that between 2008 and 2019, Banskobystrický was the county with the highest occurrence of suicides in all Slovakia every single year, with instances around 30 percent higher than the Slovak average (Národné centrum zdravotníckych informácií, 2020). If the chroniclers were right to point to suicides as consequence of local tendencies to alcoholism, then there is still one unanswered question: what is the cause of the alcoholism?

Based on insights from the previous subsections, one might expect these sociopathological features to result from an enormous and unprecedented socio-economic decline. Natural wealth offering sufficient job opportunities, the rich agricultural tradition based on a strong relationship to the agricultural landscape, tightened by centuries of individual farming, and stable employment secured by prosperous enterprises – each of these features of the region's former economic system has disintegrated in the last few decades. With such disintegration, the municipalities of Klenovec and Kokava 'lost their purpose'. A great number of people left K&K for good. Those who stayed have struggled to find a dignified and sustainable way of living. 'People without hope' often treat their hardship with drinking. Both alcoholism and suicides, thus, seem to be symptoms of an extensive *anomy* that has affected people living in K&K immensely (cf. Durkheim in Marks, 1974). Whether for Roma or non-Roma, musician or non-musician, conditions of the *hladová dolina*, with all their related hardships, are significant determining factors in the everyday life of K&K people.

"The gypsy problem" – Roma in K&K

> All indications are that the gypsy problem [*cigánský problém*] will remain a problem for a long time to come. The education (or re-education) of Gypsy citizens and their recruitment for the fulfilment of societal tasks is a very difficult matter.
>
> (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1977], 376)

In Slovakia, there is a strong correlation between a region's poverty indicators (e.g. unemployment and low salaries, as presented in the sections above) and the Romani proportion in the population. The whole district of Rimavská Sobota has a proportion of 28.2 percent (the second highest rate in Slovakia after the adjoining Revúca district), the Poltár district has 11.1 percent, while the Slovak average is 7.5 percent (Goliáš, 2017, p. 22). Looking at the two municipalities in question, in 2019, there were 830 Romani inhabitants in Klenovec (out of 3070; i.e. approx. 27 percent) and 515 in Kokava (out of 2843; i.e. approx. 18 percent) (Office of the

[15] Klenovec chronicles mentioned other sad events related to alcohol consumption, including many more suicides, tragic accidents, vandalism, and criminal offences (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, 341, 386, 414, 473, 575; Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, 23, 88, 140).

Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Romani Communities, 2019). The category of inhabitants with the lowest income overlap significantly with the category of Romani inhabitants. Most of the K&K Roma live in deep structural poverty. A similar situation is, after all, widely present elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. Roma in this entire transnational region form an ethnic group defined by low socio-economic status – an "ethnoclass" (Vermeersch, 2003, pp. 890–892), or an "underclass" (Szelényi, Emigh, & Fodor, 2001). It is a group tied to ideas of a "sociological problem" rather than to those of a "culturally distinct people" (Stewart, 1997a, pp. 87–88); and the culture of Roma is confused in various discourses with a "culture of poverty" (Jakoubek, 2018). The perception of Roma as a *problem* that needs to be sorted applies to Roma elsewhere, including widely in Slovakia – in the past (cf. Jurová, 1993) and today (cf. Klimovský, Želinský, Matlovičová, & Mušinka, 2016). K&K is no exception. In the local chronicles from the era of socialism, we find abundant mentions of "the gypsy problem" [*cigánsky problem*] and "the gypsy question" (e.g. Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, 129, 145, 191, 386). With the fall of socialism, the word 'gypsy' was replaced by 'Roma/ni', but neither 'question' nor 'problem' disappeared from the vocabulary which locals use to point out issues involved in living alongside Roma (e.g. Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, 178, 285).

This section focuses on the lives of K&K Roma from an ethnographic perspective. It aims to explain the reasons behind their extreme poverty, to outline their problematic relationship with non-Roma and, finally, to introduce their ways of adapting to the challenging socio-economic conditions of the *hladová dolina*.

"*Inadaptable*" – Roma on the Periphery and the Effect of Cumulative Failure

> Not many people know Roma from Dolinka in as much detail as Martin, the missionary. "I can tell you almost exactly because I was recently doing the St. Nicholas feast [*Mikuláše*] for the kids there," he explained to me as we talked about demographic trends in Dolinka. "There are currently 55 households – also counting when more than one family exists within one house. There are 130 adults and 115 children." Later in the evening, he passed me a photo album with old pictures of Dolinka. They may have been from the late 1980s. "Isn't it interesting that their huts back then were much more taken care of?" I admitted he was right. The asphalt road in Dolinka was built after 2005 so, in the pictures, there was only a dirty stream flowing in the centre of the *osada*. It was the same stream around which the first Klenovec Roma built their houses to have access to water many generations ago. However, the wooden huts were in great shape – incomparable to the situation today. Garbage around the huts was nowhere to be seen. And the people in the pictures didn't seem quite the same either.
>
> Klenovec, 30th of January 2019

The topographical name Dolinka can be translated as 'Dell' or 'Little Valley'. It is situated in a little valley at the Eastern end of Klenovec, in a part known as Majer (⇦ Box #1). Although only a few houses can be found in this area on the map (even fewer of which are labelled with a number), Dolinka is actually inhabited by

approximately 250 people – all Roma. Their houses (varying from 18th-century brick houses to wooden shacks with leaky roofs) line the entirety of Majer Street right up to its end. Dolinka is quite a typical example of a *romská osada* – a segregated Romani settlement (e.g. Hrustič, 2015, p. 45). Dozens of similar settlements can be found across Slovakia, most notably in its eastern part. In the past, this part of Klenovec was a mansion (*kaštieľ*; also called *kúrie*) owned by the Kubyni family – the largest Klenovec landowner – and it was surrounded by agricultural land. It is speculated that the first Roma were invited to settle by landlords in the second half of the 18th century.[16] A census made in 1770 stated that six Romani families were living in Dolinka (Murin, 2018, pp. 78–79). Today, the 'little valley' of Dolinka cuts into even more desperate socio-economic conditions of the larger 'valley of hunger'. It is the place with the highest concentration of poverty in K&K. Its situation reflects the massive decline of the region and is enhanced by a profound marginalisation and social ex-communication of Roma in Slovakia. Dolinka has become a *periphery on the periphery* and a place of concentrated misery. In the surrounding area, moreover, there are many similar 'Romani concentrations' to be found.[17]

In past years, Dolinka underwent a development that mirrored that of the entire region. During good times, Roma in K&K – including many of those living in Dolinka – participated in formal regional economies (i.e. the mining industry, large enterprises, agriculture and consumer goods production, as I noted in the previous section). Since the 1960s, there has been a state-controlled effort to integrate Roma into majority society. In Klenovec in particular, this resulted in long-term attempts to move Roma away from Dolinka. Although these attempts did not go as smoothly as anticipated by the communist authorities, they eventually achieved partial success. By the end of the 1980s, the townhall of Klenovec managed to move 282 Roma from Dolinka to deserted houses in Klenovec (bought with the help of state subsidies)[18] and another 116 Roma into new

[16] As the legend of the first Roma arriving in Klenovec has notable importance for the local musical craft, I will revisit it in the next chapter (cf. ⇨"Romani Aristocracy").

[17] In the *Atlas Rómských Komunit* [Atlas of Romani Communities], these concentrations [*koncentrácie*] are places where Roma live in segregated marginalised communities, apart from the majority (these communities in Slovakia are often referred to by the abbreviation MRK, i.e. Marginalised Romani Communities [*marginalizované rómske komunity*]). Similar concentrations to Dolinka can be found in other places in the nearby region. In Kokava, for instance, there are three such concentrations smaller than Dolinka, yet with a higher number of inhabitants in total – Huta (with 48 Roma), Chorepa (152) and Kyseľovo (125). There are other Romani concentrations in the immediate vicinity of K&K – for example in Hnúšťa (Likier T20; 62 inhabitants), Rimavská Baňa (Repno and Železničná, altogether 97), Tisovec (Hrb, 48) etc. Larger concentrations can be found in bigger towns; in Rimavská Sobota, for instance, over 1,600 Roma live in such concentrations. The project of *Atlas Rómských Komunit* was carried out by the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Romani Communities [*Úrad splnomocnenkyne vlády SR pre rómske komunity*] in 2019 (previously also in 2004 and 2013) (Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Romani Communities, 2019).

[18] The subsidy was worth 30,000 KČS. The average monthly salary in the 1980s was approximately 2,600 KČS (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1989], 177; ČSÚ, n.d.).

apartments in a housing estate and into newly built houses. Roma who struggled to join the formal economy were employed on a compulsory basis as auxiliary staff in affiliated working squads [*nádvorné čaty*] (cf. Murin, 2018, p. 78). In 1989, thus, there were only 116 Roma remaining in Dolinka. With the immense socio-economic decline escalating in the 1980s and amplified by the fall of communism, Dolinka started to repopulate again. In 1998, the Klenovec chronicler evaluated these trends as follows:

> In the 1980s, the municipality put a lot of effort into finding a solution to the Roma issue [*rómskej otázky*]. The municipality leadership had a plan to liquidate the Romani settlement [*zlikvidovanie rómskej osady*] in Dolinka. Roma from the *osada* have been gradually leaving and, with the money they acquired from the municipality […], they have bought older houses […], or acquired apartments in blocks of flats from their employers […] Many Roma have changed their ways of life and adapted to the progress of civilisation. Just a couple of inadaptable [*neprispôsobivých*] ones remained in the *osada*. They lived in shanties without electricity, carried water from wells, and didn't even have toilets. When the economic situation worsened in the 1990s, they lost their jobs. Some Roma returned to the *osada*. Their huts were already torn down, but they quickly built new ones so that they would have places to stay.
>
> (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1998], 388)

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the existence of the Romani segregated settlement ("the Gypsy problem") was only smoothed over on the surface by its re-labelling as "the Romani problem." But its existence carried on after the change of political regime and, moreover, it was amplified by the abrupt socio-economic decline during the transformation (cf. ⇦The Decline during the Transformation). The municipality has worked on technical improvement of Dolinka to make the socio-hygienic and material situation of its inhabitants better. Similarly, they have proposed several social integration programmes, aiming to improve the level of education and employment in the settlement.[19] Despite all these efforts, Dolinka exists today with approximately the same number of residents as before the communist interventions started. Moreover, as the opening ethnographic excerpt suggests, its appearance and its demographic structure have changed noticeably. Its inhabitants today are those who either failed to leave or who were forced to return.

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[19] For example, between 2005 and 2010, the municipality carried out an EU project for reconstruction of Dolinka, during which they directed the water flow underground and built the asphalt road in the middle of Dolinka (cf. opening vignette). They also equipped the *osada* with an electricity network (during the 1990s, Roma from Dolinka stole electricity using illegal DIY connections) and street lighting (possibly hoping to eliminate petty crime). The subsequent phase of the same project was planned to see the construction of low-cost social homes, but this has never been realised (Murin, 2018, p. 80). As for an example of a social integration programme, in 2004, a project called "Romani Settlement of the 3rd Millenium" [*Rómska osada 3. Tisícročia*] was launched, during which Roma from Dolinka were taught how to grow own crops. The project was highly valued by social-work professionals and also by Roma from Dolinka (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [2005], 560; Marková 2006).

In the past, many Roma from K&K took a proactive approach to the region's socio-economic decline and left K&K for good (as did many non-Roma). This included Roma living in Dolinka. Some settled in nearby towns where job opportunities were better, some left to more prosperous – Western – parts of Slovakia, and some tried their luck even further West – mainly in the Czech Republic and Germany. Stories of the latter are told with reverence among Roma, and the legends are enhanced by the occasional appearances of people returning to visit relatives, showing off their success with expensive cars carrying German license plates. The attempts to leave K&K have continued up until today. From time to time, individuals or entire families set out in motion in search of a better life elsewhere. Martin the missionary told me about one recent such attempt:

> The last one I know of trying his luck was Paľo. He sold me his house in Dolinka, and I intended to use it for missionary activities. This money helped him to travel with his entire family to Germany, where they sought work. But they didn't succeed in the end. In a couple of months, he and his family were stepping back on the doorstep of their old house in Dolinka. So I gave it to back to them as they had nowhere else to go.
>
> Klenovec, 30th of January 2018

This example illustrates well the larger demographic trend that I outlined in the opening ethnographic excerpt. In cases of a successful migration from K&K, Roma do not return to the *hladová dolina*, apart from for occasional trips to visit their relatives. But those who do not succeed come back to the only place they know well, seeking financial and material help from their relatives and friends. They often settle in the same huts they once left or re-occupy empty houses of those who managed to escape. Thus, the demographic composition of Roma living in Dolinka (and similar Romani concentrations around) is determined by the long-term processes of *cumulative failure*. They are not "inadaptable" without a cause. In this underprivileged region, Roma are the most underprivileged people. They are trapped by minimal social mobility, living in grave poverty and dependent on social aid and meagre incomes derived from informal economic activities. For many K&K non-Roma, these "inadaptable Gypsies" from segregated settlements are prototypes on the basis of which they derive their relationship towards Roma, as I will show in the following subsection.

"Those who don't work" – K&K Roma in the Eyes of Non-Roma

> That day, I went to the Kokavská Izba pub for lunch with Vladimir from Kokava and his wife, Janka. As we finished up, he suggested that we continue the discussion over a drink but somewhere where they have a good beer (although I think he preferred to move on so that his wife Janka wouldn't have control over his beer consumption). We went to Táňa's – the pub named after the previous owner who died some years ago; despite that, it still bears her name. Vladimir (as usual) got swept up by the lively atmosphere of the pub in an instant. He was switching his attention from one table to another, holding several parallel conversations about various things. We ordered a Krušovice each – a Czech beer ('You must love Czech beer because you are Czech!' Vladimir had said). The bartender, a good friend of Vladimir's whom I had met at the latter's 55th birthday just a couple of weeks before, handed us an advertising flyer – a scratchcard. "It's a special offer for Krušovice.

> You scratch it, and if there's a symbol of a beer, you get one for free." Both Vladimir and I started scratching. "I got one! That makes one free beer!" Vladimir exclaimed. The whole pub – full of non-Roma – cheered, and some regular customers slapped Vladimir on the back. "But what on earth is this?" said Vladimir, pointing towards another pack of leaflets left on the bar. The big capital letters said: 'Marian Kotleba –ĽSNS'. "Who on earth left this here?" asked Vladimir. "I did," said the bartender rather hesitantly. He lowered his eyes as if he felt uncomfortable to tell this to Vladimir. There was a burst of contemptuous laughter around the pub – it was obvious that there had already been some previous conversation about these leaflets just before we had come. Some of the regular customers (apart from Vladimir, all non-Roma) started mocking the bartender, voicing the opinion that he had "gone totally crazy." This murmur was interrupted by a vigorous speech from the bartender: "I'll tell you what! I'm just interested in his opinions. After all, I'm going to Lučenec on Tuesday to see him in person. But yes, I may even vote for him. Because he seems to be the only candidate who is doing anything for Slovakia and not only for the USA!" "But he's a fascist, you fool!" an older visitor countered. "Nonsense! You only say that because you don't have anything else to say. Moreover, you all get fooled – you've just become Fico's fanboys! [*všetci ste zficovteli*]." A couple of weeks after this incident, I asked Vladimir: "So shall we have a drink at Táňa's some time soon?" "Are you mad? I'm never going there again – that's a pub for fans of Kotleba! [*Kotlebovci*]." Not long afterwards, Vladimir posted a picture on his Facebook from Táňa's of him sharing a beer with his friends.
>
> 1st of March 2019, Kokava nad Rimavicou

In the introductory chapter of a classic piece of ethnography on Central-Eastern European Roma, Stewart's *Time of Gypsies* (1997b), we read the story of a seventeen-year-old Magdalena Babická, a finalist in the national beauty pageant Miss Československo in 1993, being asked about her life ambitions. She replied that she would like to become a public prosecutor so that she could cleanse her town "of its dark-skinned inhabitants" (p. 2). The audience responded with laughter and applause, and the moderator called her a "brave girl" (Ibid., cf. also Bridge, 1993). With this story, Stewart opens a chapter dedicated to post-communist Romaphobia in Central and Eastern Europe, enumerating many violent events, lynchings, pogroms and murders. Back then, the story of the young pageant participant reflected society's overall mood in this wider region. Romaphobia was a wide-spread attitude, one that was socially tolerated and, to a certain extent, accepted. In November 2019, the successor of the national beauty pageant, Miss České republiky,[20] erected a counter milestone. Nikola Kokyová became the first winner of these competitions with Romani origins (Ryšavý, 2019). She won the contest despite her Romani appearance and her typically Romani surname. She publicly stated that she would gradually like to change the perception of Roma in the Czech Republic. It may seem that society in Central and Eastern Europe has

[20] As Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, national beauty contests continued in parallel in both countries. Slovakia has not yet had a Romani winner. In 2010, however, a Romani participant – Erika Kováčová – did make it to the final, which brought a great of media attention (by coincidence, Erika now lives in Kokava and, in 2021, I went to her wedding, when she married Vladimir Sendrei's son Vladimir). Interestingly, there is also a beauty contest for Romani girls only; it started in 2001 in the Czech Republic (Miss Roma), and since 2009 there has been a joint competition for Romani girls from the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Česko-Slovenská Miss Roma) (Dienstbierová, 2017).

made a quantum leap towards positive perceptions of Roma and the eradication of strong Romaphobia. But this has not happened en bloc. There are still epicentres where these anti-Romani sentiments remain almost unchanged. Moreover, with a rise of far-right political movements across Europe, these sentiments have served to construct strong political narratives. The *hladová dolina* of K&K represents one of these regions, where such opinions resonate strongly. To understand the situation described in the introductory vignette, it is worth introducing its main protagonists and its socio-political context. I will start with a person who will be mentioned many times throughout this thesis as a key research participant: Vladimir Sendrei (familiarly known as Vlado). There is practically nobody in K&K who would not recognise Vlado – the frontman of well-known Romani band Kokavakere Lavutára (cf. ⇨Box #15 – Kokavakare Lavutára). He was born in 1964 into a family of Romani miners and became a man of many talents. From the age of 21, he was a professional footballer, making it all the way to the second-highest league in Slovakia (Truschan, 2014). His story as a celebrity started with great serendipity in about 2004, when he participated in the TV show Zámena manželiek (the Slovak version of Wife Swap). One person who had known him from before once told me: "If Vlado hadn't gone on Zámena manželiek, he would still be doing activating works.[21]" His appearance on TV changed his entire life and the lives of his family. As the episode turned out to be the most popular in the series, TV Markíza decided to create a docu-soap series entirely about the Sendrei family. The motto of the series was: "The theme of Roma life is lack of money, because their music cannot make enough of a living for everyone. Their life philosophy is: not a step without fun!" (Kočišek 2008). Later, he also appeared in two documentaries filmed by Jaro Vojtek – picturing Vladimir as a charismatic football coach (Back Passing [*Malá domov*], 2009) and as a candidate for Kokova councillor (The Gypsy Vote [*Cigáni idú do volieb*], 2012). Thanks to his frequent appearance on TV, Vladimir Sendrei became a celebrity all around Slovakia. He uses his socio-political capital to advocate for Romani rights in the country. In 2010, he was appointed Ambassador for the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion and, in 2011, Ambassador for the Year of Volunteering. He is also active in the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities [*Splnomocnenec vlády SR pre rómske komunity*] and in his own cultural and educational civic association Láčho drom (in Romani: 'Happy

Box #4 – Vladimir Sendrei

I made this video – introducing Vladimir Sendrei both as a local star and a musician – at the celebration of his 55th birthday on the 8th of February 2019 in Kokava. The video features the song *Bésame mucho* (written by the Mexican songwriter Consuelo Velázquez in the 1940s), which almost all Romani professional bands I have met in K&K have in their repertoire. I was asked to create this video for Vladmir's social media and as a keepsake for him.

thesis.nuska.me/box/04

[21] Cf. ⇨Footnote #27.

Journey' but also 'A Good Way [of doing things]'),[22] which operates a cultural centre, stages cultural events, and provides counselling to boost the employability and social integration of Roma in Kokava.

To put the ethnographic excerpt above into a socio-political context, the whole incident happened about two weeks before the first round of the fifth Slovak presidential election. The election took place on the 16th of March 2019. Zuzana Čaputová and Maroš Šefčovič advanced to the second round, which took place on 30th of March, after which Čaputová was elected the first female (as well as the youngest) president in Slovak history. Robert Fico, the other person mentioned in the ethnographic excerpt, is a politician from a social-democratic party (*Směr-SD*). He resigned from the post of prime minister in March 2018 as a result of a major Slovak political crisis, triggered by the murder of the young Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in February 2018.[23] Finally, Marian Kotleba, whose name raised so much controversy in the pub, is a Slovak politician and a member of parliament from the People's Party – Our Slovakia [*Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*, the ĽSNS]. He and his party consciously work with nostalgia-driven narratives about the first fascist Slovak Republic (1939–1945). Kotleba is famous for his many anti-Semitic statements, holocaust denial, and using symbols directly related to neo-nazism and fascist legacies more generally.[24] Around Europe, there are political parties that work with similarly legacies to those evoked by the ĽSNS. However, no party with such a clear and direct link to fascism has recently gained such a strong proportion of the electorate. In the 2016 elections, the party achieved over 8 percent of the vote, which gave it 14 seats out of 150 in the National Council of Slovakia [*Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*; the equivalent of a parliament in Slovakia]. In the presidential elections that followed shortly after the incident described in the ethnographic excerpt above, Marián Kotleba ended up fourth in the first round with 10.39 percent of the votes. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, the ĽSNS won 17 seats. Election statistics show that the most faithful (and the loudest) supporters of the ĽSNS party can be found in the regions affected by structural underdevelopment – the Slovak *hladové doliny*, including the *hladová dolina* in question here.

On 4th of February 2020, a great turmoil in the Slovak media was caused by a man interviewed at a meeting of the ĽSNS in Rimavská Sobota. This man made a controversial statement that was first broadcast by a local TV station and

[22] Note that the official name of the civic association Láčho drom does not correspond with the formalised spelling rule of Romanes (*láčho* vs *lačho*).
[23] Cf. ⇦Footnote #14.

[24] The case that attracted most public attention happened in March 2017, when Kotleba donated a cheque for 1488 EUR to three socially disadvantaged families. Right-wing extremists widely use this numeric combination, as "[i]t consists of the number 14 (a reference to the 14 words of right-wing extremist David Lane) and 88 (which stands for Heil Hitler)" (Spectator, 2019). The incident was followed by long legal wrangling. In April 2022, the Slovak Supreme Court finally found Kotleba's guilty in the case. He was sentenced to a six-month suspended sentence and was also stripped of his parliamentary mandate.

eventually went viral on Slovak social media. "During fascism, people had jobs, and Sundays were holy days! Women gave birth to children; nobody was arguing. You also need to consider what Hitler gave to people – freedom!" The reporter asked another man whether he thought that the ĽSNS had the right solution to current problems. The man replied: "I think they are right and that their statements are correct, because there are a lot of *those who don't work* but do get money" (Rimava.sk, 2020). The ĽSNS meeting in Rimavská Sobota was accompanied by a massive demonstration denouncing it; among the many to address the crowd was Vladimir Sendrei, the protagonist of the introductory ethnographic exerpt.

Despite the notable resistance to the ĽSNS's activities, the party attracted a significant portion of the votes. In the presidential election (mentioned above), Kotleba was the third most voted for candidate in Klenovec (with 21.8 percent) and the second most voted for in Kokava (with 24.8 percent), losing by less than 1.5 percent to the leading candidate. Kotleba has obtained many supporters in these regions by perpetuating narratives about "Gypsy criminals," relying on the widespread anti-Romani attitudes in Slovakia while contributing to their growth (Poláčková, 2018; e.g. Walker, 2019). The second point in his political programme for the 2016 elections states: "We will build social policy on the principle of merit, and we will eliminate the preferential treatment of gypsies [*cigánov*] (and not only them) over decent people. Parasites who refuse to work will not be given anything at all for free – no houses, no benefits, no contributions" (Kotleba - ĽSNS, 2015, p. 1).[25] In the 'newspeak' of the ĽSNS, "those who don't work" becomes a code name for Roma and also a significant priority on their political agenda.

Kotleba's proposed 'solution' is presented as a simple one. The unsatisfactory situation in the peripheral regions can be overcome by giving resources to those who deserve them ('those who work') rather than to 'those who don't work'. As I have shown in the previous section, the desperate conditions of the Slovak peripheral regions is a result of major economic and demographic decline, for which mainly past socio-economic developments and long-term political ignorance should be blamed. The high proportion of the Romani population living in segregated concentrations and deep structural poverty should thus be seen as a *symptom* of these regions' socio-economic conditions. However, due to the long-term problematic relationship between Roma and non-Roma, intensified by the recent narratives of radical political movements, Roma are not seen as a symptom but often *the cause* of bad socio-economic states. In other words, 'those who don't work' are blamed by K&K non-Roma for the failure of the entire region. It imposes a strong *pariahdom boundary* and significantly affects the performance

[25] It is worth noting that in the subsequent election, Kotleba did not mention the word "gypsies" at all. Smartly, they reversed the usual rhetoric – instead of using negative phrases about penalising 'those who don't work', he stated that they "will allow work for everyone." [*Všetkým umožníme pracovať*] (Kotleba - ĽSNS, 2020). In the context of other recent actions and statements from Kotleba and the ĽSNS, this softening of rhetoric seems to be a result of careful political marketing rather than any moral evolution in the party.

of Romani ethnicity, i.e. what it means to be a Rom in K&K. I will discuss this in detail in the next chapter, ⇨Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft.

"Unemployed"... yet making a living – The Income Generating Activities of K&K Roma

> "Some Roma here live practically from day to day. For them, it's important to secure food and firewood for winter. By no means can we lump them all together," says Deme. According to him, the situation for Roma was better in the past. They managed to work in co-ops and factories, even with lower levels of education. "Today, it has already been two generations of Roma lacking the habit of working. They have Saturday every day, and they fight for survival. It shouldn't be called laziness though – that's simply how the life for this class looks," the social fieldworker claims.
>
> Newspaper article about Dolinka, featuring Janko Deme – an outreach worker and fiddle player from Klenovec (Suráková, 2015)

Supporters of Romaphobic political movements often justify their attitude towards Roma with recourse to official statistics. In the previous section, I discussed in detail the unflattering unemployment figures in K&K. When counting the unemployment of Roma more specifically, proportional figures for this group are even higher. In 2020, there were 198 Roma from Klenovec and 213 from Kokava registered at Job Centres [*úrady práce*] as job seekers. This represents about 41 percent of the economically active Roma of Klenovec and 53 percent of those in Kokava.[26] The trend of higher unemployment among Roma compared to non-Roma populations is a phenomenon typical for many other EU countries as well, yet Slovakia is where the differences are the most remarkable (e.g. FRA, 2016, pp. 12–20).

These statistics allow a one-sided interpretation, which far-right political propaganda often misuses: Roma – those who don't work – are only siphoning off public resources while doing nothing. In this section, however, I will show that in the case of Roma in K&K, being 'unemployed' by no means signifies 'doing nothing'. Indeed, most of the Roma on the periphery are dependent on some form of social aid from the state. Yet, to access this social aid, they need to undergo a programme of so-called *activating work* that, in many respects, resembles wage-labour work.[27]

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[26] The figure was estimated after proportional deduction of economically inactive people (those of 0–15 and 65+ years old) and primary carers (i.e. receivers of parental allowance for the first three years of a child's life). As not everybody who does not have a job is registered at the Unemployment Office, the actual figure may be even higher (Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for the Romani Communities, 2019).

[27] With the aim to "promote and maintain working habits of long-term unemployed" (Kureková, Salner, & Farenzenová, 2013, p. 8), the Slovak government instituted this scheme in 2004. It was primarily aimed at people who were simultaneously 1) recipients of Benefit in Material Need [*Pomoc v hmotnej núdzi*]; and 2) unemployed. Potential recipients are required to work 10–20 hours a week to be eligible for social benefits. Unofficially, it seems that the scheme was mainly introduced to sort out problems with Romani unemployment (cf. Grill, 2011, p. 99). This assumption is also borne

And, even so, relying only on this aid would be far from sufficient for survival amid the conditions of the *hladová dolina*. While a significant portion of 'inadaptable' Roma do not have a job in the conventional sense of the word, most of them are involved in some form of income-generating activities that are essential for the sake of mere economic survival. I encountered three common supplementary income-generating strategies: involvement in the formal economy, periodic migration, and involvement in parallel economies (or any combination of the three). I dedicate a subsection to each of these income-generating activities.

Involvement in the Formal Economy

> Marcela and Júlo are occupants of the only officially approved [*zkolaudovaného*] house in Dolinka. It is the only house there connected to the municipal water supply. They have six children – Dominika, the eldest, finished elementary school in Klenovec in about 2015 and ever since has had a permanent job in Evasport ("Thanks to her, we could get a loan to rebuild the house. We are still repaying 260 EUR a month," Marcela told me.) The second eldest daughter, Klaudia is, as her parents proudly claim, the first Dolinka resident who has ever finished high school [*maturitu*] – doing so in the spring of 2019. Their other children – Míša, Ivana, Alena and Marcel (the only boy) attend elementary school in Klenovec.
>
> Most of the family's livelihood in the past came from Júlo's trading of wood. ("There were times where I could earn up to 700 euros a week"). Marcela was a housewife for many years, receiving child allowances that contributed significantly to the family budget. As soon as the youngest children were reaching puberty and were less dependent on everyday parental care, Marcela and Júlo started seeking a way to improve their financial situation. When I met them in October 2018, they were currently retraining for the job of security guards under the umbrella of the Job Centre [*Úrad práce*]. At the same time, they were seriously thinking of leaving Klenovec. I took part in a family discussion in which Marcela seemed to be firmly persuaded about leaving, despite their recent major investment into the reconstruction of the family house and their youngest children begging them to stay. "I'd take Júlo, and we'd go to Bratislava. We'd stay at my sister's place, and we'd finally earn some good money. The rest of the people here [in Dolinka] only want to live to survive [*prežiť*]. These drinkers go to the forest every day to earn their 20 euros. But I don't wanna live to survive like that. I wanna live."
>
> When I visited them in January 2019, both Júlo and Marcela had jobs in a factory in Hnúšťa. They woke up at 4 am for morning shifts, which forced them to change their lives significantly. Júlo needed to leave his profitable work in the forest, but he didn't seem to regret it. "We are now in a trial period for three months. If they like us, we can get a contract for a whole year. The work is good – I only wish they'll keep us there," Marcela said.
>
> Klenovec, October 2018 – March 2019

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out by statistics. A survey shows that 47 percent of Roma participate in activating work, compared to 5 percent of non-Roma (Kureková et al., 2013, p. 8). In K&K, taking part in activating work is an everyday necessity for most of the Roma on the periphery. Mainly, they take this work seriously, as absence can be penalised and result in the loss of the social benefits upon which many families are existentially dependent. It should be noted that experts have criticised this scheme since its first application (e.g. Oravec & Bošelová, 2006); moreover, it was reported to have a limited positive impact on treating unemployment (Kureková et al., 2013, p. 48). The case of activating work raises an interesting paradox, which the far-right political narratives tend to conceal: even Roma who are officially unemployed are involved in a working routine that is very similar to wage-labour work (and quite contradictory to the idea of 'not working').

Romani resistance to proletarianised economic activities and their inclination to work in such forms that allow for a maximum of liberty, flexibility and independence has been a theme of many ethnographic studies on Roma worldwide. Some of them even point out that the proclivity for informal economic activities is a significant trait that defines Roma in opposition to non-Roma, making them who they are (cf. ⇨Phenomenon of Romani Economies; ⇨Romani [In]Dependence). However, there are much fewer ethnographies about Roma involvement in wage-labour-based activities of the formal (i.e. non-Roma) economy. Those rare studies reveal that, in some settings, involvement in the formal economy is the most desired economic adaptive strategy, preferred over the supposedly traditional passion for making a living in a Romani way (e.g. Horváth, 2005). Yet, the opportunities to join the formal labour market in these settings often come with various obstacles for Roma. Sometimes, these obstacles make involvement in formal economies entirely incompatible, and having a wage-labour job remains an unfulfillable dream for many Roma. K&K is one of the places where joining the formal economy is extremely hard. This subsection covers some of the most notable complications that Roma in K&K face in formal wage-labour work.

Firstly, there is the paradox that having a legal wage-labour job does not necessarily sustain a viable income for families. The salaries offered to Roma in the formal-economy job market are extremely low, even when compared to the region's already stunted salaries. This is a phenomenon known in the wider transnational region, where Roma are often used as "cheap labour maintained at minimal cost to the state, as an integral part of capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe" (Kovats, 2003, p. 14). This is why Roma involved in formal-economy jobs often *lose* rather than earn. The story of Júlo and Marcela (from the opening vignette) provides a good example. To start with, obtaining a formal job often comes with losing social benefits that are existentially vital. Marcela told me that a Klenovec townhall official once selected her as an ideal candidate for a job as a community coordinator in the community centre in Klenovec. As the job offer was for a 50 percent part-time position [*pol úväzok*], she would only earn half of the regular salary for someone in this sector – already a low wage. "I was sure I would enjoy this type of work, but then I counted how much I would lose – from regular school-lunch benefit for the kids to free school books!" After adding everything together, she realised she would not be earning money with this job but, rather, *losing* it. Thus, she was forced to politely decline the offer. Moreover, salaries available in the formal-economy job market are incomparable to some informal income-generating activities in K&K, to which Roma have much easier access. For instance, with his wood-trading, Júlo claimed to earn more than four times the average regional salary, and almost seven times more than the salary of the workers in Evasport. However, these activities are semi-legal and involve many risks (cf. ⇨Informal Economies and Gádže's Exploitation).

Secondly, the structural poverty of Roma on the periphery raises practical issues related to entering the job market. For instance, once I visited Peťo – a Rom from Klenovec; he and his partner live in a tiny two-room hut without a bathroom –

together with his mother. For four months, the couple were making money in a German chicken factory. When Peťo's partner became pregnant, they returned, and he started searching for a job back home. I was with him when his partner brought him some good news: "I spoke to my sister, and she thinks there'll be a place for you in Evasport. You should bring her your CV [*životopis*]." "Hang on," I said – "how are you gonna make your CV? Do you need any help with that?" "No, thank you. I hope Janko Deme [the Klenovec outreach worker] will make one for me. He has done that for others too." This is just one example of a whole plethora of practical issues. Nowadays in Slovakia, entrance to the formal job market comes with many prerequisites (such as ability to work with electronic documents, sending and receiving emails, managing e-banking etc.) that are considered standard general knowledge and literacy, but to which most Roma on the periphery have limited access.

Finally, Roma working in regular jobs experience racism on an everyday basis. Marian from Hnúšťa, for instance, is a bus driver. According to him, he is only one of two Romani bus drivers in the entire county. He left the *hladová dolina* in the 1990s and subsequently made a living with his skills in the Czech Republic. Many years later, Marian returned to be closer to his family. Ever since, he has faced consistent insults in his job. "Not long ago, a guy got on my bus saying 'Who the heck is driving? You'd be better off parking the bus somewhere and getting out of here quickly!'" He added: "You know we are quite an extraordinary family – we have one doctor of medicine, one engineer and even one associate professor [*docent*] of psychology. Despite that, we are still treated like Gypsies. The latter – the psychologist – even changed his surname because he was too ashamed of having Gypsy origins."

Periodic Migration

> Sure, I went begging to Germany like many others [from Dolinka]. It works as follows: there's always a driver who gets five people into a car and drives them to a city in Germany. The drivers earn the most as he gets about 20 euros every day from each beggar. And that does not include petrol – you need to pay for it on the top of that! […] During the winters, especially around Christmas, you can earn quite a bit – like 200 to 300 euros a day. But you need to know how. For example, you need to know that older people generally give more. Younger people are rather hesitant: 'You have both hands and legs, why wouldn't you work rather than beg?'"
>
> Klenovec, 9th of November, 2018

In one of the previous subsections (cf. ⇦"Inadaptable"), I wrote about difficulties related to Roma making permanent moves away from K&K peripheries. Besides a lot of courage and the many hard decisions involved, including having to leave behind loved ones, it also requires a lot of knowledge about officialities to which many Roma have limited access. Hence, as a compromise, many Roma from K&K migrate for shorter periods to participate in economies – both formal and informal – outside K&K, with regular returns home.

Popular migration paths have always led to the Western part of Slovakia, where major foreign investments were made during the economic transformation and where many large enterprises with sufficient job opportunities emerged (cf. ⇦Decline During the Transformation). I met many Roma from K&K who had spent time working for large enterprises such as Jaguar Land Rover Slovakia in Nitra (launched only in October 2018), Samsung in Galanta, Volkswagen Slovakia in Bratislava, etc. This path was most typical for young adults who did not yet have their own families. Most of them stayed in temporary accommodation and returned home to K&K regularly to spend weekends with their parents, relatives and friends. In the majority of cases, they sent extra earnings to their families in K&K. For older adults with children, these strategies were quite rare, typically resorted to only when faced with a sudden loss of family income. Janko, the fiddle player from Klenovec, for instance, lost his job due to the end of an EU project that employed him as an outreach worker. As his oldest son Janko was studying at university (his story will be told in the chapter ⇨Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft) and there was no other work opportunity anywhere closer, he had no choice but to leave Klenovec and work in Volkswagen Slovakia in Bratislava:

> When I finished my shift and laid down in the dosshouse [*ubytovňa*], I would feel so lonesome without the family [...] After a month, I realised I was sending back only 440 euros. This was about the same money I could have earned only with music-making. So I decided to go on sick leave [*ísť na nemocenskú*] and return to Klenovec. Eventually, I sent the keys back by post and never returned to the factory.
>
> 14th of February 2019, Klenovec

Salaries in Western Slovakia are higher than those around K&K, and working there allows one an easy commute home weekly. For more lucrative salaries, some Roma move further west. These paths usually follow those of people who have previously succeeded. From testimonies, I have learned of a diasporic network of K&K Roma in the German region of Thuringia, particularly in the region's capital Erfurt and the second largest town of Jena. The jobs there are similar to those in Western Slovakia – that is, being wage-labour workers in large enterprises. For practical reasons, people here do not return home so frequently; instead, they take trips lasting a couple of months and usually travel there in smaller groups of friends or families. They often stay in the homes of those who have been settled at the destination for some time, people whom they also ask for advice related to job-seeking. With the money they bring back from Germany, they can usually live in Slovakia for a couple of months without pursuing any income-generating activities, sometimes even making major investments into their houses and repaying debts. Peťo, mentioned in the previous section, represents a good example of this strategy. The chicken factory in which he and his partner spent four months was in Erfurt: "Eventually, I lost this job. But that was not the issue – there were many other job opportunities so we could have stayed and looked for another. But as we were expecting the baby, we decided to return. It'd be impossible to raise the kid in a dosshouse."

Another important (yet less common) strategy among Roma is nursing in Austria and Germany. In two weeks of intense 24/7 work, most nurses can earn around 1200 EUR (almost double what is earned on average in a month in K&K) and then return home and have a break from work. Many agencies in Slovakia take care of organising practicalities, from working permits to transport. One of the Romani families from Klenovec – Peťo and Vlastička (both in their forties) – built their entire family income on nursing. Previously, they used to do 14-day shifts together, staying with families close to each other. Nowadays, while Peťo works in Germany for a whole month, Vlastička takes care of the house and their teenage children in Klenovec. They both benefit from their long previous experience in Germany, where they spent seven years in total. They know the language well, and their children are tri-lingual – speaking German, Slovak and Romani. "You see, I never really wanted to do nursing, but then I did a course, and I ended up doing it. There are some good things about it – especially the free time after work," Vlastička told me. They have used the accumulated capital for their house renovation, thanks to which they now boast one of the best equipped Romani houses in Klenovec – clearly showing signs of family prosperity. It should also be noted that nursing is a popular and proven income-generating strategy among many K&K non-Roma too.

Finally, I encountered migration-driven occupations based on informal economic activities. These include begging – as described in the opening vignette of this subsection – and also busking, a proud domain for local musicians in the past. The greatest boom for busking emerged right after the fall of communism, in parallel with the sharpest economic decline of the region. In the 1990s, many K&K Roma travelled in groups to Western Europe (especially West Germany, Switzerland and France) to perform on the street. Due to the extremely strong Western currencies in comparison with the highly devalued Czechoslovak (and later, Slovak) crown, many K&K musicians made a real fortune. "Sure, we were nervous at the beginning. But eventually, we noticed that each of us could easily earn 100 [German] marks per day. And we played just on squares and in parks. After one month of playing, we brought home over 30,000 crowns" – that is how Barna from Hnúšťa remembers it at the beginning of the 1990s. The average salary in Czechoslovakia was 7–10 times lower at that time (cf. ČSÚ, n.d.). After the partial consolidation of the former Eastern-bloc economies, busking was no longer a 'gold mine' as it once was; yet, it has remained in the portfolio of activities for K&K musicians up until today. With busking, K&K musicians cover shorter periods when they have no gigs in the calendar. Alternatively, they perform on the street as a complementary (yet minor) income-generating activity alongside their trips to take up temporary formal-economy jobs abroad. Sometimes, they admitted that they decided to go on a busking trip due to issues at home – whether with officialities and paperwork or with their wives and partners. Nowadays, musicians for whom it is a major source of family budget are quite rare, but they still exist.

Zolo – an accordionist and keyboardist from Klenovec – is one of these rare exceptions. He combines formal-economy summer part-time jobs [*brigády*] in the surrounding woods with frequent busking trips abroad, the latter representing

essential income in the family budget. These trips usually take a couple of weeks. He leaves his wife and three children, and with his friend Batuho – a saxophonist from Klenovec – they usually travel by car to places in Germany and Austria that they know from the previous trips. They sleep in their car and perform for at least six hours a day to make their trips tenable. "You know, if you wanna earn money on the street, you need to play a lot. And you need to play well!" During my fieldwork, Zolo disappeared a couple of times at short notice. Each time he came back, he never forgot to mention how much he had earned, comparing it to the meagre salaries in the region. After a month-long trip in spring 2019, he told me with a proud smile: "I sent home 350 euros. I bought a new accordion for another 350. And I came back with another 350 in my pocket. Sure, we earned at least twice that, but you need to count the petrol, food and stuff." After a similar trip in September 2019, Zolo returned with about a thousand euros. He sold the accordion he bought in March and invested all the money into his little house in Klenovec, rebuilding the floor, door, and windows.

The busking of K&K Romani musicians is a highly relevant topic for further research. I have decided, however, not to develop the topic any more in this thesis. This is mainly due to the ethnographic under-exploration of this phenomenon (I have never gone abroad to participate in busking activity with my research participants) and, more importantly, to prioritise other research topics. I will briefly reflect on the phenomenon of busking once more in the concluding chapter (cf. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #5).

Informal Economies in the Control of *Gádžovia*

> "In the forest, one in ten has an employment contract. The others are working there illegally," said Júlo. "Well, what if something happens to you in the forest?" I asked, looking at the missing fingers on Júlo's right hand (regardless of which, he is a great guitarist). "Well, then you are fucked – no one gives you anything. I had at least two good friends who died in these forests. One of them was hit by a chip to the femoral artery. He didn't survive for even the next 15 minutes. The other one was hit by a beech sprung branch and was slapped against another beech." "That one was a great singer," Marcela continued. "When he was walking down at Majer and singing, I could have heard him all the way from here. What a voice he had! Once, he didn't have anything to feed his kids with, went to the forest and never returned." "You know, that's all for those rich *gadžov*.[28] They are selling ten cubic meters of wood to Hungary for 500 euros and then riding around in their huge SUVs." "Have you ever considered going on strike? They couldn't log without you, could they?" "If I went on strike, there would be at least 20 hungry, desperate Gypsies willing to spend the whole day in the forest for 20 euros," said Júlo.
>
> 10th of February 2019, Klenovec

[28] *Gadžo* is a Romani word with which Roma mark non-Roma. The same (or very similarly sounding) words use by Roma all across the world. There are many variants in the spelling (most typically *gadjo*, *gajo*, *gawdjo*). In this thesis, I will use the Slovak spelling and Slovak (not Romani) declension (e.g. pl. – *gadžovia*).

As I have already mentioned, in ethnographic accounts of Romani life, parallel, non-formalised ways of making a living have attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention. One of the most fascinating Romani socio-cultural features is the capacity to operate on economic peripheries, where the formal economy does not provide other opportunities for making a living. In these conditions, Roma make their living by the creation of parallel, informal economies (cf. ⇨Phenomenon of Romani Economies). The skills to operate within these economies are highly valued among Roma as they are proudly distinguishable from *gadžo* ways of making a living in precarious jobs (cf. ⇨Romani [In]Dependence). There is a great shortage of ethnographies, however, dealing with informal, parallel economies that are sought, created and sustained by non-Roma, and where Roma are used as an exploited workforce. Woodtrading around K&K is a typical example of such activity.

Roma on the K&K periphery have always been dependent on firewood as they did not have any alternatives for heating their homes. Therefore, logging firewood for this use was always tolerated by locals and, to an extent, it is still tolerated up to today.[29] After the fall of communism, when most Roma lost their jobs (cf. ⇦The "hladová dolina" of Klenovec and Kokava) logging massively escalated as it was one of the few remaining ways of sustaining a living on the periphery. It reached such a level that the local police must have started monitoring the situation and making a systematic effort to prevent Romani lumberjacks from destroying the surrounding forests (cf. Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1994], 285). With logging in the 1990s and early 2000s, not only did people earn a living, but some even made small fortunes. Most of the Roma involved in logging remembered those times with undisguised nostalgia. "It's all changed a lot! Today, there are always enough drinkers [*opilcov*] to go around. They have spoiled the prices for everyone," Jáno from Dolinka told me.

Logging and wood-trading are accompanied by a complex economic system, the study of which could surely fill the pages of a dedicated ethnographic monograph. There is a specific hierarchy at the centre of this work, one based on various levels of collaboration with non-Roma. Júlo, for instance, who managed to earn four times an average salary, worked independently. He had his car and a chainsaw. These independent lumberjacks can earn about 60 EUR per day, sometimes (and especially in times gone by) even more. Another sort of workers are in a subordinate position, not possessing any tools. They usually earn about 20–30 EUR a day, acting as an auxiliary force. Zilo, a friend of Júlo (and a great bass guitarist and singer), worked for a similar squad led by a non-Roma (supposedly a "very rich" person). "So my job is to run uphill with a rope and tie a tree trunk with a chain. It sounds simple, but it can be tiring. You know, sometimes the chain slips

[29] "For 20 euros a year, you can ask for permission to take anything on the ground with a diameter smaller than 18 centimetres," Zilo told me. "Otherwise, you can get a fine of up to 30 euros for a single twig!" I did encounter some level of tolerance, however. During a snow calamity in January 2019, I witnessed a situation in which two Roms smuggling a big tree in broad daylight in a busy road in Klenovec met a police car full of officers. The officers slowed down the car, admonished them in jest and, shaking their heads with laughter, disappeared from the scene.

and so on. Not to mention times when there's a lot of snow outside. One needs to be fit for this job. I can't afford to gain a single gram of weight." In most cases, logging is done with official permits that make the act of logging legal[30] – unlike the Romani labour. Zilo said that having a work contract would not pay off as he would need to have a trade certificate [*živnosť*], pay taxes and fulfil other legal formalities: "So, it's better to do it illegally [*načierno*]. It's not such a bad job. I go to work at seven and [...] I'm back home by two. But when I feel sick, or there's a snow calamity, I earn nothing."

Nowadays, logging around K&K is a type of economic system that is not covered extensively by ethnographic studies on Roma. From the point of view of its agents, it resembles a casual labour-wage job of the formal economy (with regular working hours, structures of power and dependence on employers), which Roma in many socio-cultural settings tend to avoid. Yet, it lacks the certainty of legal labour-wage jobs, such as (at the very least) a minimum wage and social security in case of illness, accidents at work, and unfavourable circumstances such as bad weather. Logging is the most typical example of exploitative activities of this kind in K&K. Yet, I also encountered other cases when Roma on the periphery were hired by non-Roma for as little as 10 EUR per day as an auxiliary force, doing menial undignified work. All of them had no choice but to pursue it.

"You need to know how to adapt!" – Closing Remarks

> "First and foremost, a musician needs to be universal. You need to know how to adapt [*prispôsobiť sa*]!"
>
> Béla, double-bass player from Jesenské, 14th of February 2019

Through the detailed ethnographic description in this chapter, I have attempted to show the most significant socio-cultural features of the region in question. I have outlined how people in K&K are exposed to the challenging socio-economic conditions of the *hladová dolina*. Many of them have trouble finding a dignified and sustainable way of making a living. Roma are among the people most seriously affected by their circumstances. Although non-Roma perceive them as 'those who don't work', they need to combine many adaptive economic strategies to earn their living and feed their families. This involves combining social aids with meagre salaries from formal-economy jobs and exploiting opportunities provided by informal economies. This concluding section will highlight the importance of these findings for the upcoming chapters of this thesis.

[30] Rarely, I encountered stories about illegal logging for trade. One Rom from Klenovec, for instance, told me: "Once, I was earning 70 euros cash on the nail. We would wake up around three in the morning and return from the forest by seven with the stolen wood. The whole thing was organised by a *gadžo*."

The most important remark concerns the Romani ability to *adapt*, an idea which has come implicitly into the chapter many times. K&K non-Roma often mark their Romani fellow citizens with the word 'inadaptable' [*neprispôsobiví*]. This association has deep roots (cf. ⇦"Inadaptable") and is prevalent in contemporary media discourse and often stressed in the 'newspeak' of far-right political parties (Kluknavská & Hruška, 2019; e.g. Kluknavská & Zagibová, 2013; Mezeiová, Horváthová, & Benčúriková, 2015). In colloquial Slovak, the nominalised adjective 'inadaptable' has become little short of a synonym for Roma. Nevertheless, my observations in K&K have revealed that Roma are almost the exact opposite of this word – as revealed when one asks '(in)adaptable to *what*'? The case of marginalised Roma in K&K only illustrates how extremely adaptable they are as they are forced to sustain their living in such an 'economic desert' and despite deep social marginalisation (cf. Okely 1983, 53, paraphrase; cf. also ⇨Romani [In]Adaptibility in the next chapter). However, this necessity to adapt also comes at the cost of great humiliation. The fact that Slovakia has been a member of the European Union since 2004 and that some of its regions score highly in economic ratings clearly shows a great failure of Slovak politics in dealing with the 'Romani problem'. Immense regional disparities due to political negligence in peripheral regions, profound structural poverty, and racism against Roma should be blamed for the 'Romani problem', not the Roma themselves.

This ability to adapt plays a crucial role in Romani music-making, which I have intentionally left aside in this chapter. Later in this thesis, I will tell stories of many Romani musicians from K&K who seemingly have nothing in common. They play different musical instruments and excel in different musical genres and styles. In some cases, they even keep a distance one from another. What they all do have in common, though, is the *hladová dolina* over their shoulder. The socio-economic condition of the surrounding region is an important background to the ethnographic picture. Other parts of the picture that I will be drawing would be incomplete and incomprehensible without this background. Music-making should thus be seen as a distinctive way of adapting to the conditions of the *hladová dolina*. It is an informal economic system that brings *purpose* to many K&K Roma. It is a manner of adaptation to the surrounding region's catastrophic socio-economic conditions and the highly problematic relationship between non-Roma and Roma.

This adaptability is also reflected greatly in music-making itself. "You need to adapt," as Béla noted, is a mantra pointing to the trait that all great Romani musicians must possess. Such musical adaptability, for which K&K Romani musicians are widely appreciated, includes tuning into current musical moods, styles and genres; unifying with the band while maintaining one's original musical contribution; tailoring repertoire to the taste of the audience; and so forth. On top of that, it is also a key to understanding the anthropological aspects of Romani music-making in K&K, which I uncover in the upcoming chapters. It clarifies the role of ethnicity performance in the music-making and explains the distancing seen between various groups of K&K Roma (chapter ⇨Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft); it expounds on the economic principles of Romani musical craft

and the dynamic of ever-changing musical niches (chapter ⇨Music-making as Making a Living); and, finally, it answers the question of how Romani musicians enact and commodify their Roma-ness on musical stages (chapter ⇨Roma-ness in Music). While I introduce these other parts of the ethnographic picture, the reader should keep in mind the background presented in this chapter. Most importantly, Romani music-making in K&K represents a distinct socio-economic adaptation to the conditions of the economic periphery, where Roma are profoundly marginalised. It is a way of making a living. It is a skill that Roma learn through living the conditions of the *hladová dolina* of K&K.

Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft

The Pariahdom Boundary and its Markers

Introduction

This chapter aims to explain the role of Romani ethnicity in music-making and, conversely, the role of music-making in the performance of ethnicity for Roma in K&K. Based on the insights from the previous chapter, it introduces Romani ethnic identity performance as a distinctive manner of adaptation to the challenging socio-economic conditions of the *hladová dolina* and the troubles of living alongside the non-Romani majority. In the first section of this chapter, I will put my ethnographic case into the context of contemporary discussions; I will explain why Romani ethnicity is a controversial topic; bring attention to the most peculiar aspects of the discussions; and justify my search for a fruitful theoretical conceptualisation of ethnicity. Then, I will introduce my theoretical model, which considers non-Romani demarcation of Romani ethnic identity (the pariahdom boundary) as a central feature of ethnicity definition. I will employ a semiotic approach to analyse various ethnic boundary markers. With this model, I will then interpret ethnographic data from K&K, attempting to answer three central questions: 1) How is the pariahdom boundary constructed and maintained in K&K? 2) Which common strategies do Roma use to adapt to the condition of the pariahdom boundary? and 3) What is the role of professional musicianship in ethnicity performance?

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Essential Note #2: Roma or Gypsies?

> "Regarding the typical names, here it's pretty simple, isn't it?" I said. "Everyone is either Oláh, Cibuľa or Radič!" "But you mean only Gypsy names [*cigánska mena*]?" Miňo countered. Everyone around this table of young Romani musicians froze as if a taboo word had been uttered; they looked at each other with nervous smiles. Then, Miňo continued: "I mean 'Romani names', of course [*rómska mena*]." Then, everyone burst into laughter.
>
> 1st of February 2019, Klenovec

Before I deal with the peculiarities of Romani ethnicity, it is first necessary to clarify one other, more glaring peculiarity – the reasons behind my usage of the terms Roma and Gypsies throughout the thesis. This question is especially relevant for the present chapter. By default, I use the term 'Rom', when referring to a person, the term 'Roma' when referring to a people (or group), and the word 'Romani'[31] as a relational adjective. This is because these terms are politically correct endoethnonyms in the socio-political context of my research (cf. ⇨Roma – Peculiar [Ethnic] Group). In my ethnographic writing, I also use the term 'Gypsy' (pl. 'Gypsies')[32] as it is consensually considered the closest translation to the Slovak word *Cigán* (pl. *Cigáni*),[33] which (leaving aside political correctness) is often used by both non-Roma and Roma in K&K. Distinguishing these two terms has a notable ethnographic significance, as I will show in later sections. Finally and importantly, I use the term 'Roma' consistently in all the theoretical discussions in this chapter, although in a great portion of the scholarly work to which I refer, the authors use the term 'Gypsies'. Therefore, the word 'Roma' in these discussions should really be read as 'Roma/Gypsies'.

The 'Peculiarities' of Romani Ethnicity

Romani ethnic identity is an important, yet controversial topic. Roma are well-known in the field of ethnicity studies as a group that even "the most experienced and best-informed academics in the subject are unable to easily define" (Law &

[31] In English, Romani is sometimes spelt 'Romany'. It can also be read as a noun standing for Romani language (*Romanes*).

[32] Gypsy, in British English, is sometimes spelt 'Gipsy'; the former is, nevertheless, more common in contemporary language discourse and abundantly used by UK-based scholars (e.g. in the work of Judith Okely and Michael Stewart). In some scholarly work, the word 'gypsy' is not capitalised. This very much reflects the position of Roma in earlier scholarly discourses. When quotating directly from these authors, I leave the word in its uncapitalised form, but follow it with [*sic*].

[33] In English, the word Gypsy can also be understood figuratively as pointing to any nomadic people, including those of non-Romani origin. This "double signifier" occasionally causes confusions in folk categories but even in scholarly discourse (cf. Matras, 2004). Hence, the reader should keep in mind that the word 'Gypsy' in the ethnographic parts of this thesis is a translation of the Slovak word '*Cigán*', which is, in the Slovak context, a person of Romani origin (incidentally, non-nomadic in the vast majority of cases).

Kovats, 2018, p. 39). Moreover, Romani ethnicity has become a "dangerous topic," over which there have been a great amount of "arguments and bitter disagreements," often "emotionally charged and highly sensitive" ones (Marushiakova-Popova & Popov, 2016, p. 23; Mayall, 2004, p. 275). I found two major sources of this controversy in the contemporary scholarly discourse to be the following: firstly, Roma are a *peculiar* (ethnic) group that turn various ethnicity theories upside down. Secondly, ethnicity is a *peculiar* social-science concept, one that can be understood and used in various ways. I will clarify both peculiarities in the two initial sections of this chapter, by reviewing literature in the fields of Romani and ethnicity studies.

There has been a lot written about how and why Roma do not fit various ethnicity theories very well. Profound overviews of Romani ethnic 'peculiarities' have filled the pages of several dedicated monographs (Law & Kovats, 2018; Marushiakova & Popov, 2016; for the most coherent overviews, cf. Mayall, 2004). Many of these peculiarities can be explained with reference to the socio-political history of Roma and their immense sociocultural variability, but by no means all of them. Various ethnographic studies I have reviewed suggest that the Romani case stands out mainly because of the peculiar Romani relationship to symbolic manifestations of ethnicity, such as those contained in Smith's ethno-symbolic theory (1987): 1) a collective name; 2) a common myth of descent; 3) a shared history; 4) a distinctive shared culture; 5) an association with a specific territory; and 6) a sense of solidarity (cf. A. D. Smith, 1987, pp. 21–31).[34] These six defining traits not only play an irreplaceable role in constructing ethnic nations, but they also represent the very basis for the definition of non-national ethnic communities. The ethnic community of pre-Israeli Jews is a good example. Although they shared some habitual similarities with Roma (including their non-national/non-territorial character and some forms of socio-political marginalisation),[35] their ethnic identity is reflected in all of these ethnicity-defining features. The Roma case raises exceptions to this scheme for ethnic definition, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

To start with the collective name, there have been massive debates (both scholarly and political) about the appropriateness of collective name(s) for denoting an

[34] These six defining features, Smith argues, establish so-called *ethnies* (sing. *ethnie*). Smith defined ethnies as "collective cultural units and sentiments of previous eras" (A. D. Smith, 1987, p. 13). He calls his approach, in which he emphasises studying shared myths and historical memories of ethnic groups and nations, ethno-symbolism. His theory has become especially relevant for studying the phenomena of nations and nationalism (Spencer & Wollman, 2002, pp. 28–29), but it also embraces non-territorial and non-national ethnic communities.

[35] Due to the historically analogous socio-political status of Roma and Jews (enforced by the speculations of "authoritative texts"), many early scholars wrongly considered Roma to be an offshoot of the Jews (cf. e.g. Willems, 1998, pp. 21, 23). Interestingly, the debates continue to this day in religious discourse, suggesting a "biblical link" between these two ethnic groups (e.g. Pohoryles, 2018).

ethnic group. The most common name – both in folk and scholarly discourse – is the Gypsies. This term's etymological root is associated with the assumed land of their origin, emerging from the fantasies of medieval people – 'Egyptians', those coming from Egypt (e.g. Okely, 2019, p. 53). In other European languages, we find other terms – *cigán* (Slovak), *Zigeuner* (German), *Tsigane* (French), and so forth.[36] These are likely related to another branch of etymological roots; the most authoritative theories consider this group of terms to be derived from the ancient Greek word *athinganoi* ('the untouchables'), which the Byzantines used as early as in the 11th century (Liégeois, 1985, pp. 13–14). Nevertheless, both the Egyptian- and *athinganoi*-derived names are exonyms; they were not originally used by the group itself but assigned by others. In many socio-political contexts nowadays, these ethnic exonyms are considered politically incorrect; they are sometimes even used as mere insults.[37] As it is inconceivable for an ethnic name to be both a proud denotation of ethnic identity and a pejorative, such exonyms certainly have limited potential in ethnic self-defintion. Another common term – the Roma – emerged as part of ethnic-political movements in Eastern Europe during the Soviet era. Recent attempts to expand this term as a politically correct alternative to the exonym 'Gypsies' have emerged strongly in some quarters. However, only a tiny minority of Gypsies call themselves Roma. Not only do distinct 'non-Romani Gypsy' groups (such as Sinti, Kale, Manouche, Romanichals etc.) not call themselves Roma, but they even dislike being referred to with the word (e.g. Salo, 2008, pp. 199–200). Therefore, while we find consensual (and arbitrary) agreements about ethnic denominations in particular socio-cultural and socio-political contexts (which, in some cases, Roma have accepted as their own), the names may contain stories of ethnic oppression or show other hidden ambiguities. For these reasons, even the most basic ethnicity-defining feature, the collective name, tends to have limited potential in Romani ethnic self-determination.

The Romani common myth of descent reveals similar problems. There is almost no doubt about the origins of the Roma diasporia: both linguistic (e.g. Matras, 2002) and genetic (e.g. Martínez-Cruz et al., 2016)[38] clues suggest that Roma

[36] E.g. *zingaro* (Italian), *cigano* (Portuguese), *Циганин* [ciganin] (Bulgarian), *τσιγγάνος* [tsiganos] (Greek), *cygan* (Polish), *ţigan* (Romanian), *цыган* [cygan] Russian, *циган* [cyhan] (Ukrainian), *циган* [cigan] Serbian, *zigenare* (Swedish), *sigøyner* (Norwegian), *cigány* (Hungarian), *çingene* (Turkish), *čigāns* (Latvian), *čigonas* (Lithuanian) etc. (cf. Marushiakova & Popov, 2000, pp. 61–62).

[37] Among numerous possible examples, I will mention just one from the socio-political context of my fieldwork. In November 2020, the Slovak prime minister Igor Matovič at a press conference accused another Slovak politician – Jana *Cigánik*ová – of lying, glossing it with the bonmot that "she has [lying] even in her name." When he was criticised by the public for making a racistic comment, he countered on his Facebook profile with a screenshot from the Dictionary of the Slovak language, indicating that the verb '*cigánit*' does indeed mean 'to lie' in Slovak (Ryšavý, 2020). It is worth noting that the English verb 'to gyp' (i.e. to cheat, to swindle) also has etymological origins in the exonym 'Gypsy'.

[38] Genealogical research on Romani origins aspires to shed interesting light on the Romani diaspora, further refining knowledge of the locations and times of Romani movements. Up to this day, however, "the evidence for origin [...] remains speculative and inconclusive," and "principally

started their migration from north-western India about 1500 years ago. Yet, there are no folk and/or mythological explanatory narratives about these origins among a large portion of Romani communities. Okely, for instance, concludes that non-literate UK-based Gypsy Travellers[39] were not at all familiar with their Indian origins and had no other explanations (Okely, 2019, p. 62). There are, however, abundant Romani origin myths constructed by non-Roma – for instance, the myth about their Egyptian origin. But these external exonymic narratives (like the exonyms themselves) do not have a significant impact on ethnic self-awareness. Rarely, there are local myths shared within particular regions, such as the Transylvanian Romani fairy tale about the mythical creation of the violin, which was written down by German writer Heinrich von Wlislocki (Wlislocki, 1890). These uncommon examples, however, seem to be products of the creative minds of particular individuals rather than evidence of profound mythological traditions. Moreover, their existence is usually conditioned by the initiative of a non-Romani intellectual who decided to preserve them and write them down. Although Romani local mythologies about the origin of Roma and Romani culture represent an interesting topic for research, they rarely play a role in how Roma define themselves, whether in local sociocultural contexts or in transnational Romani political movements.

This also applies to the aspect of shared history. Almost all Romani histories were written by non-Romani scholars, and they were "plagued with gaps, errors, repetition, generalisation and romanticisation" (Mayall, 2004, p. 39). They then also became the "dictates of authoritative texts," contributing greatly to the exoticisation and alienation of Roma, and resulting in their social and political marginalisation (cf. Mayall, 2004, p. 3; Willems, 1998, pp. 29–32). Although contemporary research on Romani history (and histories) reflects on the errors of predecessors, it does not change the fact that Romani history has almost no significance for how Roma define themselves. Furthermore, some ethnographies even suggest that Roma communities may have socio-cultural mechanisms for forgetting their local histories, presumably to disconnect from problematic pasts featuring majority oppression and violent family disputes (Gay y Blasco, 2001).

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demonstrates internal diversity and shared ancestry with non-Roma" (Law & Kovats, 2018, pp. 68–72; Mayall, 2004, p. 255).

[39] English Travellers, also known as Romanichals, are descendant from Roma who lived in Britain from the beginning of the 16th century - a fact for which convincing linguistic evidence has been found (e.g. Matras, Gardner, Jones, & Schulman, 2007). Up to today, a considerable number of Engish Travellers have retained their specific nomadic way of life. In 2020, almost 23,000 Travellers' caravans were counted in the UK – the number in the last 50 years has almost tripled (Penney, 2020). It should be noted that there are other similar nomadic groups loosely lumped together with Romanichals, but these do not share the Romani origin. Included in this group are Scottish Highland Travellers (commonly known as Summer Walkers) (e.g. Neat, 2002) and Irish Travellers (known as Pavees), whose non-Romani origin was confirmed in a profound genetic study (Gilbert, Carmi, Ennis, Wilson, & Cavalleri, 2017). Regardless of their genetic origins, however, all groups of UK- and Ireland-based Travellers tend to experience a similar level of discrimination and racism and are often lumped together simply as 'Gypsies' (cf. Helleiner, 2000).

As for the association with a specific territory, Gypsies are often addressed as a clear exception to this ethnicity-defining feature (cf. A. D. Smith, 1987, p. 29). Being "citizens of everywhere and nowhere," the only territory that truly defines Roma is their lack of one (cf. Acton & Gheorghe, 2001). Unlike other diasporic ethnic groups who, for various historical and socio-political reasons, experience "landlessness" (Young, 2020, pp. 45–50), Roma lack narratives about a particular piece of land that "has a symbolic geographical centre, a sacred habitat, a 'homeland,' to which it may symbolically return, even when its members are scattered across the globe and have lost their homeland centuries ago" (A. D. Smith, 1987, p. 28).[40] Relationships of Roma to the territories they occupy have traditionally been rather instrumental, lacking any symbolic and sentimental attachments. The most obvious consequence is that Romani communities are dispersed on all six habitable continents and, up to today, many Romani communities are inclined towards transnational migration.

When it comes to distinctive shared cultural features such as "language and religion; […] customs, institutions, laws, folklore, architecture, dress, food, music and the arts" (A. D. Smith, 1987, p. 26),[41] Roma tend to share cultural frames with the surrounding majority and re-create and re-invent their cultures within these frames. As a result, "Roma people often have more in common with their non-Roma neighbours than with other Roma" (Law & Kovats, 2018, p. 36). Their dispersion and immense sociocultural variability make defining Roma based on shared cultural features complicated; there is no single culture of the Romani people, but various *cultures* of Romani *peoples*. Romani language, however, represents an exception. It is considered by some scholars to be the "*primary*, if not the *sole* identity marker of 'authentic' Gypsies or Roma" (Okely, 2019, p. 56; italics original). But even this primary and sole marker of (ethnic) identity comes with complications. Romani has many dialect branches, and a dialect spoken by one sub-ethnic group often cannot be used as a code for communicating with another sub-ethnic group. Hence, its ethnicity-constituting potential on the level of the Romani transnational political movement is limited (cf. Law & Kovats, 2018, pp. 22–27; Mayall, 2004, pp. 259–263). On the local level, Romani language may contribute positively to proud ethnic self-awareness (i.e. as a trait distinguishing Roma from surrounding majorities), but it may also contribute to group fragmentation, being associated with the low status and poverty from which some individuals may try to disconnect (Beissinger, 2001, pp. 43–46; Mann, 1999, pp. 164–165; e.g. Tong, 1985). In short, "though the identity Roma itself is derived from Romani [language], it is not defined by it" (Law & Kovats, 2018, p. 27).

[40] There is one interesting exception to this absence of ethnic-territorial demands – the notion of 'Romanestan' in the utopian ideas of Ionel Rotaru (1918–1982), French-Romani political activist of Romanian origin (cf. Sierra, 2019).

[41] Among other features of shared culture, in this chapter Smith also mentions the extra-cultural features, such as "colour [of skin] and physique" that "may augment the differences or take their place"(A. D. Smith, 1987, p. 26). He gives an example of the "Black population" in the USA and their shared experience of suffering related to their skin colour. In later sections, I will discuss this aspect in detail when introducing the *pariahdom boundary* concept and its *iconic markers*.

Finally, a sense of solidarity is a phenomenon found in some ethnographies as a significant trait for establishing Romani communal identity. It is well-described, for instance, in Stewart's notion of 'brotherhood' among Hungarian Vlach Roma (Stewart, 1997b, pp. 50–72). In some cases, however, ethnographies suggest that this solidarity may be limited to family ties, and contact with other members of the ethnic group may be consciously avoided to prevent conflicts (e.g. Gay y Blasco, 2002). Other works have pointed out that particular groups of Roma may limit their solidarity to Roma of the same social and economic rank while they disconnect from lower-class, problematic adherents (Beissinger, 2001, pp. 36–39; e.g. Hübschmannová, 1998; Lemon, 2000, pp. 62–67; Mann, 1999, pp. 164–165). Furthermore, still other research has noted the tendencies of Romani groups to limit their inclusive solidarity, as way of keeping group sizes low and remaining 'invisible' to surrounding non-Roma (e.g. Williams, Lerch, & Lerch, 1982). Thus, certain Romani groups in certain contexts may represent exceptions even for the sense of solidarity that is supposed to be an ethnicity-forming feature.

Symbolic manifestations of ethnicity – involving a collective ethnic name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, an association with a specific territory, a shared culture and a sense of solidarity – expose some of the main peculiarities of Romani ethnic identity. These peculiarities are shared across multiple Romani communities, making this case unique and challenging for various ethnicity theories. Rather than pointing out why certain theories do not work, it is more useful to seek *other* conceptualisations of ethnicity to untangle this peculiar Roma case. This is the subject of the following three sections. In the ethnographic material of this chapter, I will show that some of these symbolic manifestations of ethnicity (e.g. language and shared solidarity) do play a role in ethnic-identity construction for Roma in K&K. Yet, this role is played differently from (and even somewhat contradictory to) ethno-symbolic theories of ethnicity; this reflects the relationship of Roma with people around them and the wider world and, conversely, the relationship of the world to Roma.

'Fruitful Conceptualisations' of Ethnicity

There has never been one single understanding of the concept of ethnicity in the social sciences. Eriksen argues that the question should not be framed as "what is ethnicity?" but rather "how can we most fruitfully conceptualise ethnicity?" (Eriksen, 1996, p. 13). It is not *fruitful* to write a deep theoretical overview of concepts of ethnicity and their evolution in the social sciences, mostly because this has already been done many times (e.g. Eriksen, 1996, 2010; Jenkins, 2008). Instead, I will point out the essential prerequisites that I take from ethnicity theories to build my inductive theoretical model, which will later be used in my ethnographic interpretation of Romani ethnicity performance in K&K. Here, I 1) regard ethnicity as socially constructed, not primordially assigned; 2) consider it dynamic and processual; and 3) focus on ethnicity from the perspectives of its

agents. I will dedicate a short paragraph to each of these prerequisites to justify my main standpoints.

While the first prerequisite about social-constructivist perspectives on ethnicity may be the most obvious, it is also the most important, determining the other two prerequisites and forming the basis of the theoretical model introduced later. This approach is dominant in contemporary debates about ethnicity (Brubaker, 2002, p. 165; e.g. Eriksen, 2001, p. 44). In the early days of the social sciences, however, scholars thought about ethnicity in different terms. They noticed that categorising the world into 'us' and 'others' is a widely spread phenomenon around different cultures. Thus, it was anticipated that there must be a universal principle upon which ethnicity operates. In these early approaches, ethnicity was thought of as emerging from "deep *primordial* attachments to a group or culture" (Brettell, 2007, p. 10; italics mine) – that is, as a facet of identity inscribed to human beings primevally, something constant and unchanging. This trend was later labelled primordialism (e.g. Coakley, 2018).[42] Subsequently, in the work of sociologists (most notably Max Weber), the perspectives of primordialism were found insufficient for an explanation of complex social phenomena such as ethnicity. Thus, the idea that ethnicity is socially constructed and instrumental in establishing social groups emerged (Eriksen, 2001, pp. 44–45; cf. Hechter, 1976; Weber, 1968, pp. 387–392).[43] In my theoretical model introduced later, I consider ethnicity to be a social construct playing an instrumental role in establishing group identity, and I will particularly focus on how it is constructed (cf. Brubaker, 2002, p. 175).

[42] It is worth noting that the approach of primordialism did not entirely disappear from anthropological thinking. Geertz, for instance, developed the canonical concept of *primordial ties*, in which he stresses the importance of primordialism from the native point of view (Geertz, 1964; cf. also Shils, 1957). Studying native primordial-based explanatory models ("commonsense promordialism") also became an important part of the discussion on ethnicity (e.g. Brubaker, 2002, p. 166; the Romani case is reflected in Marushiakova & Popov, 2016, p. 16). A thorough overview of the literature and critical reflection on the position of primordialism in the contemporary social sciences has recently been made by Coakley (2018).

[43] The social-constructivist approach was particularly useful and further developed in theories of nations and nationalism (cf. Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1992). As the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' have also entered the academic debates on Romani ethnicity (e.g. Hancock, 1991), I will explain the relationship of these concepts with ethnicity in this short footnote. Ethnicity and nation should not be considered mere synonyms. In his systematic approach to attempting to distinguish these two terms, Eriksen states: "Nationalism and ethnicity are kindred concepts, and the majority of nationalisms are ethnic in character. The distinction between nationalism and ethnicity as analytical concepts is a simple one, if we stick to the formal level of definitions. A nationalist ideology is an ethnic ideology which demands a state on behalf of the ethnic group" (Eriksen, 2010, p. 144). As I do not find the term 'nation' *fruitful* for understanding ethnicity performance among Roma in K&K, I will intentionally leave it outside of this debate, the chapter and the thesis. It should be kept in mind, though, that many early theories of ethnicity were built upon the ideas of nation states and, up to today, the insufficient distinction between these two terms contributes to the *peculiarity* of ethnicity concepts.

I draw the second prerequisite about the dynamic, situational and processual nature of ethnicity from Barth's (1969) influential theory of ethnic boundaries. Barth's theoretical approach precipitated a major shift in anthropological thinking about ethnicity, leaving a "monumental legacy" and opening up many avenues for further conceptualising and theorising ethnicity (Eriksen & Jakoubek, 2019, pp. 1–19).[44] Before his theory emerged, anthropologists tended to conceptualise ethnicity as a category assigned to people sharing a history, traditions, heritage – the same *culture*. This traditional conception can be summarised by the equation "tribe = culture = society" (cf. Barth 2007, 10). Barth, on the other hand, considered culture to be only an external form of social structure, with the social structure itself a result of dynamic interactional processes of "negotiating boundaries." Ethnic boundaries are understood as patterns of social interactions; they are fluid, ever-changing, and negotiated in individuals' everyday lives. The negotiation of these boundaries has two vital parts – the process of inclusion (by which members of a group recognise they belong to the same group) and the process of exclusion (by which members of one group recognise that other individuals do not belong to the group). Barth argued that ethnic boundaries are the essential basis for social systems and the reason why various social groups can be in everyday contact and still recognise themselves as different from each other. Thus, for my theoretical model, I will consider ethnicity a result of interactional processes of negotiating boundaries. Furthermore, I will take Barth's notion of pariahs as a central term for my theoretical model, introduced in the upcoming section (cf. ⇨The Pariahdom Boundary, **Fig. 2**).

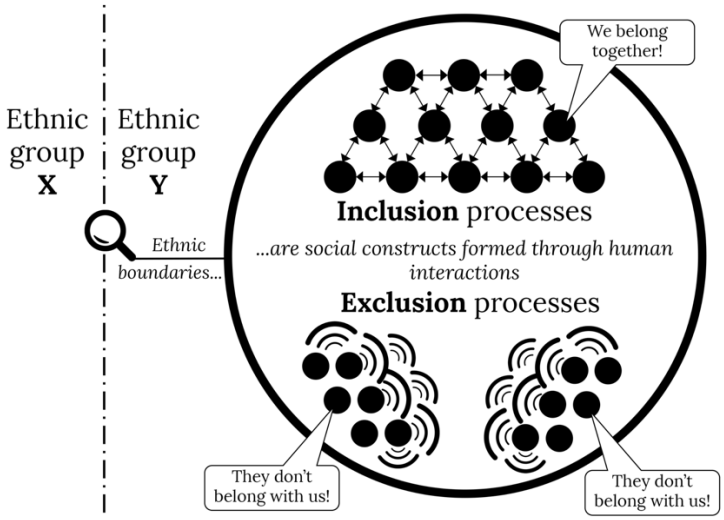

Fig. 2. Ethnic groups according to Barth (1969)

[44] It is worth noting that Barth's groundbreaking contribution did not appear out of thin air but grew from a gradual shift in anthropological thinking. Most notably, he was influenced by his teacher and doctoral supervisor Edmund Leach. In his classical ethnography on political systems of Kachins in Burma (1954), Leach pointed out that defining a social structure demarcated by a territory, a language, and a culture can sometimes be misleading. Leach's way of thinking was reflected in the main ideological standpoints upon which Barth's theory on ethnic boundaries is based.

Finally, the third standpoint is to approach the construction of ethnicity from the perspectives of its agents. While ethnicity represents an analytical category that may help researchers understand the world around them, it should also be seen and scrutinised from the point of view of people involved. Thus, rather than being thought of as a 'thing *in* the world', ethnicity should be approached as the 'perspectives *on* the world' held by agents, as an article by Brubaker – one of the most cited contributions to ethnicity theories published in the last two decades – laconically summarises it (Brubaker, 2002, p. 174; italics original). Brubaker also points to a trend in ethnicity theories of "groupism," which takes "discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life" (p. 164). He advocates a shift in attention from groups to sociocognitive processes through which agents use categories (such as ethnicity) to interpret the world around them. In other words, he proposes a change of focus from groups to "groupness." Thus, for my theoretical model, I consider a shift in perspective – not focusing on the question of what Romani ethnicity is but, rather, what it does. I will attempt to analyse the construction of ethnic difference, both for those who are differentiated (Roma) and those who differentiate (non-Roma).

The Pariahdom Boundary

The figurative term *pariah groups*[45] in ethnicity theory was inconspicuously raised by Barth in his renowned contribution on ethnic boundaries, which I have already mentioned. In a section dedicated to the periphery's organisational structure, he mentioned "gypsies" [*sic*] as an example of a group predominantly defined by processes of exclusion (Barth, 1969, pp. 30–32).[46] Although the pariah group

[45] I use the term 'pariah' in its figurative meaning as it was used by Barth, referring to any people rejected, disliked, disrespected and distrusted (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). This metaphor entered social science discourse likely through the work of Max Weber (in which he marked the "gypsies" [*sic*] as an example of "[t]he purest form of this type" [Weber 1958, 13]). It is worth noting that this term comes from the anglicised name Paraiyar – an ethnic group (also referred to as a caste) based in the Indian subcontinent from which Roma started their migration (e.g. Fontaine, 1986, p. 100). Not surprisinsgly, a hypothesis emerged that Roma are descendant from Paraiyar. The first mention of this theory can be traced back to 1783 in the work of famous Romani myth-maker Heinrich Grellmann (Hancock, 2002, p. 4; e.g. Willems, 1998, p. 19). Roma and Paraiyar, however, are not descendants of the same people. While Paraiyar come from Southern Indian states (e.g. Tamil Nadu, Kerala), the Romani place of origin is Northern India (e.g. Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab) and they are related to the ethnic group called Dom. Interestingly, both Dom people (by extension, Roma) and Paraiyar share some cultural similarities. For instance, their names are suggested to be derived from a native term for a drum, and both groups are recognised for their musicianship – and indeed for their social ex-communication (Arun, 2007; Burrow & Emeneau, 1984, p. 257; Sherinian, 2011). Despite some analogies and similarities, however, Paraiyar and Roma are genetically, linguistically and culturally different people.

[46] As an example of such groups, Barth enumerated "executioners, dealers with horseflesh [...] collectors of night soil" and, finally, "*gypsies*" [*sic*] (Barth 1969, 31; italics mine). In the text, he also claims that these pariah groups did not develop the internal complexity that constitutes fully fledged ethnic groups. Surprisingly, though, he does mention one exception – the "gypsies." In a

concept represents only a side note in Barth's influential framework, it points to the peculiar position occupied by Roma in ethnicity theories. Roma are a perfect example of an ethnic group that has "been formed without any deeper grounding than the stigmatising effects of a previous symbolic struggle" (Bourdieu & Collier, 2019, p. 87). The Romani case stands out in comparison with other ethnic groups[47] for its applicability across various communities of the world, with their wide geographic dispersion and immense cultural diversity. The surrounding majority's active rejection of, and hostility towards Roma is identified as "a *major* factor in the preservation of" and even "a *necessary* condition for the maintenance of Romani ethnic identity" all around the world (S. B. Gmelch 1986, 323; italics mine; Lee 1997, 69; italics original). This defining feature reaches beyond scholarly discourse. For instance, in one memorandum, the European Commission defined "'Roma' as an umbrella term that includes groups of people who share similar cultural characteristics and a *history of segregation* in European societies" (European Commission 2010; italics mine; cf. also Stewart 2010, 2). Such rejection, exclusion and segregation is manifest in a range of context-dependent forms, including in unfavourable views held in the majority of European states (e.g. Wike et al., 2019, pp. 86–87), but also in severe ethnic discrimination and institutional and structural racism (e.g. McGarry, 2017). Figurative references to Roma as *pariahs*, thus, can be found abundantly in contemporary literature (e.g. Hancock, 1987; Pogány, 2012; Vassilev, 2004). In this chapter, I will refer to the boundaries of Romani ethnicity being defined through non-Roma exclusion as the *pariahdom boundary* (cf. **Fig. 3**)

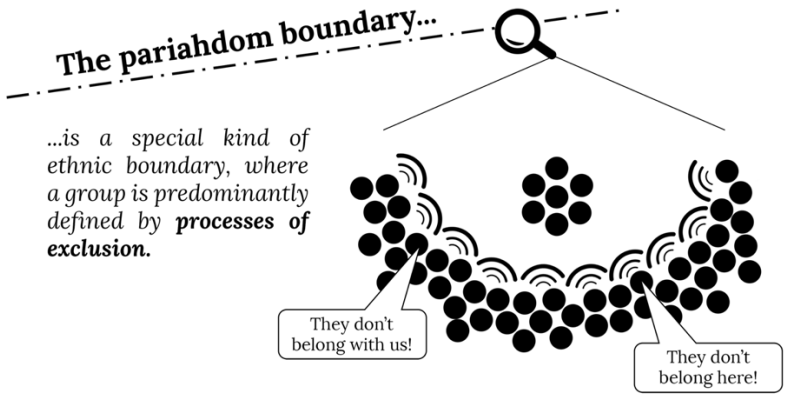

Fig. 3. The pariahdom boundary

dedicated footnote, Barth explains that the pariah position of "gypsies" is determined by their perception as wanderers and notorious violators of the order (Ibid., 38). However, he does not elaborate on their exceptional position in relation to other pariah groups – as if he did not quite know how to tackle this exception (Lee, 1997, pp. 70–71; Okely, 2019, pp. 61–62; for further elaboration on Barth's puzzled views on "gypsies," see for instance Sutherland, 1975, p. 7).

[47] There are other ethnic groups in the world with a similar pariah status; to name just a few: pre-Israeli Jews in Europe, Kurds in the Middle East, Uyghurs in China and the already mentioned Paraiyars in India.

Therefore, the chapter's primary focus is not the question of 'how Roma identify themselves in opposition to non-Roma' (although this approach can be relevant in other ethnographic contexts and for other ethnographic inquiries (e.g. Mirga, 1987). Rather, I will analyse the pariahdom boundary's genesis (through non-Romani exclusion) while focusing on its significance in Roma ethnic agency. I will show that the pariahdom boundary can be seen as a prerequisite for understanding other ethnicity-defining and ethnicity-constructing features, including those self-imposed. The experience of external categorisation (enforced by strong social persecution for many Romani communities) can have an enhancing effect for group identity through the defensive response inspired – in other words, "we suffer together, so we are a group" (cf. also Jenkins, 1994, p. 203; Mayall, 2004, p. 265; Sambati, 2018, p. 42). Simultaneously, it can have the exact opposite effect, resulting in inhibited group inclusion processes and further group fragmentation, as I will show in my ethnographic analysis of the K&K case.

Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary – Employing a Semiotic Perspective

Along with Barth's influential term "ethnic boundaries," the phrase "ethnic boundary markers" has been part of the anthropological discourse for some time (Eriksen, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Wallman, 1978). Although it appears extensively in anthropology textbooks (e.g. Peoples & Bailey, 2015, pp. 368–70), it has never been theorised in depth. Yet, theoretical focus on markers of ethnic boundaries provides at least two advantageous insights for understanding the ethnic boundary concept. Firstly, it allows for the subdivision of the holistic notion of boundaries into separate elements, which is particularly useful when seeking to analyse distinct components of ethnic identity performance. And, secondly, when seen and analysed as *signs* of ethnic boundaries, their dynamic nature can be untangled with the help of Peircian semiotics – particularly through its fundamental notions concerning the interdependent triadic relationship of *sign*, *object* and *interpretant*.

For the latter, one of the most discussed boundary markers of ethnicity – the phenotypical appearance (often reduced to the colour of one's skin) – provides a good example for explanation. Skin tone alone does not establish ethnic difference. From a semiotic perspective, 'skin tone' exists in the world only as quality – *a qualisign*. As Peirce puts it, a qualisign "has no identity. It is the mere quality of an appearance" and "[i]t cannot actually act as a sign until it is embodied" (Peirce, 1903, 1904). Qualisigns can only act as signs when forming part of a triadic semiotic relationship – that is, 1) a *sign* (i.e. "anything which in any way represents an object," in this case a 'skin tone' entering into a semiotic relationship as an ethnic marker); 2) *an object* (i.e. an ethnic boundary); 3) *an interpretant* ("a mental sign of the same object," in this case, the idea of ethnic difference in ethnic agency)

(cf. Peirce, 1895, 1902a). Awareness of this kind of triadic relationship, and especially its dependence on an interpretant, is a key premise for understanding the contextual dynamics of ethnic boundary markers, something particularly relevant in the Roma case. Taking phenotypic appearance and skin tone as an example again, it has been shown that this marker can be interpreted very differently by citizens of various European states, and this has a major effect on how Romani ethnic identity is performed on an ethnic 'visibility–invisibility' scale (e.g. Grill, 2018). Just as significantly, interpretation of this boundary marker can be obfuscated by Romani agents, for instance in cases where they claim to be members of other ethnic groups with similar phenotypic appearance (C. Silverman, 1982, p. 382; e.g. Williams et al., 1982, p. 342). In other words, ethnic boundaries (and pariahdom boundaries likewise) are constructed in a triadic relationship with signs (boundary markers) and interpretants (meanings assigned to these markers by various agents) (cf. **Fig. 4**).

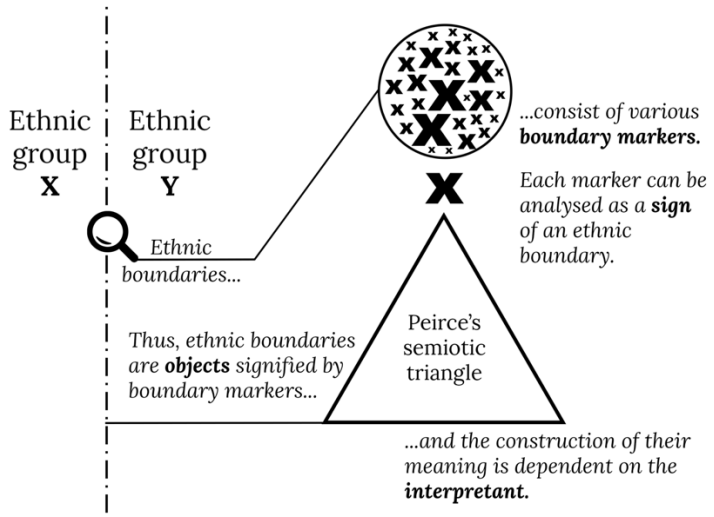

Fig. 4. Boundary markers from a semiotic perspective

Ethnic boundaries and their markers are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. These processes involve the perspectives not only of those who differentiate but also of those who are *differentiated*. In other words, agents adapting to boundary conditions are part of how the markers are constructed. It is an endless *feedback loop* in which the boundary determinates how markers are constructed and interpreted and, on the other side, markers set out the construction and interpretation of the boundary. This essential instability and hybridity of boundary markers in their triadic relations is a key for understanding another distinct feature of Romani ethnicity performance – *manipulation* of ethnicity. On the most general level, ethnicity performae can be manipulated by either overcommunication or undercommunication (Eriksen, 2010). Studies of Romani ethnicity have found great variability of intentional ethnicity manipulation on the under-/overcommunication scale (Clark, 2002; e.g. Okely, 1979). Examples range

from distancing, making oneself 'invisible' and 'silencing' ethnic identity (Horváth, 2012; e.g. Williams et al., 1982) to a proud manifestation of doing things in a distinctly Romani way (Stewart, 1997b, pp. 51–72), and even over-acting individual *Roma-ness*[48] (e.g. C. Silverman, 1982).

Breaking down ethnicity performance into separate boundary markers in their triadic relations can bring more flexibility into contextual interpretations of ethnicity under-/overcommunication. There are various ways in which a sign (an ethnic boundary marker) can relate to an object (an ethnic boundary). Drawing on Peirce's popular distinction, the relationship can be iconic, indexical and symbolic (cf. **Fig. 5**).

An *icon* "represents its object insofar as it resembles that object" (Peirce 1900). The most notable example of an iconic boundary marker of ethnicity is the visible physical phenotype mentioned above. Features of this so-called "visible ethnicity" play a significant role, especially in marking ethnic difference by exclusion (i.e. from outside) as they are "more usually applied to define 'the other' than one's own group" (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 66). Iconic markers have been studied particularly closely in theories of race. While they represent the least arbitrary signs of ethnic difference and mere 'probabilistic categories', they have the power to override other modes of perception and interpretation (cf. Lele, 2014). Iconic boundary markers may function as cognitive shortcuts in individual judgements, creating the idea of an ethnic difference almost automatically, with low cognitive costs. This is because sorting people based on their likeness and resemblance to each other ("predicting by representativeness") seem to be a universal feature of human cognition and the very basis of racial (and racist) profiling (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 162–170; cf. Rydgren, 2004). Due to this precondition, iconic boundary markers play a key role in marking boundaries based on first stimuli and reproducing already established racial and/or ethnic hierarchies. In short, "ideological work of racial discourse is made possible by iconicity" (cf. Lele, 2014, p. 155). In the

[48] Throughout this thesis, I will use the term 'Roma-ness', as a generic noun denoting the state, condition, or quality of being a Rom. It should be noted that there is no linguistic consensus about this word in English scholarly literature. The same word occurs abundantly without a hyphen ('Romaness'), which nevertheless also signifies (and often occurs as) a noun related to the city of Rome, more particularly, ancient Rome (more commonly spelt as '*Roman*-ness'). A similar-sounding word 'Romanes' (with no hyphen and a single 's') is a central term in the ethnographic work of Micheal Stewart, by which he denoted "the Gypsy way of doing things." Romanes, as Stewart argues, is an important component of Hungarian Vlach Roma identity, essential for understanding their intergroup dynamics and coherence (Stewart, 1997b, pp. 51–72). This form of the word, however, is not derived from English but from Romani language and among other things, it is also a Romani word denoting the Romani language ('Romanes: Educalingo.Com', n.d.). In Romani language, there may be other, better candidates for expressing Roma-ness such as 'Romanipen' (or, more commonly in Slovak Romani, 'Romipen'), which include deeper ethnographic meaning dependent on particular context (e.g. Mirga, 1987; Oláh, 2014). Finally, possibly the most commonly used terms are those derived from ethnic exonym 'Gypsy' – Gypsy-ness, Gypsiness, Gypsy-hood etc.

ethnographic parts below, I will discuss how this semiotic relationship, in which 'blackness' signifies 'Roma', affects ethnicity performance in K&K.

An *index* is "connected with its object; [...] but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established" (Peirce, 1894). The most typical ethnic boundary indices are the languages spoken by a group of people – their connection to the object (i.e. the ethnic boundary) they refer to cannot be derived from resemblance alone, yet they exist independently of interpretant (cf. Gal & Irvine, 1995). In this context, I will discuss strategies for eradicating Romani language and disconnecting from the indexical markers of poverty in K&K, both of which help Roma avoid effects of the pariahdom boundary and pursue a path of social integration (Beissinger, 2001, pp. 43–46; Mann, 1999, pp. 164–165; cf. Tong, 1985).

Finally, a *symbolic* boundary marker is that "which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant" (Peirce, 1902b). This is the most complex and most arbitrary form of sign, reflecting both each individual's personal experiences and sociocultural systems shared by agents (political history, racial ideologies, myths, fantasies, cultural stereotypes etc.). Symbolic boundary markers play a significant role in the construction of ethnic difference from outside, but they may also play their part in ethnic self-determination, with "the positive features of some ingroup with respect to outgroup members, thereby contributing to a positive social identity" (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002, p. 7). In the ethnographic part of the chapter (and also later in this thesis), I will focus especially on the symbolic marker of Romani propensity for music, which not only functions as a prerequisite for Romani success in the music business in K&K but also plays a distinct role in Romani ethnicity performance (performance of Roma-ness) – on the musical stage and beyond (cf. ⇨"We haven't eaten for a week!"; ⇨Roma-ness in Music).

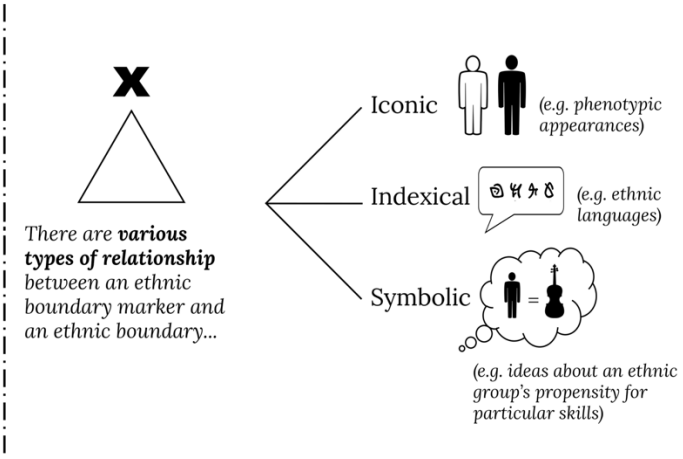

Fig. 5. Types of (ethnic) boundary markers

With the help of the analytical framework just outlined, the three following sections will discuss the performance of Romani ethnicity as an interplay of various boundary markers in their triadic relations, addressing the three central research questions:

1) How is the pariahdom boundary constructed and maintained in K&K? 2) Which common strategies do Roma use to adapt to the condition of the pariahdom boundary? and 3) What is the role of professional musicianship in ethnicity performance?

“Black–Ragged” – The Pariahdom Boundary in K&K

In a few hours, it will be dusk. Far away in [Klenovec], Christmas songs will be heard. Black, ragged Gypsies swarm into its streets among the white houses and the white snow.

Vladimir Mináč: Death Walks in the Mountains [*Smrť chodí po horách*][49]

On 6th of November 2018, the townhall of Klenovec held an event for residents to meet the three candidates standing to become mayor in approaching local elections. The day before, I was told about this event by Marcela from Dolinka. “Great, I didn’t know about it – that could be interesting. I’m gonna go. Are you going too?“ I asked. “Yeah, I’ll certainly go. I’d have a lot to ask!” That day, however, Marcela did not show up. In fact, I did not see a single Rom in the hall of the Cultural Centre, which was almost full with around three hundred participants. The first presenter was a 50-year-old male candidate, a town policeman. He had a rather hesitant way of speaking, but his PowerPoint presentation was full of saturated colours and bold ideas: “One of the things I’ll do as mayor is put a container washroom in Dolinka. I know what you’re going to say: ‘why should we build something for Roma again rather than for ourselves?’ Well here is the answer: I guess we’ve all had our kids coming home from school with head lice, right? And who was to blame? Roma, of course! So, if we build a washroom for them, it will benefit us all!” The second candidate, a 50-year-old female cultural worker, stated at the very beginning of her speech: “I don’t draw a difference between Rom and non-Rom. We are all human.” In her proposal, she mentioned building a water supply and a youth club in Dolinka, and developing a municipal social service enterprise intended mainly for Roma. Roma, in one way or another, were mentioned in the speeches of all the presenters. Once the candidates were finished, it was the audience’s turn to ask questions. The first Klenovec citizen to speak finished his string of questions with a lament: “The one thing I don’t understand is why we have no memorial plaque dedicated to Dr Ján Cibuľa. As you know, he was a president for Roma, and he was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, so why don’t we commemorate him? I’d be very interested to hear the opinion of all the candidates about this.” The crowd grunted in agreement.

6th of November 2018, Klenovec

[49] Vladmir Mináč (1922–1996) was a Slovak writer and a politician of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS). He was born in Klenovec and is probably its best-known citizen. The excerpt comes from the book *Smrť chodí po horách* [Death Walks in the Mountains] (first published in 1947), a war novel from the period of World War II, in which he nicknamed Klenovec “Klance” (other topographical names, however, do not leave the reader in doubt that he writes about his hometown). It is the only excerpt in which the existence of Klenovec “Gypsies” is mentioned. The excerpt occurs as a sentimental reminder of Christmas time later in the Klenovec chronicle (1999) and the municipal newsletter (2015) (Mináč 1974, 70; Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1999], 419; 2015). To this day, the elementary school in Klenovec bears the writer’s name.

This vignette elaborating non-Romani perspectives foregrounds a couple of important premises about the manifestation of the pariahdom boundary in K&K. In the speech of the first candidate, we hear what is quite typical for most non-Romani inhabitants – the emphasising of clear distinctions between 'us' (the non-Romani majority) and 'them' (Roma). Although Roma represent over a quarter of the population of Klenovec, they tend to avoid this sort of public meeting and rarely participate with non-Roma in communal life in the municipality. At the meeting, Roma are frequently mentioned as *the problem* to be solved. This 'problem' is not constituted by head lice though; it includes a whole range of issues mainly related to criminal offences – thefts, brawls and other sorts of excess. The solution that the candidate proposed is also somewhat typical and, in many ways, it reflects how people across Slovakia deal with 'Romani problems' – a tendency to treat the symptoms rather than causes. The non-Roma majority of Klenovec is aware of the link between Roma poverty and head lice,[50] yet most are more concerned about the lice (and by extension, various sorts of criminal excess) than the structural poverty that causes them. In the previous chapter, I outlined that most K&K Roma are trapped in a deep structural poverty, for which they are perceived as 'a problem that needs to be sorted' (cf. ⇦"A gypsy problem"). Poverty (and its related *signs*) has, thus, been a strong defining feature of the local Roma and a solid basis for the drawing of the pariahdom boundary. In the words of the writer Vladimir Mináč, "black, ragged Gypsies" have always stood out against "the white houses and the white snow." A result is that Roma experience in Klenovec is shaped by the pariahdom boundary – manifest in structural discrimination, racism and persecution, most notably exemplified in a series of murders in the 1990s.[51]

Box #5 – Dr Ján Cibuľa

Possibly the best summary of Ján Cibuľa can be found in the title of his obituary: "A Rom from Klenovec was recognised around the entire world, but by nobody at home" (Sivý 2013). Ján Cibuľa was born in 1932 in a Klenovec-based family of musicians (he played the fiddle himself). He is claimed to be the first Rom in Slovakia accepted to study at Comenius University, the oldest such institution in Bratislava, where he completed a degree in medicine. He was a co-founder of the Gypsy-Roma Association in Slovakia [*Zväz Cigánov-Rómov na Slovensku*], founded in 1969, whose aim was to assert Romani identity and cultural equality (in opposition to the plan of the Czechoslovak communist government for implementing a state-controlled assimilation of Roma). In 1971, he attended the First Romani Congress in Orpington (UK), which is today considered the first meeting of the International Romani Union (IRU). In 2001, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He died in 2013 in Switzerland, where he worked as a doctor for a great part of his life.

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[50] Which, in fact, may be another symbolic boundary marker in action; although there are sayings about lice being attracted to both dirty and clean hair, lice are primarily attracted to human blood and do not seem to care much about the cleanliness of hair.

[51] On 27th of October 1993, a 28-year-old municipal policeman decided to take justice into his own hands. He went to Dolinka and took two male Roms (a 31- and a 35-year-old) into his car one by

The pariahdom boundary also manifests itself in a much subtler way, however – in people's passive distancing of themselves from Roma. Stanka Zvarová, the second speaker at the mayoral meeting, told me in an interview about the most common position among locals. She is a cultural worker, and with her husband, she leads the Klenovec-based folklore ensemble Vepor. She is one of the few who actively deals with 'Roma problems' by attempting to open up public life in Klenovec to Roma participation while trying to change negative perceptions of Roma held by non-Roma. In the past, she was involved in many projects that aimed to do so:

Box #6 – Barnabáš Oláh

A photograph of Barnabáš Oláh with an accordion player Ján Cibuľa (nicknamed Jóno). Barnabáš was murdered two years later at the age of 31. The photo was taken by Claude and Marie-José Carret in 1991.

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> Some twelve, fifteen years back, when [Czecho Slovakia's Got Talent] and other talent shows appeared on TV, my husband and I started a project "Talent of Klenovec." It was simply amazing. Everyone took it very seriously. We had about 200 people outside; people were wearing costumes, and we had proper juries – Mr Parson, a teacher from the special needs school and myself [...]. We had all the rounds with people dropping out. It was really, really nice. But what really got me down was that when we did the same thing the next year, no white kids showed up – only the ones in my [Vepor] ensemble. And then, the white people criticised this event, saying that we only do things with Gypsies [*s Cigáňmi*] and for Gypsies. But nowhere was it said that it is only for Gypsies! It was intended for everyone. Everyone could take part! [...] So we ceased this programme as it didn't make any sense. The talented kids that we knew about didn't participate just because they didn't want to be in the same competition as Roma [...]
>
> Later, we had a project called "Getting to know each other's cultures" [*Spoznávanie vzájomných kultúr*] [...] where our kids [members of the Vepor ensemble] learned Romani repertoire, and Romani kids learned our – that is *gadžovský* – repertoire. And I was weeping on the stage, and I feel so sorry we had to cease this project. It was simply beautiful because all of a sudden our kids, who used to say about Roma that they are just 'stinking awful

one, claiming he needed to take them to the station for an investigation. Then, he drove the car to a nearby hill (Pavlínka) where he beat them and then shot them dead. A 22-year-old Rom escaped at the moment the policeman was preparing his weapon to commit the third murder, and this prevented him from committing many more. When he was detained, they found a list of people he intended to kill. In 1994, the investigations into the murders stopped as the suspect was found to be mentally unstable (with schizophrenia, as one local told me). In 1996, he was released from institutional care and moved to Hnúšťa, where he has lived up to today, just a couple of kilometres from the place where he committed the murders. He publically stated that he does not regret his action (Vražda 2012; Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1993], 275–276). I met many Roms in Klenovec who did not hold back tears when talking about this incident. "It was my cousin. When they found him, he had a broken hand and dirty nails. It was obvious he was trying to protect himself [...] He shot him in the head," remembers one of the victims' relatives. Some non-Roma Klenovec inhabitants, however, remember different sentiments about the incident: "I need to tell you sincerely – after this incident, there was a silence. Roma were afraid and shut their mouths," one non-Roma concluded. The local chronicle closed the record of the event by citing the official position of the Klenovec municipal council: "This event is not a result of bad coexistence between [Roma and non-Roma] citizens" (Chronicle of Klenovec 1984–2009, [1993], 276).

> Gypsies', were clapping the Romani kids on the stage. So, I feel really so sorry we didn't keep up with that. Just because we [people in Klenovec] are so evil.
>
> Interview with Stanislava Zvarova, 9th of January, 2019, Klenovec

The pariahdom boundary, then, does not always have to be manifest as active oppression of non-Roma. For the majority, it takes the form of passive distancing. To 'tolerate' does not seem to be the same thing as to 'accept' Roma. In this sense, the absence of Roma at public events in K&K should not be seen only as Roma lacking interest in K&K public life; it can also be regarded as the reluctance of the majority to participate in a public life that includes the 'stinking awful Gypsies'. Rare examples of people like Stanka, who attempt to actively change this situation and persuade Roma to participate in communal life while changing perceptions and the passive-discriminatory attitudes of non-Roma, are continually faced with latent manifestations of the pariahdom boundary.

The pariahdom boundary in K&K is maintained by all types of boundary markers, as I outlined in the previous section. On the most basic level, iconic boundary markers – phenotypical appearances – play a distinct role and have power to override any other semiotic systems of communication. Indeed, this phenomenon is what Roma in K&K experience on an everyday basis. In May 2018, for instance, I met with Vladimir Sendrei. We were chatting over a drink in one of Klenovec's pubs:

> It was already quite warm, so we were sitting outside. Vladimir was energetically summing up his ambitious plans for future musical projects and enumerating his band's greatest achievements, including the movie soundtrack they recorded with Hans Zimmer, and a concert in New York's Carnegie Hall. After a while, Vlado stood up and went to the bathroom. I followed him inside to pay the bill. As he went in, a young waitress called out to him: "Excuse me! But the bathroom is only for guests of the restaurant!" "Yes, I'm a guest of the restaurant" responded Vladimir with a smile. "No, you don't understand, this is a bathroom that is only intended for guests of this restaurant!" "But I'm… I'm just sitting outside." I entered the discussion, confirming that Vladimir was indeed sitting outside with me. The whole embarrassing situation lasted just a few seconds, before the waitress was sufficiently satisfied to wave indication that Vladimir was free to go on. He took the whole situation with a smile.
>
> 16th of May 2018, Klenovec

Mainly thanks to his music-making activities, Vladimir has achieved high socio-economic status, and he does not hold back from showing off this status publicly. His haircut is always pristine, with shiny black tint covering his grey hairs; his shoes sparkle, and he wears carefully ironed shirts not just for music gigs but whenever he leaves his house. The day we met in the pub was no exception. In the eyes of the waitress, however, he was categorised on the basis of iconic boundary markers as a 'Gypsy'. The other carriers of semiotic meaning ('clothes make a man') were apparently overridden. For the waitress, he was the 'other', the 'Gypsy', someone who 'makes problems'. In Wallman's terms, the incident shows *boundary dissonance* in action (Wallman, 1978, pp. 212–214). The appearance of one boundary marker ('blackness') does not accord with an associated one ('raggedness'). The

story of Vladimir is one of many that I encountered or heard of among K&K Roma. Among themselves, they share these tales, in which they are refused entry or service after being recognised as a 'Gypsies', with a certain self-irony and humour. The situations themselves, however, are always full of humiliation and embarrassment.

The pariahdom boundary comes hand in hand with the *racialisation* of Roma – in Slovakia, much like elsewhere in the world, they are frequently labelled as 'those blacks'. In this respect, iconic boundary markers are indelible and inexorable; they represent a solid basis for the marking of the pariahdom boundary in K&K. Roma in K&K, hence, often bring up the issue of colour in everyday conversation. Those who are believed to be darker are considered less attractive. And those inheriting so little of the phenotypic appearance that they 'don't look like Gypsies' are considered to have an immense advantage. For instance, Zilo – a bass guitar player from Klenovec – has significantly darker skin pigmentation than other Roma. That is why he is often the target of jokes among his Romani friends who mock him as "the one from Africa," "the Tanzanian," "the dark one" and (ironically) "the handsome one." On the other side, Milo – a double-bass player from Klenovec – has a daughter Marika, who (as Milo told me) "was lucky enough not to look like a Gypsy at all." "Once, when we were living in Hnúšťa, some kids rushed up to us yelling: 'Marika is being beaten up by Gypsies! Marika is being beaten up by Gypsies!' And I told them: 'But *we* are Gypsies!'" Marika has completed a university degree in social work; she was the only one in the class who spoke Romani. She was also the only one who spoke up when their teacher made an inappropriate, racist comment about Roma during a class. The teacher clearly did not recognise that there was a 'Gypsy' present.

The poverty of Roma is another marker that often comes to the fore in K&K, and it is a hybrid sign of the pariahdom boundary. It is partly indexical (as 'raggedness' often occurs alongside other boundary markers defining Roma) but more symbolic – drawn from the mythologised picture of Roma 'who don't want to work' and who have consciously chosen poverty over nine-to-five employment. Romani resistance to joining the formal economy's job market and insistence on making a living through informal economic systems is a widely studied phenomenon (cf. ⇨The Phenomenon of Romani Economies). Yet, from the perspective of the pariahdom boundary, it can also function as a harmful symbolic boundary marker. With the boundary feedback-loop effect in action, it is impossible to say what the relationship is between poverty as a marker and the pariahdom boundary – that is, what the cause/consequence connection between the two is. Do Roma in K&K (and, by extension in Central and Eastern Europe) resist being integrated and, *because of that*, they are treated like pariahs; or have they failed to integrate *as a consequence of* being treated like pariahs?

In K&K, I encountered strategies that aimed to erase these markers of poverty. This should not be understood merely as a strategy 'not to be poor' but rather as a way of not showing poverty, and of not being associated with poverty and other poor Roma. The last part of the opening ethnographic excerpt to this section (the

meeting for mayoral candidates) describes a curious situation. When non-Romani locals suggest making a container washroom for Roma as a way of guarding themselves against Romani lice, they express profound admiration for a Rom – Dr Ján Cibuľa – who despite his unprivileged ethnic background, become a personality on the world stage. Roma who do not 'live like Gypsies', those who show efforts to live like non-Roma, meet a greater level of tolerance in K&K. Thus, to soften the effects of the pariahdom boundary, Roma in K&K have developed strategies for disconnecting the boundary markers of 'black' and 'ragged' – strategies of integration that I will cover in the upcoming section.

"Roma like us" – Romani Integration Strategies in K&K

> A note for the future reader of this chronicle: so that the reader does not interpret the fact that we specifically mention the number of Gypsy children [*cigánskych detí*] as a sign of racism. We do this for statistical reasons, because Gypsy citizens [*cigánski občania*] do not yet reach the level of other citizens and require special care, especially at school and pre-school age.
>
> (Chronicle of Klenovec 1953–1983, [1979], 438)

> "You know, our old Gypsies behaved much better than the new ones. These ones are really cheeky," a Klenovec non-Roma told me. "Hang on," I said, "what do you mean by 'our Roma'?" "The ones that have been here [in Klenovec] forever. The ones who are well behaved. Look… For example, Gazda. Do you know why he is nicknamed Gazda [i.e. 'Homesteader']? Because he did the same things that *whites* did. He built a house. He bred pigs. He was like us."
>
> 1st of March 2019, Klenovec

As I discussed in detail in the previous chapter, sustaining a dignified living in the region is a great challenge for everyone. But it is especially so for Roma, due to the effects of the pariahdom boundary. One of the most plausible strategies for Roma seeking to counter these conditions is *integration* – the conscious effort to live like non-Roma. Gazda, the man mentioned in the interview excerpt, is now a retired professional driver in his late sixties (I will return to him later in this chapter). Gazda's son (who inherited his father's nickname, as is common among Roma in Klenovec) is in his late forties. Like his father, he is a well-known musician – he plays double-bass for one of the most profitable Klenovec bands focusing on 'traditional music' (cf. ⇨"Playing traditionally"). Yet, his musical activities have been pushed to weekends. When we had a short talk In february 2019, he was working as a sales team manager for Home Credit, Slovakia's most recognised provider of non-bank loans. "I wake up early, come home late and deal with a lot of emails before I go to bed" is how he summed up his current occupation – a working habitus contradictory to symbolic boundary markers of Roma-ness. His nickname reflects exactly his father's outlook on life – he 'does what white people

do'.[52] The younger Gazda makes a conscious effort to pass this approach on to his two children. But the integration process should not be seen as simply one of acquiring a wage-labour job. It is a result of intergenerational accumulation of symbolic and socio-economic capital and, perhaps even more importantly, a result of strategies that require an individual's Roma-ness to be left behind – that is, the undercommunication of certain ethnic boundary markers.

The story of Janko encapsulates several of these strategies. The first time I met him was in 2015, during a local folklore ensemble rehearsal. He was then 22 years old and played both cimbalom and piano very well. He told me he had been thinking of studying music, but his parents "had a different opinion." He started studying medicine, prompting his father to report proudly that Janko was the first Rom to ever study medicine in Košice. By the time I started my PhD fieldwork in 2018, Janko had finished his degree in medicine (like his great-uncle Dr Ján Cibuľa mentioned above) and started working as a doctor in the Czech Republic – a country with higher salaries for health care workers, yet accessible with a minimal language barrier. His father told me:

> I needed to discourage him from his music career. […] He appeared to be exceptionally talented, and everyone expected he would continue, including his teacher and even himself. I needed to tell him that he could make music at any point as a hobby. But he'd need to find a proper job that would sustain his living. And he changed his opinion quickly. Then he took the entrance exams for a medical school where only 250 out of 1200 were accepted. That proved I was right. If I had ten children, who knows, maybe just three of them would have had such talent for studying. It was necessary to take advantage of it. […] I could have had a luxurious car for the money I have invested in the education of my sons. But I don't regret it – it's all a question of priorities.
>
> 4th of March 2019, Klenovec

Lower education levels are a feature of the entire region – half of the Klenovec population has received only primary education, and tertiary educational participation stands at only about 10 percent (the average in Slovakia is 38 percent) (cf. Murin 2018, 71; Commission – EAC 2019). In Janko's family, there is a greater experience of tertiary education. Janko's brother is now studying, and their father has a university degree too. The latter often mentions the influence of his own father, who put a lot of emphasis on his children's education and, as a result, university degrees also appear among Janko's father's siblings. And in this respect, Janko also proudly recalls his grandfather: "My grandfather was a very respectable man because all of his children – with the exception of my mother – were university students […] You know – at those times? Roma from the *osada*? That

[52] This could also be reformulated as "what white people believe they do." When symbolic markers are constructed "in contrast to" or with an "opposition to," even these markers (we can tentatively call them *anti-markers*) are formed in triadic relationship. The fact that the construction of anti-markers are part of marker construction shows the high complexity of symbolic boundary markers and their inseparability from the boundary feedback-loop effect (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary).

was really something!"[53] The symbolic and socio-economic capital that allowed Janko's family to undergo tertiary education accumulated intergenerationally. For Roma in K&K wishing to reach higher education, it is easier if there is a history in the family, and almost impossible with no history at all (cf. Čokyna, 2019). But if education has the purpose of securing access to 'proper jobs', this is contradictory to symbolic boundary markers considered vital ethnicity-defining features for Roma – resistance to proletarianisation in favour of alternative informal economies. In Janko's family, having a 'proper job' represents the highest goal; for many Roma in K&K, it is an unfulfillable dream.

The path of integration is also associated with attempts to erase markers of the pariahdom boundary. The most notable example is well-integrated families avoiding the use of the Romani language. Although both of Janko's parents are fluent in Romani, he cannot speak any himself; his younger brother Patrik is marginally fluent owing to his elementary school education. His parents admitted that they refused to teach them any Romani "so they wouldn't have troubles." The complete eradication of the Romani language (as an indexical boundary marker) may minimise the harmful effects of their pariahdom, yet it may also expose individuals to serious identity issues. The latter is exemplified in something Janko's mother told me: "[Janko] is a bit Rom and bit not. So, he pisses off both *whites* and Roma." Ultimately, though, Janko was raised to be *less Romani* as a way of aiding his path to integration. I found this strategy (with similar motivations) employed by other households in K&K, including those at a lower social integration level. When I visited these families, I witnessed angry shouting when the children spoke in Romani: "Can't you see we have visitors? How many times have I told you that when we have visitors we only speak Slovak?" Some of these families even told me they had completely stopped talking Romani at home so that their children would not develop a grasp of the language. These parents' attempts often proved less successful, however, as their children often picked it up during elementary school education.

To disconnect themselves from the 'ragged' boundary marker, another strategy employed by well-integrated Roma in K&K is to emphasise their distance from the less integrated. For the context of this thesis, it is vital to note that, in K&K, the higher level of social integration coincides with the phenomenon of professional musicianship. Although in the latest generations of some families, this craft has retreated at the expense of more pragmatic professional paths (e.g. Janko and Patrik – although they both play their instruments to an excellent standard), in other families the craft continues up to today. All of Gazda's sons and grandsons, for instance, have followed him along the path of professional musicianship. Indeed, musical craft has a special position in Romani ethnicity performance, as I explain in the following section.

[53] One of Janko's mother's siblings was the famous Dr Ján Cibuľa, who was mentioned in the opening vignette of the first ethnographic section (cf. ⇦"Black–Ragged")

“Romani aristocracy” – the Hereditary Aspects of the Musical Craft in K&K

> “I’m looking for the musicians,” I said. “Musicians? You are way too early!” responded a young dancer, with a laugh. I was about 20 minutes late for a traditional Friday rehearsal of the Vepor folklore ensemble in January 2019. Yet, the musicians were nowhere to be seen. “Just sit in the auditorium, they should show up tonight.” It took another 20 minutes for the young Romani musicians to finally arrive. I knew most of them from my previous fieldwork, yet I had trouble recognising them. In four years, fresh-faced teenagers had turned into good-looking young men. They were all dressed in fashionable clothes – despite being indoors, they all had scarfs draped elegantly around their necks. They had carefully trimmed hairstyles and the beginnings of beards. I recognised David (the *primáš*),[54] his older brother Miňo (playing *bráča*),[55] and their cousin Dalibor (playing cimbalom).[56] In 2015, David and Dalibor were 13 years old, making their way through an insititionalised music education system and dreaming about careers as professional musicians. But today, they were both now students in renowned music high schools. During the break, in which the dancers rested, they jammed on melodies from classical music (such as Vivaldi’s *Spring* chorus) and jazz standards (*Autumn Leaves*). After I came up on the stage and re-introduced myself, they recalled our interview sessions from before. We all happily agreed to meet for a drink later in the month to catch up.
>
> We met at Demko’s on Friday after another rehearsal a couple of weeks later. Apart from David, Dalibor and Miňo, also there were Vlado (fiddle),[57] and Páťo (fiddle) and his girlfriend

[54] *Primáš* is the person who plays the first (lead) fiddle (coming from Latin *prima*, i.e. playing the first voice). This word is specifically used when talking about Slovak (as well as Hungarian and Moravian) folk(lore) music. The word likely came to the Slovak language from Hungarian [*prímás*] thanks to the popularity of *magyar nóta* music style in the 19th century (cf. ⇨“Playing traditionally”) His (very rarely *her*; cf. ⇦From ‘Romani Music’ to Romani Musical Craft) role is vital for communication with the audience as well as inside the band. I will write about primáš’s specific function in music performance later (cf. ⇨“We’ll make you dance”).

[55] *Bráča* (sometimes reffered to as *bráč*) is a Slovak word for viola; or more particularly, a specific way of playing this instrument. Its etymological origin is the Latin word *brachium* (cf. *viola da braccio* in Italian, *Bratsche* in German etc.) – i.e. *a forearm*, reflecting how the instrument is usually held. In Slovak folklore ensembles, *bráča* players do not hold the instrument under their necks (unlike with the viola in classical music) but rest it on the forearm and chest. They play ‘*kontra*’ (hence bráča players are also called ‘*kontráš*’), which is off-beat accompaniment with chords. It forms a musical counterpoint with the double-bass and is one of the most important components of Slovak (as well Hungarian, Moravian and Bohemian) folk music. David once told me that the absolute minimal composition for a folk band [*ľudovej kapely*] is “*primáš* [lead fiddle], *basa* [double-bass] and *kontra*.” This traditional set-up – regarded as the “oldest part of [Romani] orchestras” – was formed in the *magyar nóta* tradition, which I will discuss in the next chapter (cf. Bonini Baraldi, 2021, p. 39; cf. also ⇨“Playing traditionally”).

[56] Cimbalom [in Slovak *cimbal*] also commonly known as dulcimer is a string instrument essential for Slovak folk music. The expression *cimbalova hudba/cimbalovka* [cimbalom band] is an equivalent expression to *ľudová hudba* [traditional/folk band].

[57] In this work, I use the term ‘fiddle’ as the translation of the Slovak word *husle*. Unlike in English, there is no distinction between ‘violin’ and ‘fiddle’ and the word *husle* is, thus, used for the

Želka. They were all around 18 years old, Miňo just a bit older. Both David and Miňo already addressed me in an informal way [*tykenie*] as they knew me from before, while Patrik and Želka couldn't get used to it and, from time to time, they addressed me formally [*vykanie*]. Yet, at the table, I was by no means the centre of attention – the musicians had a lot to say to catch up. Patrik hadn't been to a folklore-ensemble rehearsal for (as he said) six months, and David had recently come from high school ski training, so they all had stories to share. Those they exchanged seemed quite similar to the tales of their non-Roma middle-class peers from anywhere in Europe, rather than to those of their peers in Dolinka. They talked about their high-school troubles, shared vivid drinking stories and showed their favourite music samples on YouTube and Spotify. Later in the evening, I told a story of how I took part in a *bašável* in Dolinka. "You mean Dolinka the *osada*? You went to Dolinka?" they asked. "Sure, I did. I have a lot of good friends there." There was another round of looks among them, a mixture of surprise, amusement and also a bit of contempt. "You know, we don't really go there. Actually, we are afraid to go there!" concluded Miňo with a short laugh. Everyone else laughed in agreement.

11th of January and 1st of February 2019, Klenovec

The young musicians featured in this ethnographic excerpt have some notable family connections with other Roma mentioned earlier in this chapter; these will become important as this section progresses. To start with, Patrik is the younger brother of Janko, the cimbalom player who was discouraged from a music career in favour of one in medicine. Their father Janko has played with the Vepor ensemble for many years and, as a *primáš*, he is also a frequent choice for Vladimir for the gigs of Kokavakare Lavutára.

Box #7 – 'Folk Band' from Klenovec

"So what name for your band would you like me to use in the YouTube title?" I asked when I had finished post-production of the song *Hej pane králi* [Hey, Your Highness!] – a Czechoslovak protest song from the 1930s. It was for a project I had initiated with David, Miňo, Dalibor, Májo, Páťo and Vlado. There was an extended silence in our Messenger group. It was obvious that the young musicians were having an internal discussion about it. Then, David – the *primáš* and thus the one with the final word – replied laconically: "Folk Band" [*sic*, i.e. in English]. "Just that? Nothing about Klenovec or Vepor?" "No, just 'Folk Band.'" While the most regular engagement for this band, the group built around the *primáš* David Oláh, is to perform at the Vepor folklore ensemble in Klenovec (⇨"Playing traditionally"), as they have grown up, they have also started playing standard commercial jobs – such as weddings, birthday parties and other types of 'entertaining performances' (cf. ⇨"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). Their involvements with professional music-making have started falling into conventional patterns for the local musical economy – with a network-like character that I described (cf. ⇦Essential Note #1). They sometimes play together, but just as often, they perform in the bands of their fathers and in other K&K bands. Thus, it may be somewhat indicative that I never saw them using the name 'Folk Band' again (cf. ⇨Box #30 –Peťo Farkaš and the 'Live band').

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instrument in the context of both folk and classical music. References to either 'violin' or 'fiddle' in this thesis reflects distinctions in style and context, not the instrument itself.

Their grandfather (also Janko) was the first saxophone player in Klenovec after he had smuggled the instrument back from the front during World War II. Since he "came from a family of musicians," he started learning the instrument, one that few had seen before (cf. Zvarová, 2016, p. 23).

Apparently, in their family, the musical craft has been passed on as easily as the names of first-born sons. David, Miňo and Dalibor are grandsons of a well-known grandfather – Janko the Gazda – previously mentioned as the Rom 'who lives like the *whites*'. Apart from building his house and breeding pigs, he is also well-known in the region for being an outstanding saxophone player. During an interview I conducted with him in spring 2015, he told me: "Until the end of the world, my family will always be a family of musicians." Gazda's father's name was also Janko, and he was the brother and bandmate (*bráča*) of Drôto, one of the two most famous *primáš* in Klenovec history.

Box #8 – The first Romani saxophonists in Klenovec

The photograph shows the first Romani saxophonists in Klenovec – Ján Deme (left) and his brother Milan Deme (right). The brothers opened a new era of Romani music-making in K&K – they accompanied Romani 'traditional' string bands (in this case, the band of the famous *primáš* Drôto) with parallel voicing on their saxophones. This unusual combination soon became highly favoured in the surrounding area, and the brothers became much-in-demand members of local Romani bands. It also led to the increased popularity of saxophones among K&K Roma.

thesis.nuska.me/box/08

Earlier in this chapter, I also mentioned Gazda's son, who inherited his father's first name and his nickname. Besides having the well-paid job of a sales team manager, he is also the manager and double-bass player of one of the most successful Klenovec folk bands. He too named his first-born son Janko, and this Janko often accompanies his cousins and Vepor-bandmates David, Miňo and Dalibor on double-bass. In 2017, the son of this youngest Janko was born. Unsurprisingly he was given the same name as his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. I met the two-year-old Janko at a Vepor rehearsal, where he enthusiastically (though somewhat randomly) struck the cimbalom with beaters, surrounded by his older kinsfolk who flattered him: "He is so talented! He'll surely be a cimbalist!" "No way, he'll play the fiddle!" "He'll play everything!" "Are you surprised? He's got our genes!"These are just some ethnographic examples indicating that there are, indeed, some hereditary aspects to the Romani musical craft in K&K. Musicians in K&K are a sort of "hereditary musicians" (cf. Hooker, 2007, p. 69). Milan, a Romani saxophone player from Klenovec and my eldest research participant (now in his 80s), told me once that this local musicianship is not 'inborn' but 'rooted' – "We are *rooted* musicians" [*muzikanti od koreňa*], he said. Musicians do not inherit merely the 'musical talent' (as sometimes both non-Roma and Roma in K&K claim) but, rather, there is a notable intergenerational pressure to maintain and pass on the craft of music-

making within musician families. This pressure can often be very explicit ("When Karol went home to tell his father that he no longer desires to become a musician but a professional body builder, his father beat him up really badly. But if that hadn't happened, he might not be the best *primáš* in the district today," Milo told me about the notable fiddle player Karol Radič, who I will mention many times later on). The musical profession is regarded as the most prestigious vocation for Roma in many places. It is associated with high socio-economic status and, for these reasons, continuity of musical craft in Romani families of musicians is often seen as "sacrosanct and indeed inevitable" (Beissinger, 2001, p. 41; Hooker, 2007, p. 69; cf. also Hübschmannová, 1998, p. 343; Ionescu, 2006, p. 1).

Box #9 – Imrich Drôto Oláh

Primáš Imrich Oláh – known as Drôto – had a famous Klenovec band with his brothers, Maxmilián (known as Frído) playing double-bass and Janko (from whom the Janko born in 2017 – five generations after – inherited his first name) playing *bráč*. He was celebrated for his distinct (*rázovitú*) interpretation of Slovak folk music. For more than two decades, his name has been honoured at Klenovec's annual competition *Drôtová nôta*, where folklore music ensembles from all around Slovakia compete to be the best ('most authentic') interpreters of Slovak folk music (cf. ⇨"Playing traditionally"). The second picture shows two of my oldest research participants – Janko Gazda (on the accordion) and Milan Deme (on the saxophone), performing with *primáš* Drôto at a non-Romani wedding.

thesis.nuska.me/box/09

Ivan Murin, an ethnographer who has researched among Roma in Klenovec and Kokava for decades, told me that "musicians are the aristocracy [*šľachta*] of the local Roma." References to musicians as the "aristocracy" and/or "elite" of Roma, in fact, abound in ethnographic works from across the world (Beissinger, 2001, pp. 36–39; e.g. Beynon, 1936, p. 363; Hübschmannová, 1998, p. 343; Kállai, 1984; Stoichiţă, 2008, pp. 86–104). These 'aristocratic roots' of the Romani musical craft in K&K go as deep as the history of Romani settlement here – according to historical sources, stretching back to at least the 1770s (cf. Facuna & Lužica, 2017, p. 88). All of Klenovec's old chronicles and official documents were lost in a great fire in 1888 (Chronicle of Klenovec 1934–1947, 1934, 8); thus, the story will never be known in great detail. Yet, everyone in Klenovec – both Roma and non-Roma – knows the story's outline by heart. It is a legend that I heard countless times: "A long time ago," (although no one can be sure when exactly) "the noble family of Kubínyi wanted to have their soirées accompanied by authentic Romani music, as it was popular back then. And so they invited the first Roma to settle in Klenovec." The story varies in some details. Some say it was just one family of musicians; others recall that there were three. Some say they were from Slovakia; others maintain that they were Hungarian. Despite many discrepancies, there is one aspect firmly present in the collective memory of locals – the first Roma in Klenovec were, for sure, *the musicians*.

To this date, Romani musicians in K&K proudly stress the origins of their musical ancestors and the importance of blood ties and kinship. For both K&K Roma and non-Roma, the most common Romani surnames in K&K – Radič, Cibuľa and Oláh – are the names associated with the old K&K musical craft. Among Romani musicians, these associations are stressed with pride and gratification. For instance, after the opening of the exhibition Rooted Musicians that we organised in September 2019 in Klenovec, Barna approached to tell me: "I like the exhibition a lot. But there's one great Klenovec musician who is missing, Miško Grbato. I think you should have included him too!" The surname of this famous Klenovec *primáš* was Cibuľa – the same as that of Barna's musical family. "Well, I know they say that Grbato was the best. But in fact, there was one *primáš* who was even better than him!" David told me once. "His name was Drôto, you've heard about him, right?" "Sure, I have. But, David, don't you say that just because he was a relative of yours?" I asked. David smiled back at me in response. Drôto was a nickname of the *primáš* Imrich Oláh – David's great-great-uncle, with whom he also shares his surname. Lastly, the musician name Radič has a notable position in Kokava's folk(lore) ensembles. In the Radičovci case, local historians refer, without exaggeration, to a "musicians' house" [*hudobnický rod*], whose roots go back to the mid-19th century.

For the K&K musical craft, thus, names seem to play a distinctive role in ethnic impression-management. The name of bands in K&K (whether official or informal) are often taken from musicians' surnames (e.g. Sendreiovci, Radičovci), first names (e.g. Barnovci, Miškovci) and even nicknames (e.g. Mečkovci). They allow musicians to connect with notable musical ancestors and to proudly put existing family ties on display. The names can also function as a hybrid boundary marker – in essence iconic, but related to symbolic markers of Romani musical exceptionality. David, for instance, told me about his experiences at a summer school for young *primáši* (*Primášikovia*) that he attended in the early days of his musical training. His musical peers were impressed by his fiddle skills. Based on his appearance, they did not recognise that he was a Rom. But as soon as they learned that his surname is Oláh, they took it as the ultimate explanation for his talent: "They kept calling me Rinaldo Oláh and whenever I played they just said: 'It makes sense that he plays so well. He's a Rom, and he has it in his blood'," David told me in 2015. The well-known Slovak violinist Rinaldo Oláh (1929–2006) was nicknamed 'Paganini from Slatina' for his exceptional skills. With David, however, he only shared a surname (in fact, it is one of the most common Romani surnames in the region) and his Romani origin, but this was apparently enough for the explanation about 'shared blood and musical talent' to emerge. On the one hand, Romani surnames in some contexts may represent a solid basis for the pariahdom boundary, manifest in the ethnic profiling and discrimination present even before non-Roma meet Roma in person; e.g. in the housing market and the job market (e.g. OSF Foundation, 2020). In music-making, however, having a surname of a 'Romani musicians' house' (cf. Mann, 1999, p. 170) can work as a trademark and, thus, musicians occasionally like to put their 'musicians' name' on display.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the effect of cumulative intergenerational failure. Due to the region's significant socio-economic decline and insufficient adaptation to new conditions, a great portion of K&K Roma are forced to live on the periphery of the periphery (cf. ⇦"Inadaptable"). Conversely, the high ('aristocratic') status of the K&K musicians has been determined by the *cumulative success* of several generations of musicians who built their living on the musical craft. K&K musicians have used distinct strategies for adapting to the challenging conditions. These include strategies of (greater or lesser) integration (discussed in the previous section) and preserving and passing on the profitable craft within their families. Although K&K musicians sometimes proudly enact their Roma-ness on the musical stage (as I will discuss in the next section), they do not consider themselves the same 'Gypsies' as those found on the periphery.

The opening ethnographic excerpt suggests that distancing between well-integrated families of musicians and lesser-integrated Roma from the periphery is partly defined spatially. In Klenovec, Dolinka is where only lesser-integrated Roma live (and visit – cf. "We are afraid to go there!"). I have also encountered some musicians who have contemporarily settled there attempting to conceal this fact. Milo told me about Barna, who now lives in Hnúšťa and who likes stress that he and his family belong to the 'better Roma':

> When Barna's family came from Třinec [in the Czech Republic], they settled in Dolinka at their grandparents' for some while. It took time before his father was able to buy a brick house in Máša. I used to see him there often. Sure, I remember him – no one could ever forget a boy with such immense glasses [laugh]! But very few people know this. If you ask Barna, he'd tell you he's never set foot in Dolinka.
>
> 17th of August 2021, on our way to Veľký Klíž

In the more or less distant past, all Romani musician families in Klenovec came from Dolinka, including the famous Klenovec *primáši* Grbato and Drôto, who had their houses there. Over generations, however, the accumulation of social and economic capital allowed the musicians' families to leave Dolinka and settle in other parts of Klenovec (cf. Murin, 2018, pp. 79–80).[58] These days, I have encountered a notable antagonism between the Roma living in Dolinka and those living outside. Similar polarisation can be found in Kokava too. During her fieldwork, Ambrózová encountered an opposition between inhabitants of two Romani concentrations – Chorepa and Kyseľovo: "Kyseľovo was the part where musicians lived [...], and in Chorepa, they live traditionally, in a Romani way. They

[58] In the previous chapter (cf. ⇦"Inadaptable"), I also noted that some Roma have managed to move out from Dolinka following schemes from the communist government, supported by generous state subsidies. Many of them returned to Dolinka in the 1990s, as soon as the K&K region was hit by the job crisis caused by the fall of communism (cf. ⇦The Decline during the Transformation). Those who managed to keep their houses despite the difficult economic situation now live spread out all over Klenovec. Their socioeconomic situation varies immensely. In particular, families outside the "musical aristocracy" have often formed segregated micro-localities in which their inhabitants face similar problems as the Roma in Dolinka. As a rule of thumb, though, both Roma and non-Roma perceive Roma living outside Dolinka to be higher on the social ladder, whether they are Romani musicians or non-musicians.

are poorer. It's hard to change them." Similarly, "[m]y uncle – Cibuľa – married a woman from Chorepa. And so he was rejected by the whole family. His grandma has never forgiven him for marrying a woman from Chorepa" (Ambrózová, 2004, p. 15). Ambrozová suggests that this social stratification was caused by the stable incomes of musicians living in Kyseľovo. In Klenovec and Kokava too, the musical craft seems to be a significant aspect in social stratification, manifest in the notable polarisation and distancing between Romani musicians and Romani non-musicians.

These findings suggest that despite the small size of the municipalities of Klenovec and Kokava, their Romani populations are stratified according to divergent life-style groups: on the one hand, there is the 'Romani aristocracy' – families of well-integrated Romani musicians; and, on the other, there are 'black–ragged Gypsies' – those struggling against structural poverty. These groups tend to distance themselves from each other. This challenges the primacy of ideas around ethnic inclusive solidarity, which are generally regarded as an important feature of ethnicity construction and have been studied in contexts of various Romani communities (e.g. Stewart's 'brotherhood') (Stewart, 1997b, pp. 50–72). With the pariahdom boundary operating in K&K, solidarity tends to be limited in its binding effects to Roma from the same rank. Socio-economic status and integration level represent distinct boundary markers that apply *within* this 'ethnic' group. This, again, relates to issues of identity and imposes challenges inside families. Most well-integrated Roma from K&K have (closer or more distant) relatives struggling with poverty, and, at some point, all their ancestors came from the local Romani concentrations – that is, from a humble socio-economic background. In short, it seems that while in some contexts *music* may have potential for strengthening communal identity and mutual solidarity in Romani communities (e.g. Stewart, 1997b, pp. 181–203), *musical craft* in other contexts may be a factor with inhibiting effects for group solidarity, acting as a contributor to group fragmentation.

"We haven't eaten for a week!" – Distancing vs Roma-ness on the Music Stage

> On 21st of September 2019, we were preparing a photo exhibition related to the history of the Romani musical craft in Klenovec with the cooperation of two civic associations – the Klenovec- based OZ Rodon and the Kokava-based (and Roma-led) OZ Láčho drom. It took place in the local Cultural Centre. Although it gained a certain degree of attention from the local media, I was concerned about how aware local Roma would be. The day before the opening, I knocked on almost every door in Dolinka and personally invited everyone I could – some 200 people. I knew that wine and refreshments would be provided, but I did not mention it as I was afraid information about an 'exhibition opening' could easily be twisted into 'free food and wine' – something that I thought could cause mania in Dolinka. About two dozen Roma ended up attending the opening. After the event, my co-organiser Stanka asked me: "Did you notice that no Roma touched either the food or the drinks?" Indeed, that had been surprising to me. During the event, I even tried to encourage people, including kids there without their parents, to take some refreshments. But all politely refused and they stayed only for a very short time – the food and drink were all consumed

> by non-Romani visitors. "When I was involved in a campaign for the mayoral elections," Stanka remembered, "the Roma in front of me washed the glasses that were already washed. I think it's the same thing. As if there is a boundary [*hranica*] between them and us. It's as if they are ashamed of their poverty. As if they feel we are not equal" said Stanka with regret in her voice. Later, I realised that there were in fact some Roma who not only took the refreshments but greatly enjoyed them – the musicians who performed at the opening. I recalled the double-bass player Béla saying: "You know what's missing at this event? Sausages!"
>
> 21st of September 2019, Klenovec

The situation described here provides an insight into two markedly different performances of ethnic identity. It shows quite a rare moment, a single event in which both of the divergent Romani groups in K&K participate in relatively large numbers. Roma from the *osada* Dolinka are affected by the pariahdom boundary more than any others. For these people, iconic boundary markers ('blackness') are strengthened by indexical ones ('raggedness'). The non-Roma majority sees them as troublemakers while well-integrated Roma keep distance to show they do not belong to the same rank. At the event, these Roma kept their profile as low as possible. My own part in the situation was shaped by boundary dissonance, as I presupposed that the Roma would 'eat the food because it is free and is provided by non-Roma'. After years of fieldwork in K&K, I was obviously affected by symbolic boundary markers, imagining Roma coming in large numbers to deprive the non-Roma majority of their resources. My presupposition turned out to be completely wrong. Under the effect of the pariahdom boundary, these Roma at the event were barely 'visible'.[59]

The Romani *musicians* at the opening, however, showed completely different behaviour. All apart from one arrived late. The one who came on time emphasised that he is very unlike other Romani musicians in his habitual punctuality (cf. also the opening excerpt of the previous section). Dressed in suits, they surrounded the refreshments table with their confident conversation peppered by loud laughter, after which they filled the hall with the tearful tones of their Romani instrumental music. Having depriving their patron of an extra-honorarium negotiated on the spot (I will return to this story in the next chapter; cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo"), they went on to another stage to get that audience truly excited

[59] My ethnographic interpretation of this situation triggered an interesting discussion at the Gypsy Lore Society Annual Conference in 2021 (Nuska, 2021a). Two scholars (independently of each other) approached me and asked whether such a situation, in which Roma are reluctant to take non-Roma food, might be interpreted as a sign of "ritual purity" – a socio-cultural feature that is regarded as important in some Romani communities (Hübschmannová, 2003, p. 3; e.g. Mirga, 1987; Stewart, 1997b, pp. 204–231) – and, in a way, as an act of proud resistance against non-Roma. Later at the conference, I discussed this issue with Renáta Berkyová – a Romani scholar based in the Czech Republic, originally from the district of Rimavská Sobota. She seemed to lean towards my interpretation of the situation, adding a story of how her uncle – a musician – and his entire band were starving throughout a non-Romani wedding at which they played. It was not for the sake of resistance or ritual purity, though, but because they did not know whether the food at their table was meant for them, and they felt too insecure to ask. Thus, there seem to be various way to read this situation, not least the simple explanation that most of the Roma gave me at the event: perhaps they were just not hungry.

and energised. Unlike the other Roma attendees, the musicians not only made themselves highly visible but they also played up to a number of preconceptions which non-Roma hold against Roma – in other words, they reinforced the symbolic boundary markers constituting the pariahdom boundary. The musicians were unreliable (late), they successfully deprived non-Roma patrons of the extra honorarium (in a *smart* way; cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo") and they impressed with their spectacular musical abilities (cf. ⇨Romani 'Strangeness'; ⇨Anatomy of Romani 'Musical Blood'). *Music* performance in K&K, thus, represents a special type of *ethnicity* performance. Many boundary markers that harmfully demarcate the pariahdom boundary in other contexts are overcommunicated here. Roma playing the role of musicians are not only welcome but even expected *to be Roma*.

The marker of poverty is occasionally enacted in Romani musicianship too and has a particularly notable position. At the beginning of my fieldwork in October 2018, for instance, I attended a gig with Vladimir's band. When the musicians needed a break, Vladimir took the microphone and announced: "Thank you, thank you! We'll be right back after a short break. Now, we need to go and eat. We are all divorced, and we haven't eaten for a week!" All of the musicians there actually seemed to be satiated and happily married. Later, I learned to see these jokes, playing on stereotypes about Roma shortage of resources, as part and parcel of Vladimir's musical performances. "We are not leaving the stage until you pay us off," I heard him announce to a dancing crowd. Another time I witnessed him answering a question from a passerby: "Where is your fiddle?" Although Vladimir does not play the fiddle so does not even own one, he replied without hesitation: "At the pawn shop."

I encountered similar strategies of evoking people's compassion for these 'poor Gypsies' – often under the guise of jokes, half-truths and outright lies – from other musicians too. In such situations, they occasionally highlight precisely what many of their Romani compatriots in K&K would be ashamed of, and musicians – as better-integrated Roma – would ordinarily try to disconnect from: the boundary marker of poverty. On the stage, again, this enacted marker can function for the benefit of musicians. While in non-musical contexts, many boundary markers only reconfirm the pariahdom boundary and, thus, have harmful effects on Roma, on the musical stage, they are all part of a trademark that can be successfully sold (cf. ⇨Roma-ness in Music).

“If you don’t play here, you’re not a human” – Closing Remarks

> If you don’t play here, you’re not a human.
>
> Zolo, an accordion player, September 2019, Klenovec

> When I was saying my goodbyes to Peťo, a local fiddle player who was expecting his first baby boy, I said: “I wish him all the best, and above all good health!” Peťo responded with a smile: “No! The most important wish is that *he’ll play*!”[60]
>
> April 2019, Klenovec

In this chapter, I have sought to develop a theoretical model explaining some distinctive features of Romani ethnicity, harnessing the ethnographic case of Roma in K&K. I have analysed non-Romani demarcation (the pariahdom boundary) as a distinct feature of ethnicity definition, employing a semiotic approach to considering various ethnic boundary markers. With this model, I have specifically analysed the musical craft in K&K and focused on its significance for Romani performance of ethnicity. It is worth, in this concluding section, revisiting the main points, as a way of highlighting potential paths for extending and developing the model and of addressing some of its limitations.

It is apparent that the musical craft in K&K has key significances in the performance of Roma-ness. Becoming a musician here can lead to comparative prosperity and to relatively high levels of respect from non-Romani neighbours. While on stage, a Rom can be a Rom without being judged (or persecuted) for it. As such, this represents the best way to avoid the harmful effects of the pariahdom boundary while retaining some individual Roma-ness. In the upcoming chapters, I will uncover various aspects of the performative nature of Romani professional musicianship and will argue that Romani musicians intentionally enact and commodify their Roma-ness. Yet, Roma seem to hold a much deeper – almost an existential – connection with the craft of music-making. In another context, Bonini-Baraldi comments that music sees Roma “erasing the dichotomy between ‘acting’ and ‘being oneself,’” something which may account for such strong bonds between Roma and music-making (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, p. 303). Thus, in a way,

[60] Peťo’s son was born in the summer of 2019 and he was named after his father. I met Peťo at the “Rooted Musicians” exhibition opening in September of the same year, when I had my camera in hand to document the exhibition. He enthusiastically and proudly showed me many of his musical ancestors on the camera. When I asked him about his newborn, he said: “He will also be a musician! I really hope so! I’ve already given him a fiddle in the cradle.” This sentence has since become a tagline for the ethnographic short film I produced in spring 2021 (cf. ⇨Towards the Films…). Peťo died in the summer of the same year, before I had a chance to show him the film. One extremely hot day in August 2021, he collapsed during a logging shift in the woods near Klenovec. He was 36 and died just a few weeks before the birth of his second son. Shortly afterwards, someone changed the profile picture on his Facebook account. The picture showed his two-year-old son Peťo holding his fiddle in a black case.

being a Rom *and* a musician in K&K seems to have a significance for the performance not only of Roma-ness but also of *humanness* (cf. “If you don’t play here, you’re not a human”).

The role of the pariahdom boundary is central to Romani ethnicity performance. I think of it as similar to the rope around a boxing ring, one within which the everyday tussles over ethnic identity take place. In the introductory theoretical discussion, I suggested that the pariahdom boundary may have a stimulating effect on group identity. But the case of Roma from K&K clearly shows that the pariahdom boundary may also lead to further fragmentation of a group and to contestation surrounding issues of inclusion and solidarity.

The phenomenon of the pariahdom boundary can be employed in other ethnographic contexts and may help with understanding other ‘peculiarities’ of Romani ethnicity, those I outlined at the very beginning of this chapter. For instance, it can be relevant for studying and understanding complex politicised constructions of ethnicity prevalent in contemporary discourses around Romani political activism and Romani nationalism. These manifestations of ethnicity have recently attracted significant scholarly attention, but they have also been criticised as irrelevant when seeking to deal with the actual problems faced by European Roma, such as structural poverty, social exclusion and racial discrimination (Law & Kovats, 2018; e.g. Surdu & Kovats, 2015). Yet, when these forms of ethnicity performance are approached from the perspective of the pariahdom boundary, they can be reinterpreted ultimately as demands from Roma to be treated inclusively and equally – demands that would not be necessary if the pariahdom boundary did not exist (cf. Mayall, 2004, p. 265). Hence, acknowledging the existence of the pariahdom boundary may be a key for a deeper understanding of Romani ethno-emancipatory endeavours and other contemporary manifestation of Romani ethnic-identity performance around the world.

The pariahdom boundary lens can also shed new light on the much-discussed phenomenon of Romani informal economies. In the case of K&K’s musicians, a double-edged position is clear: softening the effects of the pariahdom boundary is only made possible through filling and exploiting a socio-economic niche, a niche demarcated by the very construction of the pariahdom boundary. While music-making in K&K may represent an exemplary case of Roma proudly sustaining their lives on the periphery, the socio-economic niche is created and maintained by the power position of the non-Romani majority (among other things, by the economic system of supply and demand). Roma are, hence, ‘allowed to be Roma’ only in a segment of life narrowly demarcated by non-Roma. This is a crucial aspect in need of further consideration, not just in relation to music, but for studies of other ‘traditional’ Romani occupations (fortune-telling, horse-trading, metalworking and so forth). I will return to this point in the next chapter (cf. ⇨“The show must go on”).

Employing the perspective of Peircean semiotics has also provided useful insights into Romani ethnicity performance in K&K. The whole conceptual framework established by Peirce himself (and extended by more than a century of scholarship) is complex and hence it allows many aspects of my ethnographic interpretation to be elaborated with deeper complexity. Yet, the very basis of the semiotic theory – the triadic relationship between a sign, an object and an interpretant – provides a convenient theoretical standpoint for deeper comprehension of ethnic boundary markers and their dynamic. It sees them as a system in which the sign – the boundary marker – can have various meanings depending on the interpretant. When the marker of poverty, for instance, is approached in its triadic semiotic dimensions, there may be different responses and meanings obtained from different agents in different contexts: 1) the non-Roma majority (e.g. 'black–ragged troublemakers'); 2) well-integrated Romani musicians (e.g. distancing themselves); and 3) when enacted on a musical stage (e.g. purposeful arousal of compassion). Understanding the triadic relationship of sign (boundary marker), object (ethnic boundary), and interpretant (idea of ethnic difference in ethnic agency) is key when considering how boundary markers constitute various groups for various agents. The K&K case shows that, paraphrasing Brubaker, the groupness of the 'black–ragged' Roma is constructed differently from the groupness of the local Romani musicians – both in relation to the non-Romani majority and to Roma themselves (cf. Brubaker, 2002).

To conclude, Romani music-making in K&K represents not only a notable strategy for making a living but also a special case of ethnicity performance. In the past, the Romani musical craft enabled relative economic prosperity – a foundation for a high level of social integration and for an opportunity 'not to live like Gypsies'. Musicianship for Roma used to be an exclusive source of a living, with those involved making enough not only to sustain their families but to develop into a distinct group, living in significantly better conditions than other 'black–ragged Gypsies' in K&K. Due to the socio-economic decline of the region, only a tiny minority of musicians nowadays can make their living exclusively from music-making. The vast majority need to combine income from musical activities with that from other sources – social aid, regular wage-labour jobs and other informal-economic activities. Nevertheless, among families with a long history of musicianship, there is still explicit pressure to preserve the musical craft. For many musicians, it means working nine to five from Monday to Friday and spending weekends on the stage. From one perspective, music becomes an activity for earning extra income, essential for maintaining high socio-economic status, and consequently for minimising the harmful effects of the pariahdom boundary. But from the perspective of ethnicity performance, it can also be seen as a socio-economic niche, in which Roma are not only welcome but also expected to *be Roma*.

Music-Making as Making a Living

The Romani Music Business from an Economic Perspective

Introduction

This chapter explores the economic aspects of K&K Romani musical craft. It starts with a theoretical discussion providing a literature overview on functionalities and features of Romani economies, especially focusing on the seeming paradoxes of Romani (in)adaptability and (in)dependence. It also discusses the phenomenon of Romani outsmarting as a distinctive cultural practice and introduces the concepts of Romani economic niches and monopolies. The second part of the chapter connects the theoretical discussions with ethnographic findings from K&K, providing a detailed ethnographic picture of Romani music-making in K&K from an economic point of view. The primary research questions for this chapter are: 1) How does Romani music-making in K&K function from the perspective of socio-economic adaptation, in which music is regarded as a commodity of exchange? 2) How dependent on non-Roma is the Romani music-making business in K&K, and how is it influenced by the Romani ideas of social/economic independence? 3) How are the musical niches and monopolies of K&K musicians constructed, how do they develop, and how do musicians exploit and maintain them?

Essential Note #3: "Music-making is not just about money"

> "You know, I'm currently unemployed. Yet, I couldn't resist spending 2,000 euros on this amazing Korg PA 1000 [a digital keyboard]. It's quite a machine, you know! And that's not all – with my brother and father, we have just invested about 7,000 euros into our new sound equipment. We bought a new mixer, loudspeakers and a lot of other stuff for live performances," Barna Jr. told me in the car on our way to a gig in Velký Krtíš. "Well, I'm sure the investment will eventually pay off, right?" "I guess so. Eventually, it may. But remember – music-making is not just about money [*hudba nie je len o peniazoch*]!"
>
> 12th of October 2018

In contemporary ethnomusicological discourse, the economic perspective has become a popular point of departure for studying various worlds of music. Numerous related topics have taken shape under the umbrella of the emerging subdiscipline of *economic ethnomusicology*, which approaches music as a commodity of production, exchange, circulation, transmission and consumption; and also as a feature of value production and a result of human labour (e.g. Morcom & Taylor, 2020). These perspectives have become increasingly important for contexts in which institutionalised markets (so-called music industries) play a significant formative role, but they are also highly relevant for contexts in which music economies are not institutionalised. The K&K Romani musical craft represents one of these music economies that is non-institutionalised but that nevertheless contributes significantly to the form of the craft itself.

As outlined in the two previous findings chapters, in the *hladová dolina* of K&K, making a living with music has been *the skill* keeping entire families afloat over generations. It is a skill of adaptation to both the challenging socio-economic conditions of the surrounding region and the problematic elements of co-existence with the non-Romani majority. This chapter will focus on Romani music-making in K&K predominantly from an economic perspective and analyse it as a distinctive income-generating activity. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that such a narrowly defined focus is essentially reductive. I will show that economic-anthropological theories certainly help understand many (if not *most*) essential features of Romani musical craft, yet they cannot explain them *all*. To express it in the recurring words of my Romani research participants, music and music-making "are not *just* about money."

The opening vignette provides good illustration of this issue. Economic theorists may read the scene as, for instance, a manifestation of 'capital exchange' and 'convertibility' between different types of capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1986). Purchase of an expensive new musical instrument can be interpreted as a financial investment (a form of economic capital) into (objectified) cultural capital. An instrument with a pleasing tone and good looks affects the quality of sound during the performance, but it also increases musicians' credibility. They are more likely to be called to perform again or to get recommendations for other performances. Expanding the network of audiences and paying clients increases social capital. With more gigs (and sources of income) more economic capital is generated.

Eventually, there comes a desire to manifest this economic capital outwardly, by investing it into more expensive instruments, more expensive cars, or hiring a more renowned producer to make the next album or a music video. The "reproduction of capital" thus, continues the cycle of its "conversion" and "exchange" (cf. Ibid.). Yet, this theory of capital exchange may not explain *all* motivations for making the initial investment. What if buying the new instrument in the first place was not *just* about capital ("about money")?

Some scholars have noted that certain economic anthropology theories may be not simply insufficient, but even misleading, when used as an explanation in the world of music. I consider Benzecry's ethnography (2011) on opera fans in Teatro Colón (Buenos Aires) the most notable example in this genre of thought. His study is an interesting attempt to deconstruct possibly the most classic example in the sociology of taste: opera. Opera has long been considered interconnected with the upper class, elites and (employing the perspective of capital exchange) a ladder for social mobility. Thus, its social-cultural functions and relation to capital exchange represent a well-explored topic in the theory of taste and economic sociology and anthropology more generally (cf. Johnson, Fulcher, & Ertman, 2007). Benzecry, however, shows opera fandom from a remarkably different perspective. In his analysis, he seeks an explanation in terms not often seen in scholarly accounts of music economics: "obsession," "fanaticism," "addiction," "transcendence," and, finally, the key terms of his work – "passion" and "love." He advocates shifting discursive attention and making these aspects a departure point: "[t]he sociology of taste is too weak to explain the moments in which cultural objects orient life, give meaning, and allow people to lose themselves. Distinguishing it from a full-fledged sociology of passion is crucial" (Benzecry, 2011, p. 184).

Arguing that 'music is also about love and passion' may seem like attempting to reinvent the wheel, yet it is an essential point to emphasise in the context of this chapter. In music (and music-making), not everything is determined and run by principles of economic exchange and, thus, cannot be exclusively explained by economic anthropology theories. Some aspects of music-making are decoupled from the cycle of capital exchange yet have an immense effect on how music is performed and perceived. Music is, to a large extent, about the love and the passion that emerge in musicians whenever they grasp their musical instruments. Equally importantly, it is about the love and the passion occurring in the audience's minds – whether they are keen dancers or ardent listeners. Thus, although this entire chapter is based on the presupposition that Romani music-making is to a large extent about money, the reader should remember that it is 'not *just* about money'. In the upcoming chapter, I will also attempt to do justice to the role of passion in Romani music-making, showing that this phenomenon itself may function as a marketable feature of musical performance and play an inseparable role in Romani musical impression management (cf. ⇨Roma-ness in Music).

The Phenomenon of Romani Economies

In the previous chapters, I have already outlined the importance of the distinct economic strategies employed by Roma and the sizable portion of scholarly attention they have received. In the literature, their distinctiveness led to the emergence of an umbrella term, the 'Romani economy' (or more commonly, the 'Gypsy economy') (cf. Brazzabeni, Cunha, & Fotta, 2018).[61] While the phenomenon of Romani economies is one of the most commonly discussed topics in contemporary Romani studies, the first systematic anthropological contributions on this topic started emerging only in the late 1970s/early 1980s,[62] despite Romani economies having had a centuries-long tradition before that. This belated attention relates to a generally delayed scholarly interest in Roma as a group of people (e.g. Stewart, 2013) and in two other areas of anthropology study that are central for understanding Romani economies: informal economies and economies featuring service nomads. Explaining these two erstwhile knowledge gaps helps to understand how discourse on Romani economics has formed, as I will show in the two upcoming paragraphs.

Concerning the former, the discussions about the informal economy[63] (or, rather, *economies*) – that is, economic activities beyond formalised economic sectors – emerged only in the 1970s. Anthropologists then concentrated their attention towards informal economies forming alongside the modern centralised economy, often in developing Global South cities (Hart, 1973). These pioneering contributions noted that, in various socio-cultural settings, the informal economy plays a greater role in people's endeavours to make and sustain their living than the formal-economic sector is capable of providing. Thus, informal economies were regarded and studied "as a universal feature of the modern economy" and finally recognised as an important area of inquiry for anthropological research (cf. Hart, 1985, 2006). The development was especially useful for understanding the economic behaviour of Roma across the world.

As for the latter long-overlooked aspect, ignorance surrounding the phenomenon of service nomads was mainly determined by the narrow conception of nomadic people in anthropology. Nomadism was considered a binary opposite to a sedentary way of life; moreover, it was associated with food-production and

[61] Cf. ⇦Essential Note #2: Roma or Gypsies.

[62] Among the most notable: G Gmelch 1977; George Gmelch and Gmelch 1978; Okely 1979; 1983; C. Silverman 1982; Gropper 1987. Beynon's economically focused study on Gypsy musicians from Detroit represents a rare exception of an early study (Beynon, 1936).

[63] In economics textbooks, there are other synonymous (or related) terms marking this phenomenon: *black* economy, *unaccounted* economy, *illegal* economy, *subterranean* economy, and *unsanctioned* economy (Shaikh, 2010, p. 376). Alternative terms also emerge as descriptions for Romani informal economies; most notably, the terms *second* economy (e.g. Stewart, 1997b), *alternative* economy (e.g. Powell, 2011) and *parallel* economy (e.g. Crew, 2018).

lifestyle patterns of nomadic hunter-gatherers and pastoralists.[64] Other forms of nomadism were "largely overlooked," dismissed "as minor," and lumped together as concerning "'aberrant cases,' '*Gypsies*,' or 'itinerant'" (Aparna Rao 1989, 1; Hayden 1979, 297; Berland 1979, 7; italics mine). It was also not until the 1970s–1980s when anthropologists – based on emerging ethnographic research involving various people(s) in movement – finally started rethinking the category of the nomad. The sedentary-nomadic binary opposition was deconstructed, allowing focus on the continuum between sedentary and nomading types of cultures (e.g. Kelly, 1992). Subsequently, anthropologists paid attention to largely overlooked nomads who built their entire living strategies on mutual economic interaction with sedentary populations. In an important contribution to understanding the cultural ecology of nomads, Hayden (1979) extended the deficient nomads typology; to the two established types – pastoral and hunter-gatherer – Hayden proposed an additional third type – *service nomads* (Hayden, 1979).[65] The 'service nomads' frame (and especially the loosening of the conception of nomadism) proved especially useful for ethnographic studies of Romani communities, including those in various stages of the process of becoming sedentary, who could not strictly be defined as a pure type of nomad from the perspective of their mobility.

Both the lens of the informal economy and that of the economy of service nomads appeared useful for analysing Romani economies around the world and contributed significantly to the first ethnographic accounts of Romani economic practices (e.g. G. Gmelch, 1977; G. Gmelch & Gmelch, 1978; Okely, 1979, 1983; Piasere, 1987; Salo, 1981, 1986a; Sway, 1984). These accounts showed that some distinctive economic features are spread across various Romani communities, regardless of their wide dispersion. This included the Romani ability to adapt to various economic conditions (including the challenging ones on economic

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[64] In early anthropological discourse, nomads tended to be seen as the binary opposite of sedentary societies based on agriculture. Nevertheless, many exceptions to this rule have been found in later ethnographic work: from sedentary populations of hunter-gatherers (e.g. North-American Kwakiutls), sedentary pastoralists (e.g. Kazakhs), horticulturists – food-producers without their own agricultural land (e.g. South-American Yanomami) (Svizzero & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5) – finally to service nomads. The number of exceptions shows that the means of food production are not decisive in the distinction between sedentary/nomadic ways of life, and the aspect of mobility has started being approached in anthropological theories as a multi-dimensional and context-dependent variable (Ibid., cf. also Kelly, 1992).

[65] In the same contribution, Hayden mentioned the "gypsies" [*sic*] as the "best known [non-pastoral nomads] in the West." Nevertheless, he 1) mentioned them only in a short footnote; 2) did not capitalise the word 'gypsies'; 3) decided not to incorporate them in the study because "very little research by trained anthropologists has been done among them" and "the work which has been done was undertaken in more developed nations [than he was] considering" (pp. 306–307). There are striking similarities with Barth's mention of 'gypsies' in his famous article on ethnic boundaries (1969), which I already discussed in the previous chapter ⇦Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft. Like Hayden, Barth 1) mentioned 'gypsies' only in a footnote; 2) did not capitalise the ethnic name while capitalising all others; 3) assigned them a status of an unprecedented case, on which he did not elaborate further, claiming it was beyond the scope of his contribution (cf. ⇦Footnote #46**).**

peripheries) within which they create, exploit and sustain various economic niches; the importance of Romani economic interactions with (and dependence *on*) sedentary non-Romani populations; Romani resistance against (and independence *from*) economic behaviour of non-Roma; and, finally, tendencies to exploit non-Romani resources in a smart way. I will unpack the discussion on these aspects of Romani economies in the following sections, as these represent components of Romani economies that are vital for later ethnographic analysis.

Romani (In)Adaptability

In scholarly accounts of Romani economies, we often encounter terms from disciplines beyond the social sciences. For instance, the widely used phrase 'exploitation of resources' (e.g. Beck, 1989, p. 58; Pesarini, 2013, p. 113; Piasere, 1992) is a concept originating in ecology. Another common term, 'host population'[66] (cf. also Barth, 1969, p. 31; Marin Thornton, 2014; Stewart, 1997b; e.g. Sutherland, 1975) is mostly used in parasitology. Such abundant metaphors are connected to certain controversies in the debates. Although they may well serve as analytical terms for describing the unique socio-economic and socio-cultural strategies of various communities of Roma, they also sound strangely similar to some claims about Roma made in public and political discourse. For instance, as I have already pointed out, in K&K and in Central and Eastern Europe more broadly, far-right political parties tend to refer to Roma as 'parasites' who 'exploit society's resources', marking them with nicknames such as 'those who are *inadaptable*' (cf. ⇦"Inadaptable"). This discrepancy and seeming paradox between scholarly and the public discourse is worth a closer look.

Long before scholars turned their attention towards Romani economies, surrounding non-Roma majorities recognised (and defined) Roma precisely for their distinctive economic behaviour. In many socio-cultural settings, these activities are well-noted in public discourse, in the form of an almost automatic stereotypical association; as Lemon summed up in the title of one of her ethnographic chapters: "black faces, black markets" (Lemon, 2000, pp. 62–68). In a lot of places, these ethnicised associations have been preserved to this day. In the eyes of non-Roma, Roma are perceived as 'those who don't work like others', sometimes even 'not at all'. This is a feature that has led to Roma being perceived as *special*, and more often, rather *strange*. From the perspective of the theoretical framework introduced in the previous chapter, distinctive Romani economic behaviours function as symbolic boundary markers. They play a part in the ethnicity construction of Roma – specifically, construction through non-Roma exclusion (i.e. the pariahdom boundary), which, in many settings, is manifest in the

[66] Abundantly appearing also as 'host society', 'host community', 'host culture', 'host country', 'host state' etc. (Lapage, 1997; Liégeois, 1994; Ljujic, Vedder, Dekker, & van Geel, 2012; McGarry, 2017; e.g. Okely, 1996). Various adjectives denoting the same meaning also appear in the literature – such as 'dominant', 'majority', 'non-Roma', 'sedentary', 'surrounding' etc.

form of Roma marginalisation and persecution (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary). In the first findings chapter, I pointed out that Roma in K&K are perceived as 'those who don't work' and that, based on this perception, they face everyday discrimination and racism (cf. ⇦"Those who don't work"). I have also described their struggles in formal-economy participation and their creation of parallel, informal economies, where they tend to experience many difficulties related to their ethnic identity and associated socio-economic position (cf. ⇦"Unemployed"… yet making a living).

In public and political discourse, these struggles to join and remain within the formalised system of the economy are often considered a sign of Romani vulnerability and *failure* (cf. ⇦"The gypsy problem"; ⇦"Black–Ragged"). However, this notion of Romani 'incompatibility with the system' can be highly misleading. A considerable number of studies have shown that Roma can benefit (and, indeed, do benefit) from making their living outside the formalised economy. I agree with Kaprow that we should not underestimate "the wise valiant adaptations of those who are powerless" (Kaprow, 1982, p. 421), and with Brazzabeni, Cunha, and Fotta that it is useful to ask "what do they have – as opposed to what do they lack?" (Brazzabeni et al., 2018, p. 5). Romani economies indicate the existence of alternative (yet not inferior) economic systems, clearly co-existing with the majority's formal economy. Thus, the perception of Roma as victims of incompatibility with the system can be misleading.

In her classic ethnography, Okely noted a recurring quotation from English Gypsy-Travellers: "You could put me down anywhere in this world and I could earn my living […] you could even put me in a desert" (Okely, 1983, p. 53). Figuratively speaking, the Romani ability to earn their living in various 'economic deserts' has been confirmed in a number of ethnographic studies from around the world. The *hladová dolina* of K&K is one such desert (cf. ⇦Ethnographic Description). These various adaptation models should not be seen as passive – as a way of getting used to challenging economic conditions. Rather, they represent "active responses" determined by "constant necessity" to adapt, and they take the form of "reinterpretative ingenuity and creativity" (Liégeois, 1987, p. 80; Mayall, 2004, p. 268; Solimene, 2015, p. 121). Romani adaptability should not be seen only as a survival skill but also as a distinctive socio-cultural response, which may – depending on context – define Roma and make them who they are. A growing body of anthropological work on Romani economic adaptability contradicts the public and political discourse described above. Based on this evidence, I emphasise the first important premise for this findings chapter: the existence of Romani economies – including that of music-making in K&K – should not be seen as indication of mere incompatibility with (and *inadaptability* to) economic systems of non-Roma; rather it points to distinctive systems of *adaptation* and an active, distinctive and creative response to given socio-economic conditions.

Romani (In)Dependence

The first theoretical encounters with the economics of service nomads recognised that it is based "almost completely" on exchange with sedentary populations (Hayden, 1979, pp. 298–301). But to properly understand these economic adaptation strategies, it was vital to begin considering economic interactions between sedentary and service-nomadic groups. This interactional perspective has become an important premise for ethnographic research on Romani economies – whether those of nomading communities or those in various stages of the process of becoming sedentary. I have already discussed how the socio-cultural diversity of Roma (arising despite their common diasporic origin) is mainly determined by interactions with surrounding populations (cf. ⇦Roma: Peculiar [Ethnic] Group). This seemingly obvious fact had for a long time been an underexplored topic in Romani studies (cf. Lemon, 2000, p. 91; Okely, 1983, p. 197), and approaching Roma independently of their surrounding majorities contributed greatly to their exoticisation in popular and scholarly discourse (cf. Marushiakova & Popov, 2011, p. 61). But the interactional perspective on economic and cultural dependence pointed the attention towards important and long-ignored topics in Romani studies, including strategies of exploiting resources demarked by surrounding non-Romani populations (e.g. Okely, 1983, pp. 49–65; Pesarini, 2013, pp. 110–115; Piasere, 1987); the conscious, economically motivated cultivation of relationships with non-Roma (Fotta, 2015, pp. 204–207; e.g. Okely, 1983, pp. 62–63; Piasere, 1984, pp. 139–146; Solimene, 2015, pp. 114–115); and last but far from least, power relations in the economic exchange with non-Roma (Durst, 2015, pp. 53–55; C. Silverman, 2012, pp. 21–38; e.g. van de Port, 1999).

While a great body of literature was dedicated to the dependency of Roma on economic interaction with non-Roma, a substantial number of anthropological contributions have also pointed out that there is a strong tendency for Roma to be *independent* from the economic habits of non-Roma. Various studies have shown that Roma tend to resist "proletarianisation" and "superexploitation" (Fotta, 2018, pp. 87–90; e.g. Kaprow, 1982; Lucassen, 1998, pp. 140–143; Sway, 1984; Zatta & Piasere, 1990). Roma are described as inclined towards avoiding formalised subsistence (typically, wage-labour jobs), instead seeking alternative ways of making their living. There is great variety in such alternative economic activities; to name just a few: delivering special services for sedentary populations (music-making, fortune-telling, craftsmanship, etc.) (Ferrari, 2015; e.g. C. Silverman, 2012; Williams et al., 1982); exploitation of common natural resources (Ghosh, 2008; e.g. Horváth, 2005); making profit from surplus resources that are viewed as useless (such as scrap collection) (e.g. Okely, 1975; Solimene, 2015); trading special goods and articles (horses, distinctive handiwork, etc.) (Okely, 1979; e.g. Stewart, 1997b); usury and money-lending (Durst, 2015; Hrustič, 2015) etc.

Even though the variability of cultural practices related to Romani economies is immense, anthropological studies from all corners of the world have found common underlying features. They have noticed that Roma prefer income-

generating activities allowing self-employment and flexibility over fixed-time jobs (e.g. Okely, 1983, pp. 53–55); short-term and labour-intensive tasks over long-term commitments (e.g. Grill, 2015, pp. 100–103); holding a diversity of occupations over just one (e.g. Sway, 1984, p. 96) etc.[67] In some studies, these distinct strategies of independence from the working habits of non-Roma were found to have functions aside from just economic adaptation. Authors argue that independence from the economic behaviour of non-Roma is an essential Romani socio-cultural feature, playing a vital part in ethnic definition. In other words, making a living in their own, distinctively Romani way makes Roma proudly distinguishable from the herd-like economic behaviour of non-Roma. It is regarded as a form of socio-cultural *resistance* against 'the oppressors'. These tendencies to independence and resistance were found even in Romani societies where (greater or lesser) involvement in formalised economies has become a necessity – for instance, due to pressure from the political establishment, social integration policies, or for the sake of mere economic survival (see below). In these contexts, Roma practices of economic independence have moved into more symbolic, ritualised dimensions.

Stewart's ethnography on Vlach Roma in Hungary (Stewart, 1997b) represents the most notable contribution to this genre of thought and possibly "the most detailed analysis of [Romani] economy to date" (cf. Brazzabeni et al., 2018, p. 8). Due to the former socialist establishment in Hungary, the majority of Vlach Roma were forced to engage with waged work. Nevertheless, they created "an alternative 'economic' and social order beyond and outside the factory" in their horse-trading tradition (p. 241). In these markets, Roma sell the horses they once bought from non-Roma back to them, creating a profit out of nothing but Romani cleverness, out of simply their "Gypsy work" – all at the expense of "foolish non-Roma." These economic activities, Stewart argues, have a dubious economic value but an immense socio-cultural one. In this case, the Romani economy is less a means of economic adaptation and making a living but, more importantly, a vital socio-cultural feature, impacting community cohesion and helping to maintain a proud ethnic definition. This ethnic definition is – unlike the one marked from *outside* (cf. ⇦Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft) – self-imposed and formed in the direct,

[67] A coherent comparative analysis of a Romani economy was made by Okely in her classic ethnography on nomading English Gypsy Travellers. Based on comparison with a non-Romani wage-labour economy, she found 15 distinctive Romani economic traits: 1) Preference for self-employment; 2) Diversified occupations; 3) Labour-intensive occupations; 4) Low-specificity of occupations; 5) Involvement of the entire family in generating income; 6) Illegible line between work and leisure; 7) Self-imposed organisation of work; 8) Family-based training and education to pursue income-generating activities; 9) Individually negotiable prices and profits; 10) Short-term insecurity with unpredictable losses; 11) Long-term security based on independence from any particular employer and/or occupation; 12) Minimum of social security benefits; 13) Need for self-employment in old age; 14) Geographical mobility; and 15) Dependence on legal constrains to settle in particular locations (Okely, 1983, pp. 55–69). Some of those traits are related exclusively to the nomadic nature of English Gypsy Travellers (14, 15); some reflect the position of Gypsy Travellers in relation to UK social policy systems in the 1970–80s (12, 13); others represent a useful outline for Romani economies applicable – to greater or lesser extent – across various Romani communities in the world.

proud opposition to (and exclusion from) non-Roma. In other words, Romani informal economies are distinctive ways of performing Roma-ness.

Although the idea of Romani (actual or ritual) independence from the economic behaviour of non-Roma represents an interesting field of research, it is worth noting that these features of Romani culture also appear strongly in worldwide popular discourse – in the form of stereotypes. The stereotypical image of Roma who 'do not work' but just smartly use the resources of non-Roma emerge in oral lore (e.g. jokes), popular literature (e.g. newspaper caricatures), mass-media (e.g. film and TV comedies), etc. (e.g. Tötösy de Zepetnek & Vasvári, 2011, p. 298). Thus, from the perspective of other-imposed ethnic definitions, these narratives function as symbolic boundary markers with a harmful potential (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary). Moreover, in many contexts, these boundary markers seem to profoundly impact the construction of the pariahdom boundary while carrying minimal (or no) potential benefits – whether from the point of view of economic adaptation or other described socio-cultural functions (group cohesion, ethnic definition etc.). Thus, attempts at correcting ethnographic contributions dedicated to the Romani ideologies of independence have also emerged. These studies have pointed out that, in many socio-cultural contexts, Roma need to retreat from these supposed socio-cultural features and choose an appropriate subsistence strategy for the sake of mere economic survival. These studies argue that Romani economic behaviour depends on particular socio-economic modes, driven by pragmatism and opportunism rather than by ideologies of independence and resistance (that anthropologists sometimes tend to 'romanticise;' cf. Abu-Lughod, 1990). In some contexts, Roma employ the *only* available options – including the opportunities of the formal, non-Roma economy – to earn their living (Grill, 2015; Horváth, 2005; cf. Ladányi & Szelenyi, 2003).[68]

Romani Outsmarting

Within the discussion of economic independence – whether actual or symbolic/ritualised – there is another prominent socio-cultural feature: the supposed ability to deprive non-Roma of their resources *in a smart way*. This may manifest itself as *actual* deprivation (e.g. pick-pocketting and similar petty crimes), but frequently, it occurs in *symbolic* and *ritualised* forms, in which the amount of profit is less important than the amount of ingenuity, audacity and wit with which

[68] Stewart's classic ethnography (1997b) is another example where these corrections may apply. Although he thoroughly explored the social and cultural meaning behind the informal economy of horse markets, he did not dedicate enough attention to Roma relationships to the formal, non-Romani economy. In the concluding chapter of his ethnography, he stated: "So successful were [Roma] in masking [the importance of wage-labour work] while not actually in the factory that it was only on my return to England after a field trip of fifteen months that I realised that I had almost no information about what the Rom thought of 'work'. They simply did not talk about it when they were at home" (p. 241). Due to this imbalance, his ethnography does not escape the criticisms outlined above (e.g. Horváth, 2005, pp. 32–33).

Roma outsmart their non-Romani counterparts. In various ethnographic contributions, Romani outsmarting has been described as having an underlying anthropological sense, one which often overrides its economic meaning.

The idea of *outsmarting* has been shown to be based on a widespread Romani conviction that Roma are smarter than non-Roma – that they are skilfully disguised as weaker, poorer and more miserable but that, on the other hand, they are endowed with special skills with which they can benefit at the expense of non-Roma. Non-Roma are believed to be "fools and easy to take advantage of," and, therefore, they "deserve" to be occasionally deprived of their resources (Ferrari, 2015, p. 163; Zatta & Piasere, 1990, p. 171). In this respect, outsmarting may also be seen as a form of ethnic self-empowerment for a group that has suffered various forms of ethnic oppression (cf. ⇦The Pariahdom Boundary). Building a sense of opposition to the majority oppressors may contribute to group self-definition and possibly also enhance the belief that Roma can endure the oppression, being much smarter than the oppressors. A similar function of humour and wit as a response to oppression has been studied in the case of the Jewish ethnic minority, with whom Roma used to share their pariah-like status (e.g. Juni & Katz, 2001). The ability to outsmart non-Roma has also been recognised as a "highly valued personality trait" among Romani communities – making the individuals who possess it respected and admired (e.g. S. B. Gmelch, 1986, pp. 313–314). Importantly, though, this ability is desired only when the outsmarted person is non-Roma, while cases in which Roma outsmart other Roma are considered immoral (Stewart, 1997b, p. 164; cf. Zatta & Piasere, 1990, p. 169). Thus, the practice can be regarded as a culturally shared system of values (an 'ideology'; cf. Zatta & Piasere, 1990), contributing to group cohesion and establishing ethnic definition as opposition to (and *independence* from) 'foolish' non-Roma. The manners by which Roma outsmart non-Roma may be seen as a distinctive performance of Roma-ness.

This cultural feature has been studied in the context of various Romani economic practices, including music-making. Most notably, Stoichiţă studied the phenomenon of *ciorãnia* [an intelligent theft],[69] an appreciated personality feature which manifests itself in breaking the rules smartly and elegantly for one's own benefit. Stoichiţă shows that for Roma in Zece Prăjini (Romania), this socio-cultural feature is especially present in the local music-making, where it plays a significant role in the economic exchange with non-Roma. As Stoichiţă observes, "[*ciorãnia*] is typically involved in bargaining the price of a wedding performance, but also in [performing as little as possible] during the wedding itself, while getting

[69] Along with the Romani word *ciorãnia*, Stoichiţă uses the Romanian word *şmecheria*. English (and French) equivalents of these words appear later in his work; he came up with – *slyness* (for *ciorãnia*) and *cunning* (for *şmecheria*) (in French, *malice* and *ruse*) (Stoichiţă, 2008). It should be noted that, unlike the translated equivalents, *ciorãnia* contains a lot of underlying ethnographic meaning (Stoichiţă, 2006, pp. 192–197; cf. also Zatta & Piasere, 1990, p. 169). In Slovak Romani, similar words to *ciorãnia* also exist; particularly *čor*, *čoripen* (a theft), and *čorel* (to steal) (Cina, 2006, p. 135). In my ethnographic analysis, however, I will use the term *špekulanstvo*, which comes from the Slovak language and is used abundantly in the K&K context (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo").

the most money from the audience, and the most food and drinks from the patrons" (Stoichiţă, 2006, p. 193). On top of that, the *ciorãnia* is reflected in musical style; it is manifest, for instance, in the adding of intricacy to a melodic line or by stealing other musicians' ideas. In other words, the *ciorãnia* adds to the music a specific Romani quality, in contrast with the "simple," "childish," and "harsh" music style of non-Roma (cf. Ibid., 192). Stoichiţă's notion of *ciorãnia* is in alignment with the outlined observations on Romani outsmarting. *Ciorãnia* is not just about mere economic profit from 'intelligent thieving'; it is, more importantly, a proud manifestation of doing things in a distinctly Romani way. Thus, it can be seen as a vital part of how Romani musicians in Zece Prăjini construct their ethnic identity in opposition to non-Roma.

Like the Romani practice of economic independence described in the previous section, the practice of outsmarting should also be treated with caution. It represents a feature that has entered the popular discourse in the form of stereotypes, functioning as a symbolic marker of the pariahdom boundary. The stereotype that Roma like to avoid common rules and are even "genetically inclined to commit crimes" is possibly the most widely spread stereotype about them (e.g. Csepeli & Simon, 2004). These markers contribute to the stereotypical, romanticised pictures of "'eternal Roma' who in the end always outsmart the [non-Roma] and find a way of survival, or even success" (Ladányi & Szelenyi, 2003, p. 50). In some contexts, outsmarting represents an unmistakeable Romani socio-cultural feature, taking the form of economically motivated enrichment (actual or *ritualised*) at the expense of non-Roma, and/or a distinctive performance of ethnic identity. In other contexts, however, Roma retreat from this practice in an attempt to eradicate harmful symbolic boundary markers for the sake of seamless co-existence with non-Roma. This is also the case in K&K. While outsmarting is not a default mode for all Roma (especially for the 'black, ragged Roma'; cf. ⇦"Black–Ragged"), I will show that outsmarting is a special domain of K&K Romani musicians. I will discuss its role in the music-making economy and the socio-cultural meanings behind it in the ethnographic part of this chapter.

Romani Niches and Monopolies

Before closing this section on features of Romani economies, I will introduce two additional analytical terms that have appeared abundantly in diverse ethnographic contributions on Roma – the concept of Romani *niches* (Beissinger, 2001; Clark, 2002; Okely, 1983; Piasere, 1987) and, consequently, Romani *monopolies* (Beck, 1989, pp. 57–58; Hübschmannová, 1998, p. 241; e.g. C. Silverman, 1986, p. 55).

As the word niche itself is of a metaphoric origin, its conceptual use in various science disciplines is also somewhat metaphorical, and this relates to some inherent issues. The term niche is most notably used in biological ecology, denoting the relational position of species/populations in ecosystems, and in economics, where it refers to a small segment of the market featuring specialised

services and products. As *a metaphor derived from a metaphor*, it has also entered anthropological discourse, most notably in the form of two conceptual frameworks in two different subdisciplines. Firstly, it arose in the field of cultural ecology (figuratively built upon the biological ecology concept), in which it is a category describing how societies exploit and compete for natural resources (e.g. Love, 1977); and secondly, it featured in economic anthropology (built on ideas of economics), in which it points to peripheral economic segments outside of formal-economy systems (e.g. Guyer, 1997). By incorporating *both* ecological and economics approaches, the term niche understood as "human socio-ecological resource" (Berland 1979, 7) has also entered theories concerning the cultural practices of service nomads and, subsequently, Roma. By taking into account the nature of these groups' subsistence, the notion has been conceptualised narrowly, focusing mainly on the exchange between these groups and the surrounding population, and how these groups exploit their surpluses.

As mentioned, this analytical term contains some inherent problems, and this has been exposed in certain critical remarks in (mainly) recent scholarship. The term has been compared with its conceptualisation in disciplines that have used it for a longer period of time, revealing various mismatches. Indeed, discrepancies between biological and social-sciences conceptions account for the most typical examples of this criticism (cf. S. Silverman, 1976, p. 634). The term has also been criticised for certain limitations defined by its perspective. Brazzabeni, Cunha, and Fotta, for instance, noted that the concept of the niche takes the "demand side" as a starting point while not paying sufficient attention to the "supply side" (Brazzabeni et al., 2018, p. 8). Thus, the niche concept mainly points toward resources made available by the supply side, but the suppliers' contribution towards the construction of particular niches remains unexplored, leading to limited understanding of this department of economic practices. Despite these inherent limitations, I consider the concept of Romani niches useful for analysis of Romani economies in general and beneficial for my ethnographic analysis later in this chapter. I will briefly summarise how I conceptualise this term for my ethnographic analysis while attempting to overcome the criticisms just outlined.

Firstly, my conception of the term takes forward the angle of economics – i.e. the niche as a segment of a particular market – rather than that of cultural ecology. No matter how close the idea of 'species competing for resources within specific environmental conditions' may be to the economic practices of a particular group of people in a particular 'economic ecosystem', I do agree with the critics that this figurative translation may be misleading, as well as that it may raise controversies and discrepancies between scholarly and public discourse (cf. ⇦Romani [Un]Adaptibility). Secondly, I consider niches as constructed and maintained through a network of relations and mutual economic interdependence, determined by both the supply and demand sides. The functioning of niches is about exploiting available resources and supplying commodities that are to benefit from corresponding demands. Thus, I conceptualise niches as dedicated segments of markets through which people sustain their living with the specialised provision of services and goods rather than just resources available for exploitation.

Understanding both the supply and demand sides of niches, hence, is crucial. Thirdly, I understand the term niche conceptually and virtually rather than spatially. Niches may be, but do not have to be, linked to actual physical space. In this respect, I do not link my conception of the niche to the older concept of the 'peripatetic niche', which implicitly focuses on aspects of mobility in Romani economies and the appropriation of physical space (Abler, 1990; Pesarini, 2013; e.g. Salo, 1986b). In my ethnography, spatial aspects do not determine the Romani (music) economy in question, and, thus, they are not relevant.[70] My understanding of the niche extends instead to a conceptual space in which various agents' economic exchanges and interactions occur. Fourthly and finally, I regard niches as highly dynamic and ever-changing systems. Niches are dependent on their 'vacancy chains' (e.g. Schrover, van der Leun, & Quispel, 2007, p. 533); they emerge, transform and become extinct depending on both the supply side (e.g. 'those who play') and the demand side (e.g. 'those who pay') but also external factors (e.g. the macroeconomic condition of the surrounding region). From this perspective, it is not only that suppliers need to adapt, but also that the demand side is affected by what is available on the supply side. And both sides are dependent on surrounding conditions.

In some economies, niches may end up being exclusively dominated by one (ethnic) group, leading to a virtual (ethnic) monopoly. This is also the case for various Romani economies – notably their *music* economies. The performing of music – and especially performing for non-Roma – represents the most prominent ethnic "monopoly" in various socio-cultural contexts (Beissinger, 2001; Gelbart, 2010; Hübschmannová, 1998; C. Silverman, 1986). These musical monopolies concern various (and highly variable) musical genres and styles. Most iconic examples include the *flamenco* of Spanish *Gitanos*; the *gypsy jazz* of French *Manouche*; the *manele* of Romanian *lăutari*; and the *magyar nóta* [Hungarian song] of Hungarian *cigányok*. Roma have traditionally been regarded as interpreters of these genres and styles; they have often determined their traditional forms and, in some cases, they are believed to hold these musical monopolies to this day.

Hungarian national music is a notable example of a Romani music monopoly, and – due to the proximity of Hungary to the geographical and cultural borders of Klenovec and Kokava – it represents a highly relevant case for this ethnography, one which I will unpack in greater detail in the ethnographic part of this chapter (cf. ⇨"Playing traditionally"). On the one hand, this ethnic music monopoly has opened up an inexhaustible music-economic niche, which, up until today, has given jobs to a substantial number of Romani musicians in Hungary and its surrounding areas, including Slovakia. Roma are seen as exclusive 'preservers' (although sometimes also marked as 'destroyers') of Hungarian folklore (Kovalcsik, 2010, p. 58). On the other hand, the niche is maintained due to the demand from

[70] Although I do acknowledge that the appropriation of physical space ('construction of territories') can play a crucial role in other Romani economic practices in different socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Xoraxane Roma's collection of scrap metal in Rome; cf Solimene, 2015).

the non-Roma majority. Romani musicians have been expected to perform and maintain this tradition, and patrons have paid for it. This situation has put Romani musicians into a subordinate position. Non-Roma patrons tend to confirm their superiority over their Romani 'musical servants' by manifestation of power, frequently leading to Romani musicians being bossed around and humiliated – both physically and socially. Sárosi summarised this 'traditional easement' of Romani musicians as follows: "According to the traditional relationship which evolved between gentleman and gypsy [*sic*] musician, the gypsy musician not only carries out musician service but is also a musician-entertainer. He is something of a successor to the old court jester, to whom all sorts of things were permitted, but on whom it was also possible to play all sorts of jokes" (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, p. 33; Dobai & Hopkins, 2020, p. 7; cf. also Ibid., 200; Hooker, 2007, pp. 62–64; 1970, p. 199).

The phenomenon of Romani musical monopolies highlights a trade-off situation. While Romani musicians often need to play the role of subordinates and experience humiliation and servant-like positions, the monopoly status affords exclusive access to the exploitation of musical niches and, consequently, to financial and social prosperity. I will discuss this in the closing remarks of this chapter (cf. ⇨"Show must go on!"). It also assigns them a status of uniqueness. From the perspectives of audiences, Romani musicians are believed to be predestined to perform a particular genre/style better than any other musicians. In other words, musical monopolies are maintained by symbolic boundary markers which are of benefit to Romani musicians. Thus, to maintain their musical monopolies, Romani musicians tend to enact these markers through impression-management strategies. I will discuss this in detail in dedicated sections of the upcoming findings chapter (cf. ⇨Roma-ness in Music).

The multi-perspective discussion on Romani economies in the last five theoretical sections will be vital for the ethnographic analysis, starting from the section that follows. This will tackle the three central research questions introduced earlier:

1) How does Romani music-making in K&K function from the perspective of socio-economic adaptation, in which music is regarded as a commodity of exchange? 2) How dependent on non-Roma is the Romani music-making business in K&K, and how is it influenced by the Romani ideas of social/economic independence? 3) How are the musical niches and monopolies of K&K musicians constructed, how do they develop, and how do musicians exploit and maintain them?

“Tonight, we play this party for you!” – The Niche of Entertaining Performance

“The most important thing is to get people entertained [*Hlavné je zabaviť ľudí*],” primáš Janko Deme told me when we were in the van on our way to Donovaly. The space in the vehicle was quite tiny as we squeezed together with three other musicians and their instruments: Vlado, the singer (and the band manager); Barna, who – for a change – took his accordion; and Béla with his double bass. “You know, Donovaly is quite a special place,” Janko continued. “We go there often, like once a month or so. We have a great reputation there. One peculiar thing about it is that they don’t pay us much by default. I would even say that the honorarium is rather small – just a hundred euros for each of us. But we also take everything we earn on the top of that.”

Galileo is a four-star hotel in Donovaly – an inconspicuous tiny town with about 250 inhabitants in Central Slovakia. Its proximity to a well-known ski resort makes it a popular destination for Slovaks who are not tight on budget. “You see the brewery opposite?” Barna asked me when we were looking from the window of the luxuriously equipped hotel. “Imagine, it belongs to a minister. You see? It’s a different sort of people who hang around here.”[71] As soon as we had entered the hotel reception, all of the musicians were welcomed as old friends. Two informally dressed middle-aged men (presumably part of the hotel management) and the service staff at the bar knew the musicians by their first names, addressing them informally [*tykanie*]. They greeted them with enthusiastic hugs and wide smiles. I introduced myself as a researcher and filmmaker and asked for permission to film some live music videos this evening, which was granted to me as “no problem at all.”

Box #12 – Hotel Donovaly

This two-minute video cut shows some of the most notable moments from this event. The video features the Slovak folk song *Zuzu Zuzu Zuzulienka*, played several times during the evening.

thesis.nuska.me/box/12

The hotel bar is surrounded by a long hall (which is about to turn into a dance floor) and a separate room, from which clinking cutlery and serious-sounding conversation echo. There is no door in between these rooms. While the musicians unpack their instruments, Vlado talks to the owner and then approaches the musicians to share some freshly gained insights: “So guys, apparently there are some important people here tonight! There’s even someone from the General Prosecutor’s Office.” Barna notes in excitement: “Oh my! If we don’t earn money *here*, then we never will!” Soon after that, the band starts playing in the empty hall. They offer one set of around 30 minutes with almost no breaks in between songs. The double bass and the accordion play unplugged, and so do the vocals; only Janko’s fiddle is amplified with a little speaker. Nevertheless, the absence of amplifiers is not an obstacle, and soon a dense sound fills up the space. During the first round, though, nobody appears on the dance floor. From time to time, somebody leaves the room to go to the bathroom, greeting the musicians with a sympathetic smile, then returns to continue the

[71] Later, I found out that the brewery was actually built (and owned) by two former ministers of the Slovak government – Ján Počiatek (Minister of Finance [2006–10] and Transport [2012–16]) and Robert Kaliňák (Interior Minister in 2006–10 and 2012–18) (Nový čas, 2016). The name Donovaly also figured in the greatest political earthquake in the history of independent Slovakia: “the Donovaly case” is associated with journalist Ján Kuciak, who had been working on it before he was murdered in 2018 (cf. ⇦Footnote #14).

conversation in the other room. “The spot is bad!” Vlado grumbled while the musicians had a short break after the first set of songs. “People are not hooking up. We need to move towards the entrance of the other room. Let’s play some folk songs [*ľudovky*] that people know. And we need to play livelier [*živšie*]. We need to make them dance [*Musíme ľudí roztancovať*]!” For the second set, the band moves towards the entrance of the dining hall, luring people with famous Slovak folk tunes such as *Nepij, Jano, nepij vodu*; *Krčmárik maličký*; *Zuzu, Zuzu, Zuzulienka* and so on. It is Janko, the *primáš*, who sings. Meanwhile, Vlado observes the band from a distance, secretly giving the musicians critical feedback. “Come closer… Turn this way… That’s more like it!” It doesn’t take long before the first couples appear on the dance floor, soon followed by others. A few more songs and the room is filled with the sound of dancing shoes swiping the dance floor, laughter and clinking glasses.

The musicians keep on dividing their performance into about 30-minute sets during which they have practically no pauses. As there are three singers tonight – Janko, Barna and Vlado – they take turns, the singer defining the style and genre of each set. Janko focuses on Slovak folk songs, accompanied by both fiddle and Barna’s voice in parallel, while Barna’s set is focused more on ‘contemporary’ [*moderné*] songs, including well-known popular hits such as Humperdinck’s *Release Me*, Velázquez’s *Bésame Mucho* and Kosma’s *Autumn Leaves*. Vlado joins in during these sets at unpredictable moments. As he is the only singer who doesn’t also play an instrument, he uses his free time slots to chat with people (as other musicians comment, “Vlado is doing business [*robí biznis*]”). As soon as each set is over, they announce a short break with a clearly articulated promise that they’ll be back soon. During the break, they drink small doses of alcohol provided by the hotel for free (“You need to drink. Otherwise, you don’t feel the party. But you can’t drink a lot as you always need to be on top of the party. Whiskey works the best for me. Beer makes me sleepy,” Janko explained to me). While drinking, they discuss what is going to happen next on the stage. With increasing levels of alcohol in the dancers’ veins, the soundscape of the party changes into a muddy mix of loud conversation and cumbersome dance. People start ordering songs that they would like to accompany their dance or to sing along to. This is the moment the band has long been waiting for, and Vlado tactically pulls out of his wallet a 20-euro note for Janko to place between the fingerboard and the top plate of his fiddle. This sends a clear message to the audience: “You are welcome to order!” Vlado is active in his negotiator role and collects the tips for the songs from the party participants. With every new suggestion, Vlado points towards the collection of notes on Janko’s fiddle. Soon, the instrument is covered with colourful euro notes.

At about midnight, there are fewer people at the party, some of the participants perhaps having gone to their beds. The dance floor is empty, and nobody is singing. Vlado turns to one of the managers, saying that they may go at around 1 am (and not 2 am as previously negotiated) since the party seems to be over. Instead of an answer, the manager (also under the influence of alcohol) places the first 100-euro notes on Janko’s fiddle. This has an immediate effect, and the party gets a second wind. Those who stayed at the party are its leaders – loud singers and keen dancers (although both activities are performed less and less articulately). They surround the musicians very tightly, sometimes even hugging and touching them while playing. People keep on ordering songs from the band. The managers know the band’s repertoire, suggesting songs for which Barna is well-known back home. For another extra amount of money placed onto Janko’s fiddle, Barna performs the famous song by Queen *I Want to Break Free*. Then the Romani anthem *Gelem, Gelem* rings out, with loud “Heeej, Romalé” sung by the entire crowd. And Goran Bregović’s *Bubamara* is ordered and played at least three times. Each order fulfilled is followed by excited cheering, applause and more money for Janko’s violin. At 2 am, the musicians have another tactical break, counting all the money on the instrument altogether with a pre-negotiated honorarium. “325 euros. Not bad. If we try to earn another 75, it would mean 200 euros each. Shall we try that?” The other musicians (although wiping sweat from their red foreheads) say they are happy to try. Vlado turns his head to a party-participant who has

accidentally strayed to the table of musicians: "Hey – we'll play you some more if you give another 50 for the fiddle." He nods in drunken excitement and disappears. "No, he won't give anything, guys. Let's go home," Béla says, and the band, without any further discussions, packs their instruments and leaves the hotel at about 2:30 am. On the way back, as is tradition, we stop by at a petrol station. It provides a safe place to exchange the money and divide the takings, and to add the food and caffeine needed to survive the long trip back home. The musicians nap while Janko drives the van through the chilly night.

We arrive at Kokava at six in the morning. It is already daybreak when we finally leave the van in a deserted parking lot. Vlado heads home on foot. Barna and I slip into Janko's car as we continue together towards Klenovec, and Béla gets into his car. "Heading home to get some sleep?" I ask. "Yeah. Not sure about the sleep, though. I still have 60 kilometres to drive home. At noon, I am playing at a funeral with Karol, and in the evening, I have another gig in Banská Bystrica."

14–15th of February 2019, Donovaly

This long ethnographic excerpt introduces the musical niche which represents the main source of income for all Romani musicians in K&K: performances whose aim is to *entertain* people. In Slovak, there is an umbrella term for bands offering this type of performance – *zábavové kapely* (sing. *zábavová kapela*), which can be translated as 'entertaining bands'. The repertoire of these bands usually consists of covers of well-known popular songs, and they are hired on a contractual basis for a range of events, such as weddings, birthday parties, private *soirées* etc., to get paying clients *entertained* ("*Hlavné je zabaviť ľudí!*").[72] Similar *zábavové kapely* are also run by non-Roma in Slovakia (e.g. ⇨Box #26), although I have never come across a single one in the immediate vicinity (possibly because this music niche is completely dominated by Roma). Interestingly, I have never heard the term *zábavová kapela* used by any Romani musicians in K&K, presumably because *all* Romani bands from around there are essentially *zábavové*. Similarly, Romani musicians do not use an umbrella term for this type of entertaining performance; they simply say "We are going to play a birthday party" [*Ideme hrať narodky*], "to play a wedding [*hrať svadbu*], "to play an event" [*hrať akci*] and (the most popular one) "to play a party" [*hrať zábavu*]. The latter expression also appears in a popular song that every single Romani band I met had in their repertoire – *Dnes večer vám zábavu hráme*! [Tonight, we play this party for you]. This iconic song, known well by both Roma and non-Roma across Slovakia, explicitly unveils what many Romani musicians regard as the ultimate goal of their music performances: *zabaviť ľudí*, to get people *entertained*.

[72] The Slovak word *zábava* [a party] shares its root with the verb *zabávať sa* [to have fun] and also with the verb *zabávať* (*niekoho*) [to entertain (someone)]. Unlike the English verb "to entertain," though, the Slovak word *zabávať sa* exists in a continuous form – *baviť sa*, which is closer to what the verb "entertain" means in English, referring to a *continuous* action. *Zabaviť*, on the other hand, refers to a state where a person (audience etc.) has met the need to be entertained (i.e. are fulfilled with the entertainment; are [fully] entertained).

The entertaining performance represents the most fundamental niche of the Romani music economy in K&K. It is the main monetizable product, while all other activities related to the music business (e.g. music recordings and music videos) are only auxiliary means to increase the number of entertaining performance and/or to attract a more prestigious clientele. I saw this clearly in my activities with producing video material from Romani performances. When uploading the videos on YouTube, musicians always stressed the importance of people "who will call back." Practically all video materials that my research participants uploaded were accompanied by only one piece of information in the description: their telephone number, on which prospective clients were supposed to call. This seems to be common practice among Romani bands beyond K&K too. David Band's song *Kde si včera bol* [Where You Were Yesterday] – with over 13 million views since its upload in 2017, possibly the most popular Romani music video in Slovakia today – follows the very same pattern, with their telephone contact the *only* information in the video description (David Band, 2017).

While creating and delivering video content for musicians, I have also encountered another important tendency typical of Romani entertaining performance – a clear preference for attracting the attention of non-Romani clients over Roma. When Barnovci were choosing repertoire for prospective music videos (whose production I was helping with) in November 2018, Barna the father resolutely decided: "By no means are we recording a Gypsy song! Who's gonna call me then [to order gigs]? Gypsies!" When I was recording their performance on another occasion, Barna whispered to me from the stage: "Stop recording now! We're

Box #13 – Dnes večer vám zábavu hráme

The song has very simple lyrics, which is why it is often sung by the audience along with the band: "[: *Dnes večer vám zábavu hráme* :] / [: *všetci ľudia sa tu radujú* :] / *že vám hrajú chlapci* Sendreioví." Translated into English: "[: Tonight, we play this party for you :] / [: Everyone here feels a great joy :] / that Sendrei's guys are playing for you." The underlined word indicates the name of the band and changes depending on who (whose band or where it comes from) is playing at the party (sometimes, it is creatively distorted and/or substituted so that it fits into the rhythm of the song). The song was made famous by the well-known Slovak Romani band Kmeťoband, which is credited with the Slovak lyrics. The song came out in 2002 (on the album *Bubamara*, released by EMI), and since being uploaded on Kmeťoband's YouTube channel in 2012, it has received 6 million views. The melody, however, was taken from a Czechoslovak fairy-tale film Perinbaba (directed by Juraj Jakubisko, 1985), where the tune appeared for a short while at the very end of the film. Presumably, it was written by well-known Czech composer Petr Hapka (1944–2014) who is credited for the soundtrack to this film. The facts about the authorship, nevertheless, are little known and are not even indicated in the database of the OSA [Copyright Protection Association]. Most people consider this song a traditional 'Gypsy' song. The first video shows a performance by a notable Romani entertaining band Kmeťoband and the second features Barna Cibuľa with his accordion on the 21st of March 2019 in Hnúšťa.

thesis.nuska.me/box/13

gonna play some Gypsy songs." Romani music-making for entertainment represents a distinctive niche, one which is ethnicised from both sides: non-Roma tend to look for Romani musicians for entertainment while Roma prefer to perform for non-Roma (it is worth adding that I have never encountered a situation when a Romani band would employ a non-Romani musician, not even as a temporary stand-in). An ethnicised form of niche like this is strongly supported by widespread convictions (symbolic boundary markers) on the demand side of the market. Many non-Roma believe that Romani musicians are specially endowed to fulfil the task of 'getting people entertained' better than others. As a response, Romani musicians do their best to fulfil these expectations by the conscious application of distinctive *impression management* (cf. ⇨Impression Management in Romani (Music) Economies). The symbolic markers of Romani musical distinctiveness are the reasons why Romani bands represent a top choice for non-Roma organising weddings, birthday celebrations and parties more generally. They are the reasons behind the abundance of income-generating opportunities for all K&K Roma. The main motivation for Roma in K&K specialising in playing to non-Romani clients is not that non-Roma pay more than Roma, as may be the intuitive explanation. During fieldwork, I never encountered two different tariffs for Romani/non-Romani clients (with the particular exception of when family ties are involved). As my research participants explained to me, the reasons are different. "I haven't played a Gypsy wedding [*cigánskou svatbu*] for 15 years!" Vlado Sendrei told me in August 2019. "Gypsy weddings are crap. Gypsies are cheeky, giving orders like crazy and woe betide you if you don't play what they want you to." Barnovci think about it in similar terms. Barna's son Martin told me: "I much prefer to play for *whites*. You know, every Gypsy is a musician. Everyone understands music. They don't hesitate to give you orders, and as soon as something is just a

Box #14 – Barnovci

Barnovci – an abbreviated form of 'Barna's family' or, more probably, 'Barna's band' – is a band from Hnúšťa focusing on so-called 'modern music'. It consists of father Barna (a shortened form of the name Barnabáš) and his two sons: Barna (in this thesis referred to as 'Barna jr') and Martin. Father Barna is in his late 50s, a skilful player of the accordion, keyboard, and guitar, and one of the most recognised vocalists over a wide area – known and admired for singing anything from opera to the famous songs of Queen in their original keys. Barna originally came from Klenovec, but he had lived in Hnúšťa since he was in his 20s, and he raised his two sons there. These sons are now in their late 30s. Like their father, both are skilled vocalists and keyboardists. Barnovci have become a vital part of the Sendreiovci band. Their relationship to this band (or rather, this musical network; cf. ⇨Box #15 Sendreiovci) takes the form of something of 'a band within a band'. Barnovci are used to playing either on their own or as the core of the Sendreiovci, especially for the occasions for which Vladimir's patrons ask for a 'modern-music band' [*moderná kapela*]. The video introduces the Barnovci band with their most iconic song *I Want to Break Free*, performed on the 8th of February 2019. I have made many other videos for this band, mainly recordings of their live shows (cf. ⇨Updates on Music Videos; ⇨Updates on Films).

thesis.nuska.me/box/14

bit wrong, they immediately criticise you. You may also play for an hour nonstop, and when you finally take a break, a Gypsy guy comes to you saying you should play more. This never happens with *whites*." Criticism may (and more often than not does) turn into open conflict between Romani clients and Romani musicians. Young fiddle player Jožko from Klenovec, for instance, told me a story in which one out-of-tune note from his violin was followed by someone stabbing a knife into the table and yelling "Out of tune!" Perhaps it is the widespread conviction about Romani musical endowment that makes Roma performing for non-Roma so seamless but so difficult when it is Roma performing for other Roma. Apparently, enacted boundary markers and ethnic impression management do not help much when performed *inside* the group.

As a consequence of this tendency, Romani musicians in K&K have developed strategies to build a deep and long-term relationship with non-Romani clients. The ethnographic excerpt from the previous section represents quite a typical example of such a long-term relationship. Vladimir's musicians travel to Donovaly almost every month. The hotel management know them by name, they know their repertoire well, and, late in the night, they touch and hug them as if they were their old friends. To achieve these long-term bonds, musicians often stress the importance of well-played gigs and a good reputation under any circumstances, as one gig may easily result in another opportunity to perform for the same client again.

The musicians dedicate special attention to those non-Roma who are not tight on budget and/or have significant political influence. Musicians think of partnerships with this kind of non-Roma in almost strategic terms. For instance, when Matúš Vallo was running for the mayor of Bratislava in November 2018, Vlado travelled with a few musicians to a 'Concert for Better Bratislava' [*Koncert za lepšiu Bratislavu*], which took place one week before the elections as part of Vallo's campaign. They spent about three hours each way to perform only around three songs on the overcrowded SNP Square. When I asked Vlado whether it was worth the effort, he responded: "Vallo contributed something towards fuel, but he didn't offer any honorarium. So, I gave 50 euros from my pocket to each of my boys [the musicians]. But you know, this was an investment for the *future*." For Vlado (and many other musicians from K&K), this investment will likely return more opportunities to perform for rich and influential people. Having non-Roma such as these among their regular clients, thus, is also a question of prestige for Romani musicians. Among regular clients of K&K musicians, one can find business people, politicians, high-ranking civil servants and even those from the Slovak intelligence agency (I promised not to share any details about the latter). Vladimir Sendrei's band Sendreiovci, which is often mentioned across this thesis, has mastered this economic exchange with non-Roma to perfection.

For Sendreiovci, entertaining performance (overwhelmingly focused on non-Romani clients) has been the single most important source of income. Rather than a single band, Sendreiovci may be regarded as an extensive *network* of musicians. Although Sendreiovci often perform at festivals of 'Romani music' and/or 'World music', where they like to put their Roma-ness on display, it is the niche of entertaining performance for non-Roma that pays the musicians' bills. Vladimir, as a singer and the band's manager, can fulfil any wish that paying non-Romani clientele may express. For one client, he may 'deliver' a 'modern band' [*moderná kapela*], for which he likes to take along Barnovci from Hnúšťa – the recognised masters of digital keyboards (cf. ⇦Box #14 Barnovci). For another client, he may send a 'folk band' [*ľudová kapela*], which employs one of his approved *primáši* (e.g. Janko and Karol from Klenovec or Martin from Rimavská Sobota) accompanied by Slovak traditional folk instruments – double bass, *bráča* and cimbalom. Vladimir can shrink or expand the band according to the client's budget.

Interestingly, Sendreiovci can sometimes play at two (and even three!) venues at once. This is most commonly achieved by Vladimir following one gig and Janka another. As they are both bearers of the name Sendrei, the clients get what they have paid for – a Sendrei at the performance. In cases when Sendreiovci play three gigs at once, Vlado may start at one gig, stay for as long as the situation requires and then travel to another gig (sometimes a couple of hundred kilometres away). There, he appears as a long-awaited star and stays until the late morning. It is worth noting that Vladimir does not have a driving licence, so he always needs to hire someone to take care of logistics. This strategy for the band's maximisation of profit "works out" more often than not ("Last time it didn't work out. They noticed that I was not present, so they took 100 euros from my

Box #15 – Sendreiovci

The band Kokavakare Lavutára (from Romani – 'Kokava musicians'), also commonly known as Sendreiovci, was founded in 1997 as one of the activities of Kokava-based Romani activist Vladimir Sendrei (Cf. Box #4 – Vladimir Sendrei). Over the decades, the band has undergone many changes in its line-up, yet Vladimir and his wife Janka have remained core members. The band was originally established to accompany the Romani children's ensemble Romano luludi but soon expanded its scope into a vast array of activities. They have performed at various music festivals in Slovakia and abroad. The band is credited on the Hollywood soundtrack for the film Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows (dir. Guy Ritchie, 2011), recorded with Hans Zimmer. They have also participated in an EU project and performed in Romani settlements [*osady*] in Slovakia to preserve Romani folklore for the next generation. The video introduces the Sendreiovci band with the song *Dze se kuri* [Where Does the chimney smoke?]. Alongside Janka and Vlado, the video also features the Romani children's ensemble Romani luluďi (led by their daughter Janka) and many other musicians from the K&K musical network. It was filmed on the 15th of September 2021 in the location of Starý Kĺíž and is intended for online and TV distribution (cf. ⇨Reflection on Visual Methods; ⇨Updates on Music Videos).

thesis.nuska.me/box/15

honorarium," Vlado told me in October 2018). Some of Vladimir's tactics to perform are clearly influenced by the ideas of outsmarting – *špekulanstvo* – which I will cover in a dedicated section (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo").

In the extent and reach of their activities, Sendreiovci represent a largely unprecedented music project in the locality. The band is an immense fish in the relatively small pond of K&K and a true 'enterprise' for the production of entertaining performance. Most of the musicians involved in the Sendreiovci 'network' appreciated the collaboration with the band mostly for plentiful opportunities for paid gigs ("Vlado may not be the best singer, but he truly knows how to do business," I have heard often from the musicians). The other Romani bands in K&K work on similar principles of musicians' networks, and musicians tend to be members of several such networks. While bands have their core members (very often members of the same family), they also tend to employ other musicians when the core members are unavailable (typically, when they are performing more lucrative gigs elsewhere). This flexibility allows them to cover the demand for entertaining performance in the region and even beyond.

The nature of the entertaining performances typical for the musicians in K&K has one more interesting feature worth mentioning. The ultimate goal of "getting people entertained" seems to overshadow one type of musical emotion typically associated with Romani musicians elsewhere – the practice of 'making people cry' by performing music featuring bittersweet emotions (e.g. Bonini Baraldi, 2021; esp. 57–63). While this seems to be a firm part of Romani musicians' portfolios in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (in line with an almost stereotypical view of these cultural contexts), I have practically never encountered these types of emotions when touring with K&K musicians to perform their craft. It was not until defending this thesis in July 2022 that I realised this fact and started asking why. The economic principles described in this chapter provide the most convenient avenue for explanation: it may be reasonable to conclude that Romani musicians in K&K do not seek to mediate these emotions through music performance simply because there is no demand for them. But if we accept this premise, then there is a subsequent question that is perhaps even more interesting: why would this demand not exist among musicians' clients in K&K? Has this been traditionally so or has the situation altered due to socioeconomic changes in the region (cf. ⇦The "hladová dolina" of Klenovec and Kokava)? Does it have anything to do with musical commonalities typical *only* of this region (⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #2)? Is it related to how Slovaks in particular like to be entertained (unlike, for instance, Hungarians; ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #4)? And could it be that Romani musicians in K&K do not trade these types of emotions on the musical stage but rather save them for musical activities they share among themselves and their families in informal musical sessions (*bašávely*) (cf. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #4)? These questions would be worth exploring in a standalone research project putting the quest for these 'missing emotions' at the centre of the enquiry. For now, though, it is worth noting that the topic carries implications for later sections of this thesis. In the next chapter, where I provide detailed analysis of Roma-ness in Romani

professional music-making, I will dedicate significant attention to strategies by which Roma "make people dance" and "make people sing." Although someone knowledgeable of Romani practices from elsewhere might expect an equivalent section on how Roma "make people cry," tears do not have a significant place in the entertaining performance of Roma around K&K, so there is no such section.

Nowadays, this profitable niche of Romani entertaining performances lies entirely outside the system of the mainstream, accounted economy.[73] In these entertaining gigs, Romani musicians are practically always paid in cash. From the perspective of the Slovak legal system, this type of work should be performed under a registered trade certificate [*živnosť*], which would require the paying of taxes for the income generated, and other payments (e.g. licence payments to the *Slovak Performing and Mechanical Rights Society* [SOZA], which authorises the covering of the popular songs upon which Romani entertaining performance is entirely based). While I have often heard acknowledgement from Romani lumberjacks without trade certificates that they do their work 'illegally' [*načierno*] (cf. ⇦Informal Economies in the Control of Gádžovia), I have never encountered any similar admission from musicians in the K&K music business. Working without the necessary documentation seems to be the standard – both for musicians and their paying patrons. Musicians often combine the undeclared incomes from music-making with other forms of subsistence – sometimes social benefits (pensions, unemployment benefits), but also part-time and full-time jobs. Nowadays, it is not so exceptional to meet a musician who has a regular Monday-to-Friday, nine-to-five job and who spends weekends working on the musical stage (cf. ⇨"Show must go on!"). The performance fees are usually negotiated orally. This leaves a window of opportunity for Romani bands to earn money "on top" – whether by tailoring repertoire according to wishes of the audience as I described in the previous section (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!") or by employing other manipulative strategies of *špekulanstvo* (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo"). Today's profitable niche of entertaining performance has developed from former – 'traditional' – Romani musical niches in K&K, as I will explain in the upcoming section.

[73] During the era of socialism in Czechoslovakia, there were attempts to bring this grey segment of the musical economy – and not just the Romani parts of it – under control. For these reasons, specific 'agencies' [*agentúry*] were established to check on the artistic and (mainly) ideological level of music productions. These agencies employed musicians on a contractual basis. The musicians were paid according to a four-level qualification system, to which they were assigned according to an artistic assessment (i.e. talent tests). Depending on demand, musicians were sent to various places across the state, commonly including hotels, spa towns and local cultural halls, and there were also occasional trips abroad (cf. Andrš, 2019). In Slovakia, Slovkoncert was the most renowned agency. Barna from Hnúšťa remembers the time during which he was an employee of Slovkoncert as a happy life stage with a stable income and opportunity to travel through countries such as [East] Germany, Switzerland and France to perform his beloved *modern* music. In these tours, he was surrounded by both Romani and non-Romani musicians, allowing him to explore worlds beyond Romani music-making – something that proved an eye-opening experience ("There were two female singers! You hear that right! Two! And – you wouldn't believe – one of them played saxophone!").

“Playing traditionally” – ‘Traditional’ Romani Niches and Monopolies in K&K

> The things you’re talking about – ‘the classical traditions’ and stuff. That’s all fine. But I take it as something which is good for [folklore] festivals. At festivals, you can come and play classically [*klasickým spôsobom*], ‘authentically’ as it should be. There’s no problem with it. Whenever we perform here [in Klenovec] at the *Drôtova nóta* festival, where first prize is worth 300 euros, sure we play authentically, there is no problem, you see? [laugh]. That’s what it is about. You get what I’m saying? You play what people want. […] Folklore and everything – it’s all fine. But it doesn’t satiate me. You’ve got to play what you can get something out of.
>
> Interview with Janko ‘Gazda jr’ Oláh, 18th of May 2015, Klenovec

Praise for so-called “traditional music” as a lucrative source of income is something I have heard countless times in K&K. “This *modern* music, it doesn’t pay as much as we would wish. Traditional music [*tradičná hudba*], that’s quite a different story. Look, Karol [a *primáš* from Klenovec] charges 200 euros per gig. We – Barnovci – need to do three gigs to earn the same,” Martin from Hnúšťa told me once. “You know who gets the most deals of us all? Píďo [a *bráča* player from Klenovec]! They call his traditional band [*tradičnú kapelu*] all the time!” Vlado told me on another occasion. Píďo is another son of Gazda – ‘the Rom who lived like the *whites*’ – someone also well-known in the K&K musician community for his huge effort to preserve ‘traditional music’ in his family. A widely circulating story tells of how he punished his son (Gazda junior) in his teens when he attempted to break with ‘tradition’ by, along with the double bass, starting to play the bass guitar. To set an example, he broke the son’s bass guitar in half. “That’s true. I did break it. But you know what? My sons are grateful to me now. They know I was right. Traditional music does earn the most of all,” Gazda told me with a smile in 2015, emphasising that all his grandsons play ‘traditional music’ too.

‘Tradition’ is a tricky term. This analytical concept frequently reccurs in various work in anthropology and ethnomusicology “despite its inherent contradictions, doubtful empirical status, and ideological entanglements” (Coplan, 1993, p. 36). The situation with ‘tradition’ becomes even more doubtful, contradictory and tangled when this “classifying” term for scholars enters the native public discourse and becomes a “qualitative” term and a phenomenon *sui generis* (cf. Morgenstern, 2021). To answer the question “what *is* ‘traditional music’ in K&K,” it is worth looking at the ‘creative processes’ of inventing tradition (Morgenstern, 2021; esp. 13–14). Analysing these processes helps to untangle the mystery of ‘traditional music’ in K&K and also reveals how the ‘traditional’ niches and monopolies of K&K Romani musicians have been constructed and developed over time.

The first common association of the phrase ‘traditional music’ [*tradičná hudba*] for K&K inhabitants (both Roma and non-Roma) is with Slovak ‘folk’ and ‘folklore’ music. As both of these latter terms also inherently contain some conceptual

entanglements (not dissimilar to the concept of 'tradition'), it is worth briefly explaining them and, especially, focusing on the difference between them.

With the term 'folk music' [*ľudová hudba*], Slovaks denote a repertoire of orally transmitted songs [*ľudové piesne*; abbreviated to *ľudovky*]. Playing non-Romani folk music has been one of the most important musical niches for many generations of K&K Romani musicians. Even today, Romani entertaining bands need to have Slovak folk songs in their repertoire – whether they perform with line-ups of 'traditional' string instruments or with digital keyboards. Mastering the Slovak folk music repertoire carried key importance in the past when musicians were concerned with satisfying the needs of the surrounding population of *vrchári* – 'the peasants of the hills'.[74] With this repertoire, they accompanied various entertaining performances, such as weddings, family celebrations and outdoor folk dancing festivities (in this region known as *kolieska*; sing. *koliesko*) The phenomenon of Roma becoming the typical instrumental interpreters of folk – or *peasants*' – music is common in other European countries, such as Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro (e.g. Kovalcsik, 2003, p. 3).

The word 'folklore' [*folklór*], on the other hand, has quite a specific meaning in Slovakia, slightly differing from that in English. It is commonly understood to point to a formalised (and often professionalised) form of folk music.[75] Folklore has been shaped by the socio-political development of Slovakia and has contributed greatly to the nationalistic and ethnic self-determination of Slovaks (see below). Folklore activities have been carried out mainly in local folklore ensembles [*folklórne súbory*]. To this day, these ensembles play a vital role in the lives of many Slovak children and youths as a free-time, extra-curricular activity with an important social and educative element. Most of the municipalities proudly invest financial resources into their folklore ensembles to provide this 'wholesome' activity to their youngest citizens and to preserve their distinctive (and their very *own*) cultural legacy (their *rázovitosť*). Slovak folklore activities are also stimulated by systems of subsidies at the national level. For instance, in 2019, when I was doing my fieldwork, the Slovak government launched the programme 'Folklór – Duša Slovenska' [Folklore – the Soul of Slovakia], in which they generously doubled funds allocated for folklore activities (hence, some of my research participants were remarkably busy with writing grant applications). While the government allocated 3 million EUR, they received about a thousand applications requesting

[74] Cf. ⇦Footnote #9.

[75] According to some scholars (and also many Slovak folk-music enthusiasts), the formalisation and politicisation of Slovak folklore had over time reached such a level that it deviated from its original – folk – form; it is said the folklore has developed in *folklorism*. As a critical response to these tendencies, a new trend has emerged in Slovak folklore, recently attracting a sizable support: a movement for "authentic folklore." This movement is organised in so-called 'dance houses' [*tanečné domy*], and it advocates a return to the very roots of folk when it belonged to *people* and not any ideology. Feinberg has thoroughly explored this Slovak folklore movement (and its 'authenticity paradox') in his recent ethnography (Feinberg, 2018a, 2018b).

13 million EUR in total (Laššáková, 2019). In short, folklore has always played an important societal role in Slovakia, and folklore ensembles have represented a focal point for civic activities in many Slovak municipalities, especially those in the countryside.

The municipalities of Klenovec and Kokava are among those in which folklore ensembles have had an irreplaceable role for many generations. The first formalised folklore activities started in the 1920s in Klenovec and in the 1930s in Kokava (cf. Ambrózová, 2004, pp. 30–31). At the beginning of the 1970s, two folklore ensembles were established, and both function to this day: Kokavan in Kokava and Vepor in Klenovec (FS Kokavan, 2013; FS Vepor, n.d.).[76]

Box #16 – Vepor and Kokavan

Two photographs by Tibor Szabó show Romani musicians in the folklore ensembles Vepor and Kokavan. Vepor in 1974. From the left: Ján Oláh (Gazda) on clarinet, Ján Cibuľa (Jóno) on accordion, Ján Cibuľa as *primáš*, Vojtech Cibuľa (Béluška) on cimbalom, Gejza Cibuľa (Havriš) on double bass and Rudolf Radič (Čuvavo) on *bráča*. Kokavan in 1992. From the left: Ondrej Radič (Gombík) on double bass, Rudolf Radič (Čuvavo) on *bráča*, Vojtech Cibuľa (Béluška) on cimbalom, Ondrej Radič as *primáš*.

thesis.nuska.me/box/16

With the establishment of Kokavan and Vepor, an important musical niche for K&K Romani musicians has emerged: they have become performing members of associated folk bands [*ľudové hudby*]. They play in string bands, usually featuring fiddle (played by a *primáš*), *bráča*, double bass, and cimbalom. This folklore niche has been an exclusive ethnic monopoly for Roma in both Klenovec and Kokava; only rarely have I encountered memories of there being non-Romani members of these associated folk bands in the testimonies of locals.[77] Musicians from the folklore ensembles have been

[76] It is worth noting that, in 1969, another *Romani* folklore ensemble was established in Klenovec. The ensemble Upre Roma was founded by Mária Cibuľová and is believed to be the first Romani folklore ensemble in Czechoslovakia (*Chronicle of Klenovec* 1953–1983, n.d., pp. 387, 438, 447; *Chronicle of Klenovec* 1984–2009, n.d., pp. 587, 701). Mária, who died only in October 2021 (three days before her 90th birthday), was supposedly in charge of the ensemble's activities for 40 years. According to my Romani friends, the end of the Upre Roma ensemble had a bitter taste, being brought about by Mária's compromised mental health and strained family relationships. While I do not dive into this interesting story from the Romani musical soundscape in K&K, a historical study on this first Czechoslovak Romani ensemble would be a vital scholarly contribution. Perhaps, it would show Romani musical culture in K&K from a perspective remarkably different from that of the Romani professional musical craft upon which I focus (cf. ⇨" I Want to Break Free," ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #1).

[77] In fact, I have only heard of one stable non-Romani member of both bands – the schoolteacher Michal Jakub, who was a *primáš* of Vepor's folk band in the 1980s. He is remembered as leading the Romani folk band in a "authoritarian way," but as he knew how to read music, he supposedly had an "enriching influence" on Romani musicians. Other non-Romani members were stand-ins, necessary due to the notorious unreliability of folklore musicians (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo").

among the most respected Roma in the municipalities. Some have even become stars with fame reaching regional significance – they have appeared on radio shows to share the folklore music of their region with the rest of the country, and some have even featured in films and on TV.[78] The bands were conventionally known by the name of their *primáši*. In Klenovec, the best remembered folklore *primáš* to this day is Imrich 'Drôto' Oláh (1910–1970) (cf. ⇦Box #9 – Imrich Drôto Oláh), and in Kokava, the *primáš*'s craft was for generations associated with the Radič family – most notably the *primáš* Ondrej Radič (1925–2000) (cf. ⇦Box #11 – Radičovci).

Box #17 – Mária Cibuľová

Mária Cibuľová – the founder of the first ensemble Upre Roma – with her husband, the *primáš* Ján Cibuľa, in 1985 and 1986. Photographed by Claude and Marie-José Carret.

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Playing in folklore bands has been a regular job for musicians. They have always been paid for their participation – both for ensemble performances and rehearsals, and this practice remains intact. Romani musicians in Kokavan are employed by the cultural centre of the municipality and receive a regular salary. Vepor musicians are paid by the civic association OZ Rodon – the legal founder of the ensemble – by individual performance or rehearsal. In the realm of Slovak folklore ensembles, this is quite a special practice, as most of the work – including that of ensemble leaders – is usually carried out voluntarily, without wage entitlement. In one of our conversations, Vepor's leader Stanka Zvarová admitted that this practice is sometimes hard to explain to the non-Romani members of the Vepor ensemble. "For [Romani] musicians, it's always been like a job [...] Like their ancestors, the youngsters are now used to be getting money too. They wouldn't play for us if they were not getting paid." Regardless of the fees, Stanka mentioned that as far back as she remembers, there has always been a need to employ some pressure so that Romani musicians take their participation in the ensemble seriously: "It's always been so. When I was a young dancer in Vepor, I remember they needed to go to Dolinka just before the rehearsal and transport all the musicians here

Box #18 – Michal Jakub

The teacher Michal Jakub (furthest left) with Vepor Romani musicians from Klenovec; from the left: Vojtech Cibuľa (Béluška) on cimbalom, Gejza Radič (Hoba) on double bass, Ján Cibuľa on accordion and Ondrej Radič (Špuko) on *bráča*. Photo by Claude and Marie-José Carret, taken in 1985.

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[78] Especially musicians from Kokavan, who have featured in various TV and radio broadcasts dedicated to Slovak folklore (cf. Murin, 2008). Some of the musicians were also given chances to appear in pop-culture cinema. The famous Klenovec *primáš* Drôto, for instance, is in the popular Slovak comedy She Grazed Horses on Concrete [*Pásla koně na betoně*] (1982, dir. by Štefan Uher) – he can be seen (and heard) playing the fiddle in the 63rd minute of the film.

one by one on a motorbike. And someone needed to get draft beer so that the musician could start drinking as soon as they arrived." Similar problems with musicians' commitment to folklore ensembles is apparent these days too (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo").

An important and not-yet-mentioned piece of the 'traditional music' puzzle is its ethnic/national context, which has had an important effect on both folk and folklore music in K&K. Stanka Zvarová commented:

> To make their living, the [Romani] musicians needed to learn the 'peasants of the hills' repertoire [*vrchársky repertoár*], so they could play it at weddings. They also played at farmhouses outside the municipalities, like at Skorušina and Ráztočné. For this, they even built a portable cimbalom to be able to travel uphill. They were forced to play the peasants' melodies [*vrchovskú melódiu*] as, in Klenovec, there were only Slovaks, and there was a sort of anti-Hungarian resistance here. So, if they had played Hungarian songs, they wouldn't have been successful.
>
> Interview with Stanislava Zvarová, 9th of January 2019, Klenovec

Box #19 – Portable cimbalom

Vojtech Cibuľa (Béluška) with a portable cimbalom. On the right, the *primáš* Imrich Oláh (Drôto). Photographed by Tibor Szabó in 1964.

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The mention of Hungary in this interview excerpt is crucial for understanding other musical niches of K&K Roma and for untangling the phenomenon of so-called 'traditional music'. Whenever I have heard about Hungarian musical influence from folklore ensemble members, it has always been in a highly unflattering and undesired context. I was told, for instance: "Hungarian song is destroying Slovak song." "And when our [Romani] musicians drink at competitions, I need to tell them often after the performance: 'You played beautifully, but you *Hungarianised* us *again!* [Opäť *ste nás* zmaďarizovali!]'" or "They [Romani musicians] play Hungarian trills [*cifry*], and they think they are world champions!" As the members of folklore ensembles explained to me, Slovak *vrchárska* music is – by its nature – simple. Any kind of ornamentation (such as fast *cifry*) are considered markers of undesired "Hungarian influence."[79] Although Hungarian elements in Slovak folk and folklore music are mostly received negatively, Hungarian music has had a massive influence on how the 'traditional music' in K&K has formed and been performed.

[79] Although this is an interesting explanation offered by my Slovak (non-Romani) research participants, it is worth asking whether what Slovak folklore fans see as "Hungarian influence" is not actually a historical relict of *Romani* influence – particularly of how Romani bands performed in urban environments of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, the boundary between 'simple' and 'ornamented' music may not align primarily with the Hungary/Slovakia boundary but, rather, with the city/countryside boundary (cf. Sárosi, 1970, pp. 219, 230). This would certainly be an interesting enquiry for a historical-musicology study.

The region of K&K is geographically close to areas that have belonged to the historical territory of Hungary and, thus, Hungarians have represented a sizable portion of the region's inhabitants for centuries. This socio-cultural influence is notable up to the present. For instance, one can find bilingual signs in the county town of Rimavská Sobota, as about one-third of all its inhabitants are Hungarian-speaking Hungarians. Some of the villages in the county even have majority Hungarian populations, with schools using Hungarian as the main language of instruction (e.g. Gemerské Dechtáre, Gemerský Jablonec, Rimavská Seč, Konrádovce etc.). Despite this age-old co-existence of Slovaks and Hungarians in the region, their relationship has been highly problematic. In various works, the political relations between Slovaks and Hungarians in the borderland have been characterised with the word 'tension'. This tension has resulted from complex political developments in both countries, bringing to the fore core questions of territorial and ethnic/national integrity on both sides. This has lasted for centuries and, to a significant extent, continues to the present time (Hamberger, 2008; Hetényi, 2008; e.g. Maxwell, 2003). As a result, various cultural features of this region have played an instrumental role in Slovak cultural and ethnic self-definition. Local folk and folklore music is the most prominent example of cultural features employed in this fight (Feinberg, 2018a, esp. xi-xvi, 30–35; e.g. Krekovičová, 2000). In this particular region, folk and folklore music are distinctive markers of boundaries between Slovaks and Hungarians.

Yet, interestingly, Hungarian music has been a vital influence on the musical soundscape of K&K, despite these Slovak nationalistic tendencies – thanks to Romani musicians and the phenomenon of *magyar nóta* [Hungarian song]. *Magyar nóta* is not a synonym for Hungarian *folk* song; as Stewart summarised it laconically, it is "'Hungarian popular', *not* folk, song" (Stewart, 1989, p. 83; italics original). *Magyar nóta* are popular art songs (i.e. original compositions) created in 19th-century Hungary in the folk style of the day, celebrating the idealised image of the countryside.[80] As I partly outlined earlier (cf. ⇦Romani Niches and Monopolies), *magyar nóta* saw an almost exclusive ethnicised division in how it was created and performed. The lyrics of these songs were composed and sung by Hungarian non-Roma, but their instrumental interpretation (sometimes also their music composition) lay almost exclusively in the hands of Hungarian Romani musicians. In a sense, then, Hungarians outsourced virtuosity and craftmanship of their songs to Roma (Jurková, 2003a, p. 4; cf. Sárosi, 1970, p. 194). *Magyar nóta* had a significant role in politics, playing an important part in the Hungarian national revival in the 19th century. Thanks to the popularity of Romani string bands, *magyar nóta* was folklorised, becoming popular within the entire Austro-

[80] In Slovak expert discourse, the term *magyar nóta* is translated as *novouherská hudba*; Roma and non-Roma in K&K today commonly refer to it simply as *maďarská pesnička* or *maďarská hudba*, which makes it difficult to distinguish it from actual Hungarian *folk* music. In practice, in the 19th century, when *magyar nóta* was gaining popularity, there was no practical distinction between folk songs and popular songs, likely because they were all distributed orally (cf. Sárosi, 1978, p. 86). In fact, experts on *magyar nóta* do suspect that its extensive repertoire (20,000–30,000 songs) includes some original folk songs (cf. Kertész-Wilkinson, 1997, p. 106).

Hungarian empire, and later it spread further afield and found its place in almost all the major cities of Europe (Feinberg, 2018b, p. 11; Hooker, 2007, p. 17; e.g. Sárosi, 1970, pp. 151–196). *Magyar nóta* led to the emergence of another distinctive phenomenon that it is also important to raise in this analysis of K&K 'traditional music' – Romani *café music*.

The term café music [*kaviarenské hudby* (SK), *kávéházi cigányzene* (HU)] denotes a type of performance in which Romani string bands played in cafés and wine bars located in cities and bigger towns. To stimulate their businesses, restaurant facilities hired Romani musicians on a contractual basis for the entertainment of their guests. The popularity of café music started in the second half of the 19th century, mainly in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. It occurred as a result of the popularity of the *magyar nóta* style, which outlined the initial core repertoire (mainly represented by *csárdás* and *halgató*). Over time, the repertoire grew organically as other compositions and songs across various genres were incorporated into the 'café repertoire' [*kaviarenský repertoár*], including opera, polka, mazurka, waltz, tango, foxtrot and jazz. Thanks to this huge repertoire flexibility, musicians were able to tailor performances to the individual wishes of each audience member. Playing according to people's wishes – in Slovak called "playing to an [audience's] ear" [*hranie do uška*] – was the essential feature of café performances. This was admired and anticipated by the audience and it allowed Romani musicians to access a significant amount of extra income (Mann, 1999; e.g. Murin, 1995, p. 86).[81] Romani music soon became an inseparable part of the evening gatherings in cafés, and owners competed to see who could hire the best Romani musicians – they became the stars of their time. Individual musicians were known by name, and the most famous *primáši* toured cities and towns to satisfy the expectations of keen audiences. This fame went hand in hand with fair fees, and, overall, it led to the brand-new status (and habitus) of 'the Romani café musician' – the richest and the most respected of all Roma. Romani café music was a prosperous musical niche and, in fact, a distinctive ethnic monopoly for Roma living in this epoch.

All the musical niches of Roma discussed in this section – folk, folklore and café music – have played a prominent role in the Romani musical craft in K&K and, more often than not, they have been exploited not by various but *one and the same* musicians. This may not be obvious from the scholarly work on Slovak Romani musicians. Some of the literature suggests that there were two notable types of Romani musicians in Slovakia: firstly, town-based musicians [in Romani, *foroskere*

[81] This strategy is widely used among Romani musicians to this day. I partly described this in the opening ethnographic section of this chapter, the scene in which Sendrei's band tailored the repertoire to 'top up' their incomes from performing (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!") and I will talk about how Romani musicians commodify this skill in the next findings chapter (cf. ⇨"Making people sing!"). The same Romani strategy – 'playing to one's ear' or 'playing at one's table' – has been described elsewhere in other ethnographic contexts – for instance, in Hungary (e.g. Sárosi, 1978, pp. 238–253), Serbia (e.g. van de Port, 1999, pp. 295–296) and Romania (e.g. Bonini Baraldi, 2021, pp. 32–46).

lavutara] who made their living through café music; and, secondly, countryside-based musicians [*gavutno lavutara*] who entertained the surrounding population with folk/-lore music. While the former were high-status individuals ("a sort of Gypsy aristocracy"), the latter were considered less successful, but they nevertheless 'dreamt about' becoming the former (cf. also Bodorová & Pulišová, 2010, p. 57; Hübschmannová, 1998, p. 243). However, the case of K&K clearly shows that such a division was not so strict. Based on historical resources and the testimonies of the oldest K&K musicians, it is apparent that K&K Roma exploited *all* niches equally well. They knew how to entertain *vrchári* with folk music, but they also excelled in cafés and restaurants in Klenovec and Kokava with very different repertoire, a repertoire with which some of them occasionally travelled to more distant towns and cities, including European metropoles like Vienna, Prague and Budapest, possibly also Krakow and Kyiv (cf. Ambrózová, 2009, p. 228).[82] In short, in K&K, there have never been *either* folk(lore)- *or* café-oriented Romani musicians. Rather, there were musicians able to adapt and exploit any of these niches.

These niches in their typical form have gradually lost significance in the K&K Romani music business. In the case of café music, its gradual decline presumably started globally at the beginning of the 20th century due to cultural-technological innovations such as "radio, voiced film, salon orchestras, chess, libraries, […] due to which [Roma had] nobody to play to" (Mann, 1999, p. 169). In the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, another sharp decrease occurred in about the 1950s during (and *due to*) the advent of socialism. For ideological reasons, Romani musicians were required to take part in formalised employment, which had devastating effects on this musical niche (Ambrózová, 2009, p. 229; cf. also Hooker, 2015, pp. 125–131).[83] The final nail in the coffin for Romani café music in the K&K region was certainly the gradual socio-economic decline which turned the former small-town characters of Klenovec and Kokava into the *hladová dolina*. Simply put, café music could not be played as there were no cafés left (cf. ⇦The "hladová dolina" of Klenovec and Kokava). Nowadays, the glorious time of Romani café music is only reflected in the memories of the oldest musicians and in some songs and compositions, once incorporated into the café repertoire, which have remained popular in K&K – not least the famous jazz standard *Autumn Leaves*.

[82] Cf. ⇦Box #10 Miško Grbato Cibuľa.

[83] It is worth remembering the unconfirmed rumour about the death of the *primáš* Miško 'Grbato' Cibuľa from Klenovec who supposedly committed suicide due to this socialist policy coming into force in the 1950s (cf. ⇦Box #10 – Miško Grbato Cibuľa).

As for the other niches, folklore has also become less lucrative for most Romani musicians. In both Klenovec and Kokava, Romani musicians still hold the symbolic ethnic monopoly, but folklore can no longer provide daily bread as it once did. This is especially the case for the Vepor musicians, who do not receive regular salaries for this job (unlike in Kokavan) but are paid on a per-performance basis. The nominal fees for their participation cannot compete with the money they can earn at various entertaining performances outside this niche. *Primáš* Janko Deme told me once: "I've learned a lot from folklore, but I've also *lost* a lot. You do get 25–30 euros per performance, but you kill a whole day with it. Not to mention the rehearsals!" This is why musicians often cancel deals with the ensembles, favouring more lucrative opportunities (cf. ⇨"Špekulanstvo"). Moreover, in comparison to the other musical niches, folklore represents the most formalised and stylistically fixed musical niche in K&K, and many musicians do not derive musical satisfaction from this. I will return to this point in the closing section of the upcoming chapter (cf. ⇨"I Want to Break Free!"). Romani musicians' relationships to K&K folklore have always been *instrumental*, never sentimental. I remember the *primáš* Janko Deme showing me various medals, branded cups, plates and other materialised awards from all sorts of folklore competitions. His wife admitted that at one point, there were so many of them that she couldn't find enough space to store them. So, she started throwing them away. They both laughed at this story, and then Janko added: "As long as we made money!" [*Hlavne, že sme zarobili*!].

Box #20 – Listie padá

There is practically no Romani musician in K&K who does not know *Autumn Leaves* (*Les Feuilles Mortes*), composed in 1945 by Joseph Kosma. I have heard it in a number of versions played by both 'traditional' and 'modern' bands, sometimes with Slovak lyrics that almost everyone knows – quite a faithful translation of the English lyrics written by Johnny Mercer. Interestingly, everyone plays the song in D minor. I asked each musician where they know it from, and I received the same genre of answer: "I don't know – everyone knows it here." The first part of the video shows the song *Listie padá* performed on the 22nd of March 2019 in Klenovec by Zolo (on digital accordion) and his brother Jaro, who sings it with Slovak lyrics which are widely known around K&K. The second part of the video features an interpretation of the same song by Barna Cibuľa (on digital accordion) and his son Martin Cibuľa (on digital keyboard; not seen in the frame), performed on the 6th of March 2019 in Hnúšťa.

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Folk music, on the other hand, still does represent an important repertoire niche. Some K&K bands base their whole strategy on performing Slovak folk songs – like Karol, Píďo and the entire family of Gazda mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this section. Vladimir Sendrei often asks these very musicians to perform with Sendreiovci when clients prefer to have a 'folk' rather than a 'modern' band. Some of them perform regularly in so-called *koliby* (sing. *koliba*) – restaurants stylised with a Slovak *folk* look. A few musicians from the K&K musical network even hold employment contracts with these restaurants, making them the only *legal* music-

makers in the area (albeit that they are paid a minimal wage). Slovak folk music works as a great stimulator for Romani entertaining performance; it is a repertoire that most of their clients are keen to dance to and sing along with. Thus, most Romani bands employ sets of Slovak folk songs in their entertaining performances to stimulate the *flow* of the event (cf. ⇨"Making people dance!").

This brings us back to the question set out at the beginning of this section. Is there such a thing as 'traditional music'? For Romani musicians, there certainly is. The musicians who play traditional instruments (fiddle, *bráča*, double bass and cimbalom) are regarded as 'traditional musicians', performing in 'traditional bands'. They are those who get paid better nowadays, have more opportunities to perform and are treated with greater respect. Romani traditional musicians, nevertheless, re-enact and re-invent 'tradition' with every performance. This process of re-inventing depends very much on their audience. The opening interview excerpt in this section, with Janko Gazda, who re-enacted the 'authentic tradition' on the stage of a folklore festival (being attracted by a 300-euro prize), illustrates this issue well. Creating the 'authentic tradition' on the stage of a folklore festival is but a manifestation of the Romani skill for tailoring repertoire (and style) so that a particular group of people shows appreciation (and pays for it) (cf. ⇨"Making people sing!"). It is not dissimilar to the tailoring of repertoire for the inebriated rich non-Roma in the hotel in Donovaly. In this case, the targeted group consists of folklore festival juries and folklore fans, who, in fact, often contribute to scholarly discourse on Slovak folk/-lore and, hence, take part in re-inventing the 'tradition' from the position of intellectual authorities.

When not featured in folklore festivals, however, Romani 'traditional' music swiftly changes. For instance, we hear the infamous 'Hungarian trills'. While resented by Slovak folklore fans, the 'traditional' Romani musicians from K&K have adored Hungarian music for generations, and, nowadays, they listen to their favourite Hungarian *primáši* and learn from them on YouTube. But we also hear how these 'traditional bands' include in their repertoire jazz standards, film soundtracks and popular songs from any time up to those only recently released on Slovak radio. The repertoire of today's Romani 'traditional' musicians has grown from the musical niches that shaped the region's music culture in the past and is being changed and innovated in real time as it has always been.

To conclude, in the case of K&K Romani musicians, leaning towards 'tradition' does not mean reverting to the music of their ancestors (an idea that the concept of tradition may conventionally invoke), but rather to *music that sells*. If it is 'authentic music' that is monetizable – 'sure, they play authentically'. If not, they play something else. Nowadays, for instance, Gazda junior – who mentioned the importance of 'playing authentically' and whose father broke his bass guitar in response to a teenage attempt to break with 'tradition' – plays the bass guitar to an excellent standard. He does make his living with the double bass and so-called 'traditional' music, playing 'authentically' when needed. But he is also exploring other musical niches, something which can earn him a future. The K&K Romani music business case shows that the term 'tradition' can be misleading, despite

Roma themselves using it frequently. A famous quote (commonly *misattributed* to Gustav Mahler)[84] states: "Tradition is not to preserve the ashes but to pass on the flame." In the case of K&K musicians, the flame to pass on is not associated with any repertoire or style but with the *craft itself*. Their professional music-making has always been about exploiting profitable niches and searching for new ones that are even more profitable. The repertoire, styles and contexts of performance do change over time, but the principle has remained the same ever since the first Romani musicians arrived at Klenovec and Kokava: they make their living by playing what non-Roma want to listen to. This has been *traditionally* so.

"Špekulanstvo" – Outsmarting non-Roma in Music

> "When we were young, there was nothing to do, so we started stealing. And then, when there was no more to steal, we started making music."
>
> Barna Jr. (in jest), 23rd of March 2019, Klenovec

> We were preparing the exhibition of Claude and Marie-José Carret with the cooperation of two civic associations – the Klenovec-based OZ Rodon (run by Stanka and Jaro Zvarovy) and the Kokava-based OZ Láčho drom (run by Vladimir Sendrei). During our first planning meeting, both Stanka and Vladimir agreed that their organisations would cover the travel costs for the photographers (600 EUR) by splitting them in half. Later, it became clear that the fundraising efforts of Láčho drom for this project had not worked out as expected. Vladimir said he had only 150 EUR at his disposal. Stanka Zvarová came up with a solution: "Maybe our association could pay 450 euros for travel costs, and Sendreiovci could – *in turn* – do a concert after the preview for free." Vladimir Sendrei happily agreed to this offer. "So did the deal with Vladimir work out?" I asked Stanka on the day of the preview. "Well, sort of. Today, Vladimir told me that he meant that only he and Janka would perform for free. But as he needs to pay the other musicians, I need to squeeze my budget and find another 200 euros to pay them."
>
> The concert was part of a small folklore festival organised on the 20th anniversary of OZ Rodon's founding. The programme was so full that Sendreiovci finally had only a 10-minute time slot. With two keyboardists and one fiddle player, they performed a couple of popular Romani songs, exceeding their dedicated allotted time and getting the audience energised and excited. Stanka turned her head towards me when they finished performing, saying: "Now, how can I be mad with them when they played so well?" Meanwhile, Sendreiovci were leaving the outdoor stage and moving their instruments towards their cars, in which they were departing for other evening gigs, heading into various parts of the region. While getting into the cars, Vladimir – with a mischievous smile – said to the other musicians: "That was a good deal [*dobrý kšeft*]. A ten-minute performance for 350 EUR!"
>
> 20th of September 2019, Klenovec

I dedicated one of the theoretical sections of this chapter to the phenomenon of outsmarting non-Roma. While I pointed out that it is a cultural trait appearing in stereotypical narratives about non-Roma and, therefore, it represents a distinct

[84] Cf. Krieghofer 2017

boundary marker contributing to the demarcation of Roma through the pariahdom boundary, I also noted that, in some contexts, it is an appreciated personality trait that plays a vital part in Romani systems of value, ethnic identity construction, and – most relevantly – in informal Romani economies (cf. ⇦Romani Outsmarting). The phenomenon of outsmarting non-Roma is very present in K&K Romani local lore – it is told in the form of jokes,[85] comes up in everyday conversation among K&K Roma,[86] and is mentioned in old stories in which those who performed the greatest outsmarting manoeuvrers are celebrated as the greatest heroes.[87] To denote the phenomenon of outsmarting, I found several popular terms in use by both Roma and non-Roma in K&K – the Slovak words *špekulant* (the person); *špekulovať* (the action – verb); and *špekulanstvo* (the activity – noun).[88] The noun also exists in its female form (*špekulantka*).

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[85] Young musicians Dalibor, David and Miňo once told me a joke. "Once upon a time, God runs out of patience with humankind. He saddles a horse to come down to the Earth. When passing through Germany, he summons the whole nation, and with a loud and full voice, He announces: 'Germans! You have terribly disappointed me! If you ever do the same evil as Hitler did, I will press *this lever*, and the whole of Germany will fall to Hell!' All the German people are shocked and terrified. Everyone does their best to make good and behave better. Similarly, God visits every nation on the Earth. Finally, He visits the Gypsies. 'You, Gypsies [*cigáni*], you are the worst of all. You steal everything and make an incredible mess all around. If you go on like this, I will press *this lever*, and all Gypsies will go to Hell!' The Gypsies who hear this message are terrified, including Dežo. He runs home to tell his wife. When she hears what happened, she starts crying: 'Oh no, Dežo! What shall we do?' Dežo responds with a smile: 'No worries! Look! It's me who has *the lever* now!'"

[86] Marcela told me once: "Imagine this: once, Martin [the missionary] came up with a game for children to clean up litter in Dolinka. So, he offered some sort of biblical money for each piece of trash. For that money, kids could buy some stuff like balls and other toys. And guess what these little *špekulanti* did. They brought him trash that was already in the container. They must have sold him each piece of trash at least twice."

[87] An exemplary story is told about Lajo from Kokava. He once visited his non-Roma neighbour, asking him whether he could lend him some money. "What for?" asked the neighbour suspiciously. "I would like to buy a sheep and make some goulash. "Oh, that's a brilliant idea," the neighbour replied. "You know what? I'll lend you the money. You buy a sheep and then I'll buy the guts from you. That way, you'll save some money." They both happily agree and, in a few days, Lajo showed up with the promised guts. Shortly afterwards, the neighbour counted his own herd and realised that he was missing one sheep. He knocked on Lajo's door. "Do you know what happened, Lajo? Someone stole a sheep from me." "Oh, that's terrible. But you don't suspect me, do you? You remember – you lent me the money so that I could *buy my own sheep*." The story does not say whether and when the neighbour got to know that he ended up buying the guts of his *own* sheep that Lajo had stolen from him. I met Lajo in the early years of my fieldwork, around 2015. Our meetings were held in a very friendly atmosphere, yet I needed to stay alert not to become a victim of his extraordinary *špekulanstské* skills (sometimes quite unsuccessfully). Unfortunately, Lajo died soon afterwards. He used to be a respected guitarist who (before he succumbed to severe alcoholism in his last years of life) influenced many Romani guitarists from Kokava. He lives on in stories as a true *špekulant* – one who truly knew how to outsmart non-Roma.

[88] The word *špekulant* also has other meanings in Slovak. In the contemporary context, it is commonly related to economic activities of *speculation* (i.e. a person who *speculates*; e.g. *burzový špekulant* = stock market *speculator*). It also used to denote someone thoughtful, philosophical and wise (*špekulovať* is also used as a synonym of *rozmýšľať* = to reckon) (cf. Kačala, Pisárčiková, & Považaj, 2003; Pisárčiková, 2004).

Roma commonly use these words in K&K to express meanings to do with outsmarting someone, enriching oneself at the expense of others, and finding a smart way to avoid commonly respected rules. The words can be used in a full range of situations. In some contexts, it is a word of praise ("*Ty si ale špekulant*!" – "Look how smart you are") and admonition in jest ("*Už zase nechce ísť do školy, špekulant*!" – "He doesn't wanna go to school, what a *špekulant*"). In other contexts, especially in situations when a Rom is trying to outsmart another Rom and/or crosses the tolerated line of *špekulanstvo*, these words have a pejorative meaning ("*Daj si na neho pozor, je to špekulant*!" – "Beware of him, he is a *špekulant* [dangerous, selfish, unpredictable]). These terms are also commonly used by K&K non-Roma, quite often when referring to local Roma. The Romani music business is a field in which *špekulanstvo* in K&K has an extraordinary tradition. *Špekulanstvo* can be found in the humorous tricks and clever manipulation that are among the practical strategies for maximising profit from music-making; for instance, a fake 20-euro note on the fiddle lures the audience into ordering songs ("Karol always had a fake 20-euro note which he had on his violin. Once, we got into big trouble because there was a guy who wanted to get change – giving him a fifty and asking for this fake twenty in return").

Most notably, *špekulanstvo* is apparent in arranging music events and the negotiation of fees. Romani musicians from K&K are notorious among non-Roma for their unreliability when it comes to deals made in advance. An agreement is barely any guarantee they will come to perform, with the possibility that someone else could make a more lucrative offer. As I have noted, this tricky aspect of collaborating with Romani musicians means folklore ensembles are in the unfortunate position of having budgets that can hardly compete with what musicians earn at other music events. "Musicians are absolutely unreliable. If they get a deal [*kšeft*] for more money, they always cancel yours. That's not what I call reliability!" Jaro Zvara – the leader of Vepor – told me once. Sometimes, Romani musicians come up with excuses and lies to justify sudden cancellations ("Tell her you are gonna play at a funeral, she will understand"); sometimes they call event organisers to propose postponing the event by a day or a week. As this often happens at short notice, organisers have no choice but to agree ("It happens often – the organisers want *our* band, so they'd rather postpone than get another band"). Similar manipulation and unreliability would not be forgiven for a non-Romani *zábavové kapely*; a band operating in this way would get a terrible reputation and it is likely it would hardly ever be called again. In the case of Romani bands, however, non-Roma seem willing to take this risk. They approach it as a trade-off: unreliability and attempts at *špekulanstvo* balance against the appeal of genuine Romani performance. On both sides of this equation, symbolic boundary markers are in action, those playing a significant role in constructing the pariahdom boundary. Both relate to markers of otherness (and uniqueness) of Romani music performance often enacted through the impression management strategies of Romani musicians. In other words, Romani musicians performing *špekulanstvo* on

non-Roma are allowed this leeway as they are partly *welcomed* and partly *expected* to behave in this way.

Thus, music-making opens up quite a special opportunity for Romani musicians: they can enact their Roma-ness, including features of Roma-ness which would otherwise be received as harmful markers of the pariahdom boundary. Whether it is their notorious unreliability, manipulation concerning fees and ritualised stealing while playing songs upon request for non-Roma under the influence of alcohol, *špekulanstvo* is a desired aspect of Romani music-making, both in the eyes of Roma and non-Roma. This may also be one reason why all Romani bands from K&K prefer (and specialise in) performing for non-Roma. *Špekulanstvo* in music may be regarded as a feature driven by the ideology of Romani independence and as a smart way of exploiting non-Romani resources. Music-making is *a* (and possibly *the only*) tolerated way for Roma to outsmart non-Roma in the K&K context. Thus, music performance is a form of *ritualised* outsmarting, for which Roma cannot be punished.

This is illustrated by the ethnographic vignette from the beginning of this section. The scene took place at the exhibition preview, which I partially described in the previous chapter (cf. ⇦"We haven't eaten for a week!"). In this situation, Stanka Zvarová and her civic association were deprived of 350 EUR for a ten-minute performance. From the response of Vladimir, it was obvious that in his victory he counted both the honorarium negotiated on the spot (200 EUR) and the money he saved on the promised travel cost contribution of (150 EUR). Thus, the entire situation could not have been a result of an unwanted communication flaw. It was a conscious *špekulanstvo* attempt that ended successfully for Vladimir's band. At the same time, however, the customer tolerated it and accepted the counter-benefit – a genuine Romani performance ("Now, how can I be mad with them when they played so well?"). The musicians are satisfied – so is the audience and, hence, the patrons. It is a triple-win situation. In this context, it is worth recalling Sarosi's comment comparing Romani musicians to "old court jesters," who had it in their job description to be occasionally humiliated, yet "to whom all sorts of things were permitted" (Sárosi, 1978, p. 199).

While *špekulanstvo* towards non-Roma is a common part of the Romani music-making business, *špekulanstvo* among Romani compatriots is regarded as severe betrayal. A good example is a Klenovec-based musician who has monopolised playing at Romani funerals and who charges (in the opinions of Roma) exorbitant amounts (reportedly up to 450 EUR). "He's such a *špekulant*! Funerals are supposed to be played for families, not made into a business. He used to be so beloved. Now it's only a matter of time before someone slaps him in the face," I heard from his bandmate.[89] Similarly, I have encountered many stories – often within the network

[89] It is worth noting that although I leave the topic of music related to Romani funeral festivities to one side in this thesis due to space constraints, it does represent a fascinating topic for further research. This might uncover a lot of anthropological significance behind musical practices at funerals in general, just as it has in studies from elsewhere (Bonini Baraldi, 2015, e.g. 2021, pp. 99–

of Vladimir's musicians – in which manipulations with musicians' honoraria were taken as an act of double-crossing and ended up with individuals disconnecting from the network and even in long-term personal animosity between musicians. Non-transparent money machinations were also the reason why Kokavakare Lavutára briefly split up near the beginning of their career and, for a moment, ceased to exist (Ambrózová, 2004, p. 39). I have encountered similar stories in other informal-economy 'businesses' around K&K – most notably in K&K logging (cf. ⇦Informal Economies in the Control of Gádžovia) – in which *špekulanstvo* towards non-Roma was seen as a vital part of the economy and *špekulanstvo* towards other Roma was considered the deepest betrayal, leading even to ex-communication from family ties. Quite clearly, *špekulanstvo* performed on other Roma – moreover, within one 'business' – is taken quite differently from when it is performed on non-Roma.

To sum up, in the eyes of non-Roma, *špekulanstvo* is a symbolic marker for Roma. In most cases, this puts non-Roma on the alert not to become victims of notorious Romani *špekulanstvo*. On the musical stage, however, *špekulanstvo* is one of the key markers of Romani performance genuinity. Non-Roma tolerate it, taking it as a sign of a desired Romani authenticity. In the eyes of Romani musicians, it strengthens (ethnic) coherence inside the group. Music-making peppered with *špekulanstvo* is an exemplary case of 'Gypsy work' (cf. Stewart, 1997b, pp. 17–26). It is driven by the ideology of independence from the non-Romani formal economy and from *non-Roma* more generally. Romani *špekulanstvo* in music is not a mere strategy for increasing economic profit with smart tricks. It also contributes to a band's cohesion and – by extension – that of the entire (ethnic) group. It is a marker of proud ethnic definition in opposition to non-Roma – 'the foolish oppressors'. *Špekulanstvo* includes the experience of exploiting non-Roma resources in a smart way and possibly the only tolerated smart way. It is a ritualised and symbolic way of *performing Roma-ness*.

157), as well as specifically for K&K Romani musicians. For instance, the commodification of funeral performances that I just mentioned (not at all concerning only this one musician) seems to be an unprecedented phenomenon, certainly one that I have not encountered in the literature. It would be worth exploring its potential connection to the fragmented 'groupness' of K&K Roma (cf. ⇦"If you don't play here, you're not a human") and to the increasing pressure for socio-economic adaptation – the Red Queen effect (cf. ⇨"The Show Must Go On;" cf. also ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #1).

“The show must go on!” – Closing Remarks

> It was the 17th of August 2019, just a few days before I planned to go out on the last ethnographic follow-up of my 2019 PhD fieldwork, when Facebook gave me a shocking notification. Dušan Plaček, the Sendreis’ non-Roma friend from Kokava, posted the following message: “On the way to a wedding in Nové Zámky, the minibus of the band Kokavakere Lavutára – the Sendreiovci – crashed.” The post was accompanied by two terrifying pictures of their familiar grey van overturned on its side. Below the post, dozens of comments started appearing in real time asking about the health condition of members. There was a lot of questions but no answers. After a long while, I managed to connect with Vladimir’s son: “They were hit from the side by some 20-year-old guy. The car flew like 30 metres, but thank God, they are all alive. Mother [Janka] is in the hospital with concussion, and Father is there too as one of his ribs was broken. The others came home uninjured in another car. The minibus has been destroyed completely.” This was a big relief!
>
> I met the whole band a few days later in Kokava, at the Balvalfest festival. Janka was still hiding dark-coloured swelling on her face behind sunglasses. Vladimir, as usual, full of energy and optimism, told me the rest of the story from that day: “So they took us to the hospital. My rib hurt, so I just lay on the bed and felt quite weak. But after some while, they called me from the wedding, saying: ‘Mr Sendrei, we are sorry about what happened. But we are so sad there’s no music at the wedding. Do you think it can be sorted somehow?’ So, I called my musician friends in Nitra. Soon, I found three musicians available. After two hours in the hospital, they sent a car for me – one hundred kilometres! – and they gave me a lift to the wedding. There, I sang with a broken rib until 2 am!” “Wow, that’s unbelievable,” I replied (as I really could not believe it). “Did you at least have some rest after?” “Oh, no! The next day, I played another wedding. Straight from that wedding, we travelled to Bratislava as we were playing on Teleráno [a Slovak morning TV show] early in the morning.”
>
> 23rd of August 2019, Kokava nad Rimavicou

This chapter has provided a detailed look into the business of K&K Romani musicians from the perspective of economic exchange. In this closing section, I will review some of the main points arising from my ethnographic analysis. Then, I will close the chapter with a brief reflection on whether and to what extent Romani musicians have freedom of choice while performing their craft, and to what extent the Romani music economy is maintained through power structures analogous to the ones that have put Roma into their subordinate position in society.

The aim of this chapter has been to complement the two previous findings chapters: exploring the role of the music business alongside other economic strategies of adaptation to the conditions of the K&K *hladová dolina* (cf. ⇦The “hladová dolina” of Klenovec and Kokava) and depicting Romani musical craft as a distinctive response to the existence of the pariahdom boundary – allowing Roma to exist in a ‘tolerated territory’ accepted by non-Roma while *staying Roma* (cf. ⇦Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft). I have shown that the Romani music economy in K&K in many ways resembles Romani informal economies elsewhere. It is a distinctive socio-economic adaptation, a socio-cultural response to the conditions of the formal economy not offering sufficient work opportunities. Like in other Romani economies, music economic exchanges in K&K most commonly

occur between Roma (the musicians) and non-Roma (the audience). The economy functions due to the *interdependence* of non-Romani demand and Romani supply. Entertaining performance is nowadays the main commodity of this exchange; it represents the main economic niche for musicians to exploit. The existence of Romani musical craft appears to be motivated by the idea of economic independence from the working habits of non-Roma and cultural resistance more broadly. Musical craft provides opportunities to perform Roma-ness (i.e. to *be a Rom*) on the musical stage. Although I started this chapter with a note arguing that 'music-making is not just about money', the economic factors of K&K Romani music-making are indeed the single most significant factor determining how the craft is performed and maintained.

In many places in this chapter, I have described long parties during which Romani musicians are stars on musical stages. In just a couple of hours, they can earn more than what their Romani neighbours make in a week in a wage-labour job (that is, if they are lucky enough to have one). With humorous tricks involving smart manipulation around honoraria and fees (*špekulanstvo*), they can enrich themselves at the expense of 'foolish' non-Roma, which, apart from increasing the incomes from music-making, allows them to earn their money in a proud, Romani way. This is why Romani musicians from K&K are associated with a high – "aristocratic" – status (cf. ⇦"Romani aristocracy"). While the musical craft in many parts of the world is regarded as a 'damned craft', stereotypically associated with poverty and distress (e.g. Abbing, 2008), in K&K, it is almost the opposite. The musical craft is a preferred and well-explored path to relative prosperity, and a ladder of social mobility. Being a musician does not only mean being *richer* but also (and more importantly) a *better Rom*, a *better human* (cf. ⇦"You need to know how to adapt!").

Yet, the socio-economic niche of music within which Roma operate is clearly demarcated by the prevalent socio-economic position of Roma in Slovak society (and by extension, in other parts of the world). In the closing remarks of the previous chapter, I pointed to the double-edged position of the musical craft. I noted that the best adaptation to the condition of the pariahdom boundary is demarcated by its very construction. Romani musicians exploit the economic and social niche, which nevertheless has been narrowly defined by non-Roma. Thus, the power relations between non-Roma and Roma clearly define not only where Roma 'are allowed to be Roma' (cf. ⇦"You need to know how to adapt!") but also where (and *how*) they can make their living. I pointed out that making a living with music can be seen as a way of performing Roma-ness, but it has a pre-fabricated form, determined by non-Romani demand. The *primáš* Janko once told me: "At one event, I tried to play Romani songs to *vrchári*. But they cut me off. They didn't want to hear *my* songs. They wanted to hear *theirs*." To keep business going, Janko needed to adapt to demand. This socio-economic interdependence of the Romani business with non-Romani demands is so strong that one can almost speak of a symbolic and ritualised *musical serfdom*.

In various countries and at various points in history, we find abundant mentions of Roma having a musical servant-master relationship with surrounding non-Romani majorities; sometimes scholars have even gone as far as labelling Roma "musical slaves" to stress the peculiarity of this relationship (Beissinger, 2001; e.g. Garfias, 1981; M. Hughes, 2012). As I have already mentioned, the Romani settlement in K&K is shaped by this very phenomenon, and the ancestors of today's musicians were in a position not dissimilar to musical servants. From the little we know about the history of Roma in K&K, it seems that they were invited by Hungarian landlords during a time when Romani musicians in this part of Austria-Hungary were *literally* traded by these landlords like commodities for entertainment and profit (cf. Sárosi 1970, 38–40; cf. also ⇦"Romani aristocracy").

In this chapter, I have described how Romani musicians develop relationships with non-Romani patrons. These relationships are sometimes formalised, with both musicians and patrons maintaining – so to speak – a professional distance, playing roles they are supposed to play and delivering what is expected to be delivered. But I have also shown that more often than not, these relationships are less formalised and – due to long-term acquaintance and mutual convenience – they may even look like friendship (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you;" esp. the opening ethnographic excerpt). Yet, whether these relationships are more or less formalised (and indeed more or less *friendly*), one still finds relics of this former master-servant arrangement in occasions featuring contemporary Romani entertaining performances. I have noticed these relics especially when K&K musicians perform touring gigs for the richest and the most influential non-Roma (whether musicians' friends or not). I have also noticed that the musicians tend to avoid speaking about these topics. During these performances, musicians are often physically touched, but unlike stage-diving rock stars, I have never seen them initiate this contact. Not to lose their reputation, they need to play songs that they are ordered to play. Putting money onto the *primáš*'s violin, when non-Roma order songs on request, can be seen as confirming this master-servant position. While this is how musicians directly increase their profits from music-making (while also performing exemplary *špekulanstvo* towards non-Roma), to do so, they need to enact the role of servants. And to keep business going, they need to master this role and play it perfectly when needed. Their deference often appears as servility, but they seem to have no other choice (cf. Mann, 1999, p. 166).

Besides, this serfdom is also manifest on a symbolic level – in a lack of freedom of choice and a constant necessity to keep their music businesses going. Due to the socio-economic position of K&K Roma, to which they were driven by the context of the *hladová dolina* and the existence of the pariahdom boundary, there are very few (if any) dignified subsistence alternatives to music-making for K&K Roma. Vladimir's story from the opening vignette is an extreme example of this inseparable dependence on his own music business. When I met him at the Balvalfest 2019, it was less than one week on from the car accident. In the time between Teleráno and the beginning of the festival, his band managed to play at a wedding in Hungary and at the opening of the Rooted Musicians exhibition in

Kokava. After their performance on the festival stage (a shining and overflowing performance of proud Roma-ness), I noticed that Vlado had become extremely tired. I asked him whether he had had any holiday recently. "No, I haven't been on holiday in years!" It dawned me on that I have never heard the word 'holiday' from any musicians, presumably because being on holiday means significant cuts to family budgets, which many musicians cannot afford. This is one of many disadvantages of earning money outside the field of the formal economy, in which holiday is guaranteed by the Labour Code. While the informal economy may (and often does) provide greater time flexibility (related to economic and cultural independence from non-Roma), it can sometimes turn into the very opposite and make musicians slaves of their own businesses, as some of the K&K Romani musicians' cases clearly show.

In the theoretical part of this chapter, I discussed in depth how Romani informal economies are motivated by resistance to proletarianisation and driven by the ideas of Romani economic independence and cultural resistance. In this respect, Romani music-making in K&K represents quite a special case. Music-making allows the earning of money in a 'Romani way' – but only partially. On the one hand, musicians are self-employed; music gigs are short-term labour-intensive tasks, and they involve individually negotiable profits etc. (cf. ⇦Romani [In]Dependence). Roma on the musical stage, moreover, do not have to hide their Roma-ness, but they are welcome and expected to show it off. With clever manipulation and wit, musicians generate a relatively decent level of wealth 'out of thin air'. Thus, Romani music-making is an almost perfect example of so-called "Gypsy work" (Clark, 2002; Horváth, 2005; cf. Stewart, 1997b, pp. 17–26). On the other hand, however, very few musicians in K&K can make their living *exclusively* from performing music, and the vast majority need to have another means of subsistence. Some can get along with meagre social benefits, their partner's/children's incomes and occasional part-time jobs. But many Romani musicians I have met in K&K also hold regular jobs from Monday to Friday. These are mainly those I nicknamed in the previous findings chapter the 'Romani aristocracy' – that is, somewhat paradoxically, those with the highest incomes from music-making. From this 'normal' working life, they need to switch into the role of musician several times a week, as they play two or three (and sometimes even more!) gigs in any seven days. They often travel to distant locations and so spend a significant amount of their time in cars. If they are lucky, they are allowed to pass lazy Sunday afternoon with their families, and they are ready to jump back on the same fast-running train towards subsistence – often including a shift on Monday morning. After I had counted up what a week for these K&K Romani musicians involves, I was less surprised when I saw them exchanging painkillers just before stepping on stage and sweeping the audience away with energising – truly *Romani* – music performance.

From what I know about the history of the musical craft in K&K, this enormous background toil may have become magnified in recent years. At least some of the ancestors of today's K&K musicians made their living *exclusively* by making music. Today, it is barely possible. There might be a couple of reasons. Firstly, it can be

seen as a result of the distinctive socio-economic development of the region, to which I have dedicated a lot of attention in this thesis (cf. ⇦Ethnographic Description). With gradual socio-economic decline, the non-Romani demand for Romani musicians has decreased. The resources that non-Roma can dedicate to music are also lower. This has put pressure on musicians to gradually change their economic strategies (involving, for instance, engagement with fields of the formal economy). Secondly, the differences between two Romani lifestyle groups – musicians and the 'black ragged Gypsies' – have grown over the generations too. To maintain their 'aristocratic' status, today's Romani musicians need to work harder. Only their busy lives on musical stages, complemented with their nine-to-five jobs, allow them to disconnect from the markers 'black, ragged Gypsies', and, consequently, the harmful effects of the pariahdom boundary.

I consider these results of processes analogous to the 'Red Queen effect'. This theoretical model originated in evolutionary biology but found distinctive application in other disciplines, including economics (Derfus, Maggitti, Grimm, & Smith, 2008; cf. Van Valen, 1973). It takes its name from a passage of Lewis Carroll's novel *Through the Looking-Glass* in which the Red Queen explains to Alice the essence of Looking-Glass Land: "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place!" (Carroll, 1871; italics removed). In the locality in question, the *hladová dolina* of K&K demands an ever increasing tempo in Romani musicians' race for subsistence. They need to work *harder* than their ancestors to sustain their livelihood. They also need to put in more effort not to be seen as 'black, ragged Gypsies' and maintain their 'aristocratic' status in K&K. In short, they have to run faster to stay in the same place. The Red Queen effect has also proliferated in the musical content. This is especially apparent in the increasing music skill levels required of all Romani musicians. "It used to be enough that a Gypsy took a violin and squeaked something on it. But that's not enough today" or "You need to be a few steps ahead of *others*," I often heard from the youngest musicians and their parents. This was one of the main justifications for the youngest members of the K&K musical aristocracy to pursue formal music education (cf. ⇨"I Want to Break Free!"). I also remember the *primáš* Janko Deme evaluating historical recordings of Klenovec's best-remembered *primáš* Drôto: "It was good for that time. But it's not a big deal compared to today's standard." Janko Gazda evaluated the recordings in almost the same words, while adding: "Today, it's a different time. Indeed, there used be time when people said – 'Look, Gypsy! He must be a good musician!' This is long gone, though. As soon as you stop working on yourself, you can't push through."

To conclude, many K&K Romani musicians today experience a strange situation that can be described as an *aristocracy–servant paradox*: while they are recognised as Romani 'aristocracy' – high-status individuals who earn several times more than many of their non-musician Romani neighbours can dream of – they also often find themselves in the position of *servants*, fulfilling the musical wishes of their non-Romani patrons, often being humiliated by them during performances and enduring a precarious relationship with their own musical businesses. On Vladimir's 55th birthday in February 2019, I had an interesting

conversation with Janko Deme, one that encapsulates some of the main thoughts of this closing section and the entire chapter. I told him I would soon travel to Bratislava to have a joint concert with two friends (singer-songwriters) in a little café. As we talked, I revealed that I would travel there for free as there was no honorarium, not even a contribution towards the travel cost. "You know, Janko, I'm playing this gig for pleasure, for the fun of it," I admitted. "That's quite different from what we are doing here. We cannot afford to play for pleasure. If I were to play just for my pleasure [*pre radosť*] and for the fun of it [*pre zábavu*], I would definitely play differently," said Janko. "What would you play then?" I asked. "I would play simply, without trills. I would play like my ancestors. But I cannot play what I like. I need to play what *others* like," Janko concluded. That brings us back fullcircle to where this chapter began. It has become clear to me that, from time to time, Romani musicians need to sacrifice even their 'passion' and 'love' in music-making – as the show must go *on*.

Roma-ness in Music

Musical Impression Management among Romani Professionals

Introduction

Built on the previous insights from the chapters on Romani ethnicity and Romani economies in K&K, the central topic of this last substantive chapter is Roma-ness in music. The theoretical part will frame Roma-ness in relation to impression management theories, arguing that Roma-ness in music is a form of enactment of Romani ethnic specificity in the music context. The chapter will critically analyse the phenomenon of Romani strangeness (i.e. 'outsideness' and 'otherness'), pursuing the anthropological principles on which it operates. It will also attempt to deconstruct the phenomenon of Romani musical blood, suggesting that it is a construct emerging from uneven comparison of Romani and non-Romani musical concepts (particularly concepts of musical talent and musical enculturation) which can nevertheless be commodified by Romani musicians on stage. The second part of the chapter provides an ethnographic analysis of Roma-ness in the music of K&K Roma. It will focus on the most essential and universal components of Roma-ness cutting across all musical genres and styles found in K&K musical soundscapes. It will explore how Romani musicians "make people dance" by ensuring that their music is "lively" through distinctive techniques of managing 'flow'. It will uncover how Romani musicians "make people sing" with their skills of musical adaptability. The concluding section discusses the restrictive aspects of Roma-ness and contemporary tendencies in how Romani musicians cope with them. The main research questions for this chapter are as follows:

1) How is Roma-ness in music constructed in popular discourses – whether Romani or non-Romani? 2) What are the common features of Roma-ness from the perspective of the Romani musical stage across various genres and styles? 3) What is the role of Roma-ness in the K&K Romani musical economy, and what other consequences does it have in the everyday lives of musicians?

Essential Note #4: "Something Romani" – On the 'musician-ness' of Roma-ness and Romani Aesthetics

> It was a cold and rainy day in April 2020 – an unprecedented month during which almost the entire world stopped its movement. Earlier, in March, I had left the UK and flown to Prague on one of the last flights before the airspace over the whole of Europe was closed due to the first outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a small Prague apartment room, I made a makeshift desk at which I sat down, trying to restore my former writing routine. That day, I was re-engaging with fieldnotes that I had made more than a year ago. Although written in my own hand, they seemed to me *strangely distant*. Both the first pandemic lockdown and the extremely heavy rain had left the streets empty. The rain was hypnotising me and taking my attention away from the computer screen. At that moment, I heard someone singing. "Who - on earth – could be singing to the empty streets in such a heavy downpour?" I wondered. I couldn't distinguish any of the song's lyrics, yet I immediately knew that the person singing must have been *a Rom*. Given all these strange circumstances, for a moment, I thought I was hallucinating.
>
> I looked down from the window and saw two men wearing orange reflective vests and safety helmets. The men were working on repairing the gas line to our house. They belonged to a group of Slovak Romani workers I had met earlier (it is common for Slovak Roma to be hired as seasonal workers in the Czech Republic for construction work in one-off trips lasting several weeks). One of them was pushing a wheelbarrow, and the other was filling it with sand. He did so with fast shovel movements and, as soon as his colleague with the wheelbarrow left, he filled the street with his singing. Although I didn't recognise the song, it sounded *strangely familiar* to me. The song was slow, in a minor key. Soon, I recognised a couple of words in Romani. I heard familiar short grace notes preceding long, melancholic tones performed with extremely slow vibrato. I heard fluent vocal sliding, similar to that performed by Romani *primáši* with their bows when playing their sorrowful *halgató*. The man sang at the top of his lungs as if attempting to drown out the heavy rain. The song was warming, and the way he was singing it was moving and beautiful. "There's *something* so Romani about it!" I thought.
>
> April 2020, Prague

The critical analysis of Roma-ness in music accounts for a large portion of this chapter's subject matter. I will frame Roma-ness with reference to the theories introduced from economic anthropology and ethnicity performance, considering Roma-ness a specific enactment of Romani ethnic distinctiveness in the context of a musical performance. Yet, it is worth asking the question: might Roma-ness in music stem from *something* deeper? In this essential note, I will explain that the question of Roma-ness in music seems to relate closely to the (Romani) conception of *beauty*. I will tackle two important questions related to this issue: firstly, what is the relationship between Roma-ness and general musical aesthetics ('*musician-ness*'); and secondly, what is the relationship between Roma-ness performed on the musical stage and Romani *aesthetics*?

The question of beauty in music is at the heart of the ancient problem of aesthetics: whether and to what extent the category of beauty is subjective (i.e. based on an individual's judgement, existing "in the eye of the beholder"), objective (i.e. independent of the individual's judgement, as an "objective feature of beautiful things"); or intersubjective (i.e. existing in the form of "beauty-discourse" – that is, "objectively in our communication with each other, but [...] subjective in relation

to reality") (Gemtou, 2010, p. 13; O'Neill, Sandy, & Wootton, 2015, p. 156; cf. Sartwell, 2017). The discussions on this matter have been endless, and philosophers and aestheticians will likely never reach agreement (Sartwell, 2017; e.g. Tatarkiewicz, 1963). Anthropologists opened up these very aspects of beauty in the early days of their discipline when they turned their attention, firstly, towards aesthetic meanings behind particular cultural practices and, secondly, towards the ontological status of beauty in particular societies. In anthropology, thus, "the question of what is and is not considered beautiful becomes an ethnographic question, as does the very question of what it means to say something is 'beautiful'" (Webster, 2009, p. 142).

Due to the aesthetics-centred nature of ethnomusicology, these questions have become a starting point of special importance in this discipline. There has been a profound discussion on these issues, framed with reference to the concepts of 'ethnoaesthetics' (Coplan, 1988; e.g. Lah, 1980), 'social aesthetics' (Horlor, 2020; e.g. Tilakasiri, 2014), 'socially situated aesthetics' (e.g. Pearson, 2020) etc. One of the challenges for these emerging discussions remains to untangle the question of whether and to what extent beauty in music is subjective, objective or intersubjective. In other words, is the experience of beauty – expressed and/or induced by music – a subjective construct on a receiver's part, or are there some objective (or intersubjective) qualities of beauty embedded in the music itself? And could instrumental enactment of 'musical beauty' work without the pre-existing idea of beauty – whether on the audience's or performer's part?

This points to the first genre of criticism that may arise in relation to the conceptual basis of this findings chapter: is it appropriate to talk about Roma-ness in music and Romani musical impression management separately from musical aesthetics *in general*? In this chapter, I will discuss a variety of features that characterise practices of Romani musicians in K&K – such as the ability to put *life* into music and to make people *dance* and *sing*, arguing that they are part of the skilful impression management and purposeful enactment of Roma-ness on the musical stage. Nevertheless, in various guises, many of these features appear more generally in comparable music-making practices worldwide. Could these practices be considered more than an enactment of Roma-ness, simply an enactment of *musician-ness*? And so, are these attempts to uncover what is 'Romani' in Romani music-making more a matter of uncovering universal aesthetic and anthropological principles upon which equivalent types of musical performance operate?

I justify my endeavours in this chapter through anthropological analysis of Roma-ness in music as a *construct* of both Romani musicians and non-Romani audiences. In the sections that follow, I will thus attempt to uncover layers of Roma-ness in music. The analysis is based on ethnographic data, and its primary scope is, firstly, to reveal what Romani musicians in this context *themselves* find to be the Romani speciality in their music-making and, secondly, what non-Roma believe makes

Romani music-making special.[90] This is not to say that the practices of Roma are unconnected to music practices that other musicians from around the world employ to make music more *beautiful* and/or more *their own*.

The second genre of criticism concerns whether enactment of Roma-ness on the musical stage may stem from something *deeper* than just purposeful impression management. The opening vignette, taken from experiences outside my field, provides material for reflecting on this question. How could I tell that the man singing in the heavy rain was a Rom? After all, the pavement under reconstruction was by no means a musical stage on which such an *instrumental* performance of Roma-ness should be expected. The context of the unusual situation likely affected my judgement (because "who - on earth – would be singing to the empty streets in such a heavy downpour" but a Rom?). Later, I recognised some stylistic features of the singing (grace notes, slow vibrato and vocal sliding) which I knew well from the musical stages around K&K. In other words, I recognised Roma-ness in the song, and this led me to conclusions about the ethnic origin of the singer. Nevertheless, this raised a whole series of questions. How does the Roma-ness on the pavement under reconstruction differ from that I knew from the musical stages? How do their roles differ in Romani society and Romani culture more generally?

Some recent contributions to the philosophical-aesthetic discourse on the status of beauty point attention toward the social dimensions of beauty and its community-establishing potential through shared experiences (e.g. Nehamas, 2010). This seems to be highly relevant in the case of Slovak Roma, for whom music (and *ways* of performing music) represent part of their cultural and ethnic identity. When Anna Šárköziová, a Slovak-Romani musician from Bratislava, was asked about the difference between the music interpretation of Roma and non-Roma, she replied: "Non-Romani musicians drill a song using notes on a page while we can feel *something* here, near our hearts, *something* that is impossible to describe" (Horváthová, 1997, p. 117; italics mine). In K&K, I have often encountered mentions of the *something* Roma have in relation to music that non-Roma do not. It was something 'in the heart', 'flowing in the blood' and 'hard to describe'. The simplest definition (although somewhat tautological) is that it is something of their own that Romani people consider beautiful. Paraphrasing Geertz, Romani music(-making) and the equipment to grasp it seem to have been made in the same shop (Geertz, 1976, p. 1497). From this perspective, considering Roma-ness in music to

[90] In this context, it is worth remembering the feedback-loop effect (⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary) and the fact that Roma often derive facets of their identity (including the distinctiveness of their music-making) from opposition to *non-Roma*. The category of 'non-Roma' becomes peculiar to engage with from an analytical perspective. For instance, the Basongye, Venda and Khalifas musicians mentioned in this chapter are also non-Roma according to a literal interpretation of the term, but they do not seem to take part in the processes defining Roma-ness in music, as I discuss them in this chapter. Thus, it should be acknowledged that 'non-Roma-ness' is itself a construct (mainly defined on the Roma side) and that it plays an important role in the construction of Roma-ness. I will return to this point later in this chapter (⇨Romani 'Strangeness').

be only a product of ethnic impression management seems essentially reductive. It needs to be acknowledged that Roma-ness also represents an intersubjective quality in music, one that is significant in forming how Romani music is performed and how it is perceived – whether by Roma or non-Roma. Also, there must be a connection between Romani aesthetics and Roma-ness performed on a musical stage.

The main contribution of this last findings chapter is to bridge between theories of Romani ethnicity and Romani economy, and to place an innovative focus on the impression management part of Roma-ness and its specific role in the K&K music business and the ethnicity performance of K&K Roma. This focus relates to my initial decision to delimit my research to the K&K Romani musical craft rather than, more broadly, to K&K 'Romani music' (cf. also ⇦From 'Romani Music' to Romani Musical Craft). Nevertheless, the reader should keep in mind that, firstly, there is inevitably a connection between Roma-ness (and the relevant musical practices observed) and general musical aesthetics ('musician-ness'); and, secondly, that Roma-ness on the musical stage relates to what we may call Romani aesthetics or Romani conceptions of beauty. Although this chapter does not stress these connections at every turn, it is important to acknowledge that they too deserve systematic scholarly attention and represent a substantial topic for further research (cf. also. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #7). Hence, while this chapter will discuss in depth how Roma-ness is enacted (and traded) by Romani professional musicians on stage, it should not be read as denying that Roma-ness actually stems from *something* deeper.

Impression Management in Romani (Music) Economies

In the first findings chapter, I described in detail the role of ethnicity in the K&K musical craft. I pointed out that Roma tend to experience harmful effects from their ethnic demarcation. For this reason, they often *under-communicate* signs of their ethnic difference (ethnic boundary markers), which typically means leaving aside individual Roma-ness, acquiring habits of the non-Romani majority and disconnecting from troublesome individuals of the same (ethnic) group (cf. ⇦Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft). Yet, I also pointed out that, in other contexts, it is convenient for Roma to enact specific ethnic markers and even to *over-communicate* them, putting them proudly on display. This has a specific role in the context of Romani informal economies, in which Roma tend to "trade" their stereotypes to non-Roma as a way of selling their goods and services (cf. Okely, 1979). In the literature, such enactments of Romani ethnic identity were framed in social-interaction theories of Erving Goffman (e.g. Goffman, 1956, see especially Ch. VI) and considered a specific sort of *impression management* (cf. especially C.

Silverman, 1982). This approach, which sees Romani ethnic identity as a distinctive performance, has received significant attention in Romani studies.[91]

Indeed, there is a growing body of literature on Romani impression management in Romani economies. Examples have been observed in various Romani occupations at many ethnographic sites. Romani impression-based economic activities range from selling (distinct) handiwork, to trading (special) goods and performing (specific) craftsmanship (e.g. Okely, 2010; Stewart, 1997b; Wiener, 1909). Possibly the most iconic example of such impression-based occupations (and probably also the top cross-cultural stereotype surrounding Romani professions) is fortune-telling. It has been studied in the USA (C. Silverman, 1982; Sway, 1984), the UK (Okely, 1983), Australia (Lee, 1997), Russia (Lemon, 2000), France (Williams et al., 1982), Brazil (Ferrari, 2015) and so forth. For this craft – most commonly performed by Romani women – ethnic impression management is found to be a vital component. Romani fortune-telling stands and falls on a skilful performance of ethnic and cultural otherness. Fortune-tellers intentionally enact their otherness to fulfil customers' (i.e. non-Roma) expectations about Roma – 'the others'. Enactment of Romani ethnic boundary markers in this performance is preconditioned by the existence of symbolic boundary markers; i.e. ideas shared among non-Roma about Roma; constructed and enforced by political histories, racial ideologies, myths, fantasies, cultural stereotypes and so forth (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary). Thanks to this skilful enactment of otherness, the prophecies of Romani fortune-tellers are believed to be received from people *especially* endowed to perform this craft.

Romani music-making represents another occupation for which techniques of ethnic impression management have been found crucial (plus, it probably shares the number one spot for stereotypes of a 'Romani occupation'). Analogous to fortune-telling, it is based to a significant degree on a set of impression management techniques by which Roma enact symbolic boundary markers of their ethnic difference and trade them to non-Roma. One of the main motivations (yet not the sole one; cf. ⇦Romani [In]Dependence) for employing ethnic impression management strategies is stimulating cash flow in Romani music economies. As van de Port summarised it, the "'Gypsyness' of Gypsy music is a construct on the perceivers' part, but which is elaborated and commodified by Gypsy musicians" (van de Port, 1999, p. 304).

In the previous chapter (Ch. ⇦Music-Making as Making a Living), I described the economic principles of ethnic niches and monopolies in Romani music. The phenomenon that a certain (ethnic) group monopolises a particular music genre

[91] It is worth noting that this well-accepted approach has been exposed to criticism for its reductionism. For instance, Theodosiou has pointed out that seeing enactment of Romani ethnic identity *a priori* as "strategic" renders "the contextual specific [sic], negotiable, and relational character of [Romani ethnic] identity" overlooked (Theodosiou, 2010). I unpacked the complexity of Romani ethnic identity performance in the second findings chapter of this thesis (cf. ⇦Romani Ethnicity and the Musical Craft).

(also style/rhythm/dance steps, etc.) is quite common in music. Connections between particular groups and particular genres of music can be seen as distinctive boundary markers of ethnic identity (and also other group *identities*, e.g. national, sub-cultural, etc.). These genres' appropriations play a role in groups' self-determination. They may be seen as one of the strongest forces maintaining the diversity of the global musical landscape ("This is *our* music, and no one else will ever play like *we* do!"). In this respect, the Romani case stands out in one aspect: Roma are regarded as interpreters of *various* musical genres and styles in *various* parts of the world. In the previous chapter, I mentioned the most prominent Romani musical niches/monopolies: the *flamenco* of the Spanish *Gitanos*; the *gypsy jazz* of the French *Manouche*; the *manele* of the Romanian *lăutari*; and the *magyar nóta* of the Hungarian *cigányok*. In the ethnographic analysis, I showed that, in the K&K case, there were at least two distinctive traditional Romani music monopolies – folklore and café music (cf. ⇦Romani Niches and Monopolies; ⇦"Playing traditionally"). As there is little (if *anything*) that makes these genres and styles related one to another from a musicological perspective, it is worth asking whether there may be other aspects that might explain the prominent position of Roma in the interpretation of various genres. Perhaps there are some *anthropological* principles, shared across various Romani communities, which make Roma ideal candidates to become typical (and sometimes exclusive) interpreters of these musical genres and styles.

The two following sections aim to unearth these principles. I will show that musical impression management techniques are based on pre-existing symbolic markers of Romani ethnic identity, which Romani musicians enact and trade to non-Roma. I have noticed two main types of marker: firstly, the notion of Romani 'strangeness', and secondly, ideas about the Romani natural propensity for music – that is, their 'musical blood'.

Romani 'Strangeness'

The first notable type of Romani musical distinctiveness relates to a phenomenon that I – based mainly on Simmel's and Nettl's ideas – summarise under the umbrella term of Romani '*strangeness*'. Across various parts of the world, Roma are widely perceived as "strange" people in the two major meanings of this word. Firstly, they are considered strange as foreigners and outsiders. Although Romani coexistence with various non-Romani populations has lasted for generations (and more often for centuries), almost nowhere have they become a part of these populations. Instead, Roma have lived on the margins of societies, often in segregated communities demarked by the invisible fences of the pariahdom boundary. In the literature, Roma are referred to as, for instance, "internal others," "internal outsiders," "familiar strangers," "strangers within," "others from within," "quintessential others" etc. (cf. McGarry, 2017, p. 25; Pettan, 2001; Rieder, 2012; C. Silverman, 2017, p. 521; Sway, 1988; van de Port, 1999). In other words, although Roma have lived 'just around the corner', they have remained '*strangers* to us'.

Secondly, due to the various markers of their ethnic difference, they have also been perceived as strange in the sense of *unusual* and *weird*. They are people of different skin tone, speaking a weird-sounding language and, especially, being of unknown origin and employing mysterious ways of sustaining their living (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary). In other words, they have never been fully accepted by surrounding majorities as they have 'stood out *strangely*'.

Importantly, however, Roma have also been "strangers" in the Simmelian understanding of the word. Paraphrasing Simmel's famous essay, Roma were not people who come today and are gone tomorrow but rather those who come today and *stay* tomorrow (cf. Simmel, 1908, p. 685).[92] Their strangeness has been manifest in relational ties with those for whom they are strangers (for the purposes of this chapter, I will mark them as 'non-strangers'). Although Romani strangers have not been attached to social systems, they have certainly been members in both spatial and *social* terms. This is seen, for instance, in Romani economic activity, where Roma tend to create niches in which "other members [of a society] are either unable or unwilling to participate" (Karakayali 2006, 315; cf. also ⇦Phenomenon of Romani Economies). Yet, to 'non-strangers', strangers are not useful only for outsourcing unpopular work. The relation to strangers is used as a point of reference for the *self-determination* of 'non-strangers'. In other words, 'non-strangers' need strangers so that they can come to know *who they are* by learning who they are *not*. As Napier summarised it, "[s]trangers […] are enough like us, and only enough unlike us, to be heuristically useful" (Napier, 1992, p. 140). Such an ontological relationship between strangers and 'non-strangers' has been found to have a special role in the world of music. A musical performance in which strangers perform music for 'non-strangers' can be seen as a ritualised way of defining and re-enforcing the identity of 'non-strangers'. And this works only when strangers bring their perspective of outsiders and enact their strangeness in these musical performances.

A pioneering ethnomusicological analysis of musicians' strangeness and its significance comes from Merriam, who analysed the "social deviance" of Basongye musicians. He found their deviance "institutionalised" and "highly functional" in the context of surrounding society. In his words: "[t]hrough the role […] the musician escapes what society requires of other men; he pays for his escape by doing what he says he wants to do, i.e., making music, but under conditions which constantly remind him of his low status in society" (Merriam, 1979, p. 23). Hence, their social deviance, by which they identify with low societal status, is the enactment of the 'strangeness' with which they are differentiated from others. The idea to look at the role of musical strangers was later picked up by Nettl in his

[92] For Simmel, the concept of *the stranger* took its place among five social types (along with 'the poor', 'the miser/spendthrift', 'the adventurer' and 'the nobility'), by which he classified various individuals in a society according to their mutual relations (Simmel & Levine, 2011, pp. 141–214). The notion of the stranger first occurred in Simmel's introduction to a chapter on the sociology of space in one of his extensive volumes of work (Simmel, 1908, pp. 685–691). Of all of his social types, the concept of the stranger was the one that spawned most interest, manifest in its notable legacy in works of contemporary sociologists and anthropologists (cf. Silver, 2008).

comparative study (Nettl, 2005, pp. 423–427). Calling on many ethnographic examples, he pointed out that people in most societies "turn to music to get away from the ordinary," usually looking to musicians who are, in some way or another, strange – in both meanings of 'outsideness' and 'otherness'. Any particular form of musical strangeness depends greatly on its peculiar socio-cultural context; yet, Nettl points out that this phenomenon is strangely universal across cultures: "One could even suggest a distant relationship between the popularity of the gypsy [*sic*] musician in European villages and the tendency of American symphony orchestras to have foreign conductors" (Ibid., 427).

As Nettl pointed out, in various contexts, a case can be made for any musician to become a stranger; for instance, a German conductor can be perceived as a stranger in the USA and a US conductor in Germany. The peculiar case of Roma stands out because they are perceived as strangers almost *anywhere* in the world, and their strangeness and otherness are universal identifying features, for which they are recognised as a distinctive (ethnic) group (cf. ⇦The Pariahdom Boundary). In many ethnographic studies, it has been confirmed that this strangeness plays an important part in Romani music-making.

Van de Port (1999), for instance, points out that the popularity of Romani interpretations of folk songs in Serbia relates to the perception of Roma as "strangers within," as people onto whom Serbian 'non-strangers' project their idea of the "repressed self." Roma, he argues, perform folk songs to allow Serbs to strengthen a sense of Serbian national self-determination. Through Romani musical performance, Serbs are allowed to experience nationalistic sentiments, the passage of emotions and 'exteriorisation of the state of their soul.' From the Romani perspective, the skilful performance of strangeness allows local Roma to run profitable music businesses based on selling these unique experiences. Hooker, to give another example, re-interprets Romani performance of strangeness within the frame of Turner's theory of liminality. She argues that Hungarian Roma were traditionally excluded, being considered "permanently liminal people." This is why they are invited for special occasions outside of everyday life (e.g. baptisms, weddings, burials; also secular parties and soirées), for which a liminal "carnival atmosphere" is required. In turn, this provides benefits for Romani musicians – they can transcend their low positions and become powerful, exclusively holding the key to open up the liminal atmosphere (Hooker, 2007; cf. also Turner, 1975).

Many other stereotypes tend to reinforce ideas about Romani strangeness. In popular discourses, it is believed that Roma are "uncivilised" (Maeso, 2015), "wild" (Picker, 2011), "impulsive" (J. Smith, 2015), "temperamental" (Gelbart, 2010), "mad" (Pulay, 2015), "irrational" (Ferrari, 2015), boasting "supernatural power" (Okely, 1996) and so forth. Possibly the most widespread (and the most studied) stereotype, one playing a vital role in the construction of Romani 'musical blood', is their supposed emotionality. This is a phenomenon noted in many ethnographic contexts including Greece, Spain, Hungary and Romania (Herman in Bonini Baraldi, 2021; Kertész-Wilkinson, 2001, p. 618). Romani musicians are described as

"emotion makers" (Stoichiţă, 2008), using emotions in their music purposefully by creating a specific "effect" on the audience (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, esp. 203–215; e.g. Kuprin in Lemon, 2000, p. 41; Stoichiţă, 2008, esp. 63–88). This purposeful arousal of emotions in music can often be instrumental and a mere business strategy for "maximising [their] earnings by satisfying the client's requirements" (Bonini Baraldi, 2008, p. 257). In other words, emotionality represents a stereotype that can be purposefully enacted and traded by Romani musicians.[93]

Emotionality and all the other additional attributes mentioned nourish stereotypes about Romani 'natural' musical distinctiveness. In various parts of the world, these additional stereotypes originated in people's experience with Romani musical practice (and other cultural practices more generally) but have been enforced by the "dictates of authoritative texts" that picture Romani musical (and other forms of) distinctiveness as a quasi-scientific fact (cf. also Willems, 1998; e.g. Willems & Lucassen, 1998, pp. 48–52).[94] To this day, essentialising views on Roma, those supporting widespread notions about their ethnic distinctiveness (including the idea of 'musical blood'), are often held by politicians, public opinion makers and educators, and, in extreme cases, they are even reflected in the ideas of contemporary scholars.[95]

Romani performance of strangeness can be explored not only in the act of performing musically but also in the *forms* of music played. Previously in the

[93] While the role of emotion has become a significant topic in studies on Romani (music) impression management, there are also studies pointing towards their deeper anthropological meaning. The most profound work on this topic to date is by Bonini Baraldi on Romanian Roma in Ceuas¸ (2021). While he subscribes to the impression-management focus and outlines how musicians commodify the skill of 'making non-Roma cry' in their music business (esp. pp. 23–62), he also shows that Roma produce strong emotions *outside* of the musical business. These include 'after-parties' following the offering of services to non-Roma (pp. 64–72), various family celebrations (pp. 73–85), and emotion-overflowing funeral festivities (pp. 99–157). His detailed analysis shows that although emotions do have instrumental roles in economic relationships with non-Roma, they also take on a deeper meaning for the community. Emotions are key component of ethnic identity construction that sets Roma apart from non-Roma ("It's only us, [Roma], who cry with music [...] It's our way with music, not theirs, our emotions, not theirs" [p. 83]). They have a strengthening effect on communal identity, mutual solidarity and brotherhood ("These situations tend to promote feelings of closeness between the musicians, and it is not rare to hear them call one another 'my brother'" [p. 15]). Finally, emotions reflect Romani positions in society ("Right away, it all comes back to you, all your problems, poverty, you understand?" [p. 87]). Romani emotions may, thus, be seen as *something Romani* – as I gently touched upon in the opening essential note of this chapter – *something* that Roma consider important in their communal life, and therefore something of their own (cf. ⇦Essential Note #4).

[94] An important current of ideas contributing to the 'scientific' construction of stereotypes about Romani musical blood has flown through the realm of music studies. In the past, Romani 'natural' musicality was an inspiration for many celebrated composers – Joseph Haydn, Johannes Brahms, and Maurice Ravel, to name just three. Some others of these composers, most notably Franz Liszt and Béla Bartók, also contributed to intellectual debates in music studies. Thus, the notion of Roma being naturally endowed for playing music became a part of music studies discourse (Gelbart, n.d.; e.g. Piotrowska, 2012, 2013).

[95] For a thorough critical overview of such 'scholarly' opinions, cf. Gelbart 2010; esp. 74–87, 177–216.

thesis, I have noted that Romani music cultures have diverse forms, and that they have always reflected the music cultures of surrounding majorities (cf. ⇦Peculiarities of Romani Ethnicity). In other words, the essence of Romani music-making across the world can be defined as "borrowing" (e.g. C. Silverman, 1996, p. 245), "copying" (e.g. Sárosi, 1978, p. 142) and even "stealing" (e.g. Szeman, 2009, p. 109) from the musical tradition of 'others'. Scholars have framed this phenomenon in the somewhat classical dilemma of Romani (music) studies that I touched in the introduction (cf. ⇦From 'Romani Music' to Romani Musical Craft): is it appropriate to talk about "Romani music" or should we refer to it instead as the "music of Roma" (more precisely, *various* music cultures of *various* Romani people)? Yet, across various socio-cultural contexts, Romani musicians have been expected to demonstrate musical performance that differs from the interpretations of people for whom they perform. The goal of whole generations of professional Romani music-makers has been to put *something Romani* into their music, making the familiar music of non-Romani majorities strange to some extent or other. By doing so, the repertoire of 'non-strangers' becomes music that is *strangely familiar* yet *strangely special*.

The phenomenon of 'Romani strangeness' – in both the senses of 'outsideness' and 'otherness' – mostly negatively affects Romani social interactions with non-Roma and their lives more generally (cf. ⇦The Pariahdom Boundary). Yet, in Romani economies based on impression management, such as music-making, strangeness may be turned to their benefit. The strangeness of a musical performance can be received with enthusiasm and fascination and may make it a marketable feature. For these reasons, Romani musicians – including those in K&K – tend to enact their strangeness on musical stages. The status of 'strangers' may seem to contradict their elite standing (cf. Beissinger 2001, 48–49; cf. also ⇦"We haven't eaten for a week!"). In the ethnographic analysis of this chapter, thus, I will contextualise Romani performance in the realm of ethnicity performance and look at various markers of Romani ethnic difference when performed on the stage.

Anatomy of Romani 'Musical Blood'

The second notable type of Romani musical distinctiveness concerns the supposed *natural* Romani propensity for music; the phenomenon that I – based on abundant mentions in the literature across various discourses – summarise as 'musical blood'. Ethnic groups thought to have so-called 'musical blood' by no means end with Roma. In various folk narratives, some ethnic groups are believed to have a particular genre (style/rhythm/dance steps, etc.) 'in their blood' and are predestined to perform them better than others. The notions of the musical blood of a particular group exist in two typical forms – as beliefs ascribed by others ('heterostereotypes') and as those self-ascribed ('autostereotypes') (cf. Triandis & Brislin, 1980, pp. 40–44). Both kinds of stereotype can play a significant role in musical impression management strategies.

The former, heterostereotypes about 'musical blood', exist due to imposition by *others*. These are represented by beliefs that are known almost globally, such as the supposed innate musicality of Jews (e.g. Gilman, 2008), African-Americans displaying a natural propensity for jazz (e.g. Suzuki, 2013), Cubans holding an inborn sense of rhythm (e.g. Hensley, 2010) and so forth. These heterostereotypes often come along with discriminatory prejudices pointing out that a particular group has music in the blood but nothing else for which one can take it seriously (as I will show later, Roma are a typical example of such a group). Music flowing 'in the blood' is a figurative expression of the idea that a particular group of people merely *inherit* the propensity for music from their ancestors. Such beliefs are social constructs with deep roots, and, as a result, it is useful to turn attention from the groups with supposed 'musical blood' to the groups that impose these beliefs (as I will do later in this section).

The latter, autostereotypes – that is, self-ascribed beliefs about natural (i.e. inborn and/or inherited) endowments in music-making – have been studied in various ethnographic contexts. They are researched in the cases of Cretans (Dawe, 2000), Khalifas in Gujarat (West India) (Baily, 2006), and Mande people (griots) in Mali and Guinea (Durán, 2015), to name just a few. Similar to any other feature of (ethnic) group exclusivity, autostereotypes about 'musical blood' may play a prominent role in group identification. They are distinctive markers of group identity, determining which members belong to the same group, setting non-members apart. Autostereotypes also play an important part in how people grow into their musical culture, acquire musical skills, and become musicians. They may function as a solid basis of 'belief systems', which may turn into strong 'environmental catalysts' – self-fulfilling prophecies about the group's musical distinctiveness – with a positive impact on musical aptitude development (Gagné, 2013; cf. Hill, 2011). To put it simply, people who believe that musical blood flows in their veins are more likely to become musicians than those who believe that musical blood is rare among their people.

In music, autostereotypes about musical blood often appear together with heterostereotypes, and the two tend to nurture one another. This has a special significance in musical economies, where groups with the 'musical blood' perform music to those without it. Auto-stereotypical belief may reinforce ethnic groups' propensity for occupying their particular musical niches (sometimes resulting in musical monopolies) and their music-economic appropriation. Heterostereotypes then strengthen the ideological notion of group musical distinctiveness and enforce it through mechanisms of economic exchange. The mutual effect of auto- and heterostereotypes on musical economic exchange is similar to the feedback-loop effect, to which I refer in the context of theory on boundary markers (cf. ⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary). Both kinds of stereotypes can be seen as symbolic markers of group difference, co-creating a cycle of cause and effect and functioning as "the congruence of difference which strengthens the boundary" (Wallman, 1978, p. 208). Thus, stereotypes about 'musical blood' exist as a shared ideological platform between performing musicians and the audience. From musicians' perspectives, both kinds of stereotype about 'musical blood' can be

traded. This is why they have such a key role in the musical impression management at the heart of musical economies.

The case of Romani 'musical blood', emerging in various corners of the world, provides a perfect illustration of this looping interplay between auto- and heterostereotypes. Various studies note that Roma tend to self-ascribe autostereotypes about their inborn musical propensity, with abundant and verbatim mentions of 'music flowing in the blood' (Grill, 2011, p. 99; Hooker, 2007, p. 62; Lemon, 2000, pp. 68–79; e.g. van de Port, 1999, pp. 295–296). On the other side, heterostereotypes about Romani musical blood are widely shared among non-Roma. These days, Romani natural musical propensity is often considered the only positive stereotype that non-Roma associate with Roma, among many negative ones, such as their natural propensity for non-conformity and committing crimes (e.g. Dobai & Hopkins, 2020). These stereotypes about Romani musical distinctiveness may be further strengthen by supply and demand in the music economy. As Silverman put it for the context of her work, "[Romani musicians] do not really want to 'uphold' this stereotype, but they feel that they have no choice – their profession depends on it" (cf. also C. Silverman, 2012, 2018, p. 82).

Stereotypes about Romani 'musical blood' – inborn Romani musical capacities – thus, represent a notable symbolic boundary marker. They are deeply rooted in ideas held by non-Roma about Romani otherness (and 'strangeness'), but they are also rooted in Romani ideas about their own group's distinctiveness. Much like prophecies in fortune-telling, Romani music performances are believed to be received from people *naturally* and *specially* endowed to perform this craft. The musical stage, upon which Roma perform for non-Roma, is an ideal place for both auto- and heterostereotypes to be confronted, re-constructed and re-confirmed. Romani 'musical blood' may function as a marketable feature of Romani music-making. It is a boundary marker that is convenient to enact and trade. It is vitally important to analyse this marker from both sides of its construction – from the perspective of performing Romani musicians and non-Romani audiences. This is an important premise for the ethnographic analysis later in this chapter.

Heterostereotypes about 'musical blood' are worth a closer look. They play a distinctive role, especially in situations in which music of a certain (e.g. ethnic) minority is performed for a majority. As Lidskog summarised it: "the dominant culture's views on particular music (and thus its practitioners) can lead musical practitioners to adapt to existing expectations and prejudgements, often causing stereotypes to be confirmed" (2016, p. 33). The following paragraphs aim to deconstruct the idea of 'musical blood' by highlighting its social-constructivist *anatomy*. I will show that the notion is constructed in the shape of at least three major components: 1) differences in conceptions of music itself, 2) differences in conceptions of musical aptitude, and 3) differences in musical enculturation.

To start with, there is not *one* music in the world; instead, music is *various*. Each music is grounded into particular places, times and cultures and plays particular roles in particular societies and for particular individuals. Thus, as Merriam put it, there are various "concepts," "uses" and "functions" of music (Merriam, 1964, pp. 63–84; 209–227); and as Rice laconically summarised it in his three-dimensional model of musical experience: "music is X." Nevertheless, the notion of distinctive groups having 'musical blood' commonly occurs when music of one group is compared with music of another. This way, people often compare music differing in concepts, uses and functions (in short, comparing *various* Xs) without acknowledging this is what they are doing. It emerges both in heterostereotypes ("No one else can play X like *they* do!) and autostereotypes ("No one else can play X like *we* do!). Thus, ethnocentrism – one of the human universals – sets up the norm as a heuristic point of comparison, for what is both above and below the norm. From this perspective, notions of musical blood are distinctive symbolic boundary markers. They are social constructs serving as cognitive shortcuts to explain inter-group differences; in this case, differences in various kinds of (and ways of making) music.

Secondly and consequently, there is not *one* music in the world; thus, there is no single understanding of what terms such as 'musical aptitude', 'musical intelligence', 'musical excellence' and 'musical talent' mean from a cross-cultural perspective. Cross-cultural comparisons of these concepts between 'classical' music culture (arbitrarily referred to as 'Western music') and other music cultures (which, for the sake of simplicity, I call 'non-Western') represent a typical example of this issue. In Western classical music, opportunity for being a musician is often restricted to a relatively small portion of the population and making music is a domain of a select group of people. For this fact, Westerners have rationalised an explanation; as Rice noted, "the observed unequal distribution of skill, ability, and interest in music is often attributed to *talent*" (cf. Rice, 2013, p. 69; italics mine). In many respects, the performance of some kinds of Western music may resemble ritualised celebration in talent differences (cf. Kingsbury, 1997, p. 88), and talent in the society is prevalently regarded as "somewhat rare" (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007, pp. 25–43). However, this idea of the supposed rarity of musical talent is by no means culturally universal. In ethnomusicology, a classic confrontation of the Western concept of musical talent with non-Western musical culture was made by Blacking (1973) in his study on Venda people, for whom acquiring musical abilities is as natural as the ability to speak. Application of this Western optic (that is, the optic of a group for whom a musical talent is a relative rarity) to another group of people for whom ability to make music is not so rare or restricted to few (that is, 'musical talent' is more prevalent, sometimes seemingly present of its own accord) may lead to the emergence of both auto- and heterostereotypes about 'musical blood', as an explanation.

Thirdly and finally, there is not *one* music in the world; thus, there is no single way of learning music and/or growing into music. In short, there are various forms of music enculturation. Each music culture requires the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge, which exist in a wide variety across the globe (repertoire, stylistic

and expressive features, performative skills, dancing skills, etc.). Thus, musical enculturation is highly specific for each context, reflecting the socio-cultural function of music and other cultural practices of a particular society. Yet, it is worth pointing out the most general difference: there are various levels of how pronounced musical enculturation is. Musical enculturation differs in how formalised/non-formalised and institutionalised/non-institutionalised educational processes are – whether music aptitude acquisition is based on education and/or schooling (cf. Herskovits, 1948, p. 310). Music enculturation may also vary in ratios between direct and indirect learning – that is, whether individuals learn music from dedicated people (e.g. teachers) at dedicated times (e.g. lessons) by dedicated means (e.g. formalised curricula); or through independent practising, performing and 'learning music by making music' (e.g. Berliner, 1978, pp. 136–159; Durán, 2015; Huisman Koops, 2010). Merriam rightly pointed out that "while some non-literate societies lack formal educational institutions, this in no sense means they have no educational system" (Merriam, 1964, p. 146). Generally speaking, individuals grow into music in a way that allows them to engage with *their* music. Some types of music require a more pronounced way of enculturation – formalised, institutionalised, based on schooling and direct learning. For other types of music, musical aptitude may emerge despite the absence of these pronounced forms. And the development of musical aptitude in some contexts may even *require* informalised, non-institutionalised and indirect manners of musical enculturation. In folk narratives, however, these differences in musical enculturation may contribute to the notion of an ethnic group's 'musical blood'. This is most notable in these cases of comparison between societies whose music enculturation is based on more pronounced forms and societies that lack these forms. Ideas about the natural inheritance of musical aptitude – 'musical blood' – may occur as the simplest explanation for this disparity.

To summarise, various types of music require varied musical enculturation. And varied musical enculturation results in varied musical aptitude. In folk discourses, ideas about the 'musical blood' of some (ethnic) groups sometimes occur as an explanation for this variability. The particular case of Romani musical blood shows that it is based on this very anatomy of social construction. There are many Romani music cultures globally; thus, particular *anatomies* of particular Romani 'types of blood' will always be context dependent. Yet, especially in these abundant socio-cultural contexts in which Roma perform music for non-Roma, the anatomy of the Romani musical blood has a similar rationale – one based on the construction just outlined.

Firstly, most non-Roma (the 'non-strangers'), who produce heterostereotypes about Romani 'musical blood', may see Romani music as a heuristic point of comparison to 'their' music. This is especially enforced because many Romani music cultures absorb musical influences from the music of 'non-strangers'. To the ears of 'non-strangers', thus, Romani music often sounds enough like ours and enough *unlike* ours (cf. Napier, 1992, p. 140). In other words, the music of Roma is

familiar enough that 'non-strangers' can relate to it, yet *strange* enough to mark a difference (cf. ⇦Romani 'Strangeness').

Secondly, Romani musicians need to acquire specific skills and knowledge to perform *their* music (or, to play music *their* way). This is quite standard practice; as I have just described, *any* music culture requires specific ways of growing into it. The peculiarity of the Romani case lies in the specific socio-cultural function of Romani music-making, which is a significant (and sometimes *major*) formative factor of Romani musical aptitude: performing to maintain an economic relationship with surrounding non-Romani majorities (cf. ⇦Romani Niches and Monopolies). Thus, Romani musicians need to cultivate specific music skills that allow them to maintain this economic relationship. Examples of these skills include those of musical creative adaptability (e.g. Pettan, 1992), skills of tailoring repertoire for a particular audience (e.g. Bonini Baraldi, 2021; esp. 47–63), skills of improvising and performing without staff notation (e.g. Piotrowska, 2012), and so forth. As similar skills are usually not a regular part of what non-Romani 'non-strangers' may consider 'ordinary musical aptitude', their emergence may be attributed to 'musical blood'. Furthermore, this attribution may be strengthened by the supposed 'rarity' of 'musical talent', to which some non-Roma ('Westerners') may relate. Yet, Romani 'musical aptitude' is neither greater nor less than that of non-Roma. This not very accentuated view can be found in observations advanced by commentators from Bartók to contemporary music educators (Bartók in Sárosi, 1978; Ševčíková, 2008); even serious recent attempts to compare measurable components of Romani/non-Romani musical aptitude have reached these very conclusions (Dolean & Tincas, 2019). It seems that the musical aptitude of Roma may just be *distinctive* and based on its *distinctive conceptions*.

Thirdly and importantly, to acquire this distinctive musical aptitude, Roma need to acquire it *distinctively*. Perhaps the key argument in favour of the notion of Romani 'musical blood' in non-Romani popular discourses stems from the belief that Romani musical aptitude occurs despite the lack of any musical education. But, as pointed out above, the lack of formalised musical education in the shape of schooling does not imply lack of *any* educational processes. In Romani studies, this issue of education/schooling has become an important topic in general perspectives on Romani enculturation. Judith Okely – a British anthropologist known for her work on UK Gypsy Travellers – made an interesting remark in a personal communication we shared: "A Bulgarian Roma whose master's dissertation I supervised [...] loved the phrase [that Roma] were 'educated not schooled.' I learned so much from the children. At my dreadful boarding school, I was schooled not educated." These distinctive forms of socialisation and enculturation in various Romani societies were observed especially in contexts in which Roma lived relatively independently of educational institutions and where Romani children were educated in families and/or communities, acquiring work-related skills for taking part in the family subsistence activities from an early age (e.g. Okely, 1983, p. 33; cf. also T. Smith, 1997; Sway, 1984, pp. 94–95). While this concerned most Romani communities in the past, these days, Romani participation in formalised education is enforced by law (just as anyone else's is)

and is further enhanced by strategies for Romani integration prevailing in particular countries.[96] In some components of enculturation – such as enculturation in *music* – relicts of this former way of knowledge transmission (based on informal education inside Romani families/communities) can still be encountered. However, when attention to Romani musical enculturation is only limited to schooling, ideas about 'Romani musical blood' may rise again in the narratives of non-Roma.

These theoretical sections, framing Roma-ness with reference to impression management theories and attempting to deconstruct and critically analyse its main components, will be useful in the ethnographic analysis that comes now. The four upcoming ethnographic sections will address the following research questions:

1) How is Roma-ness in music constructed in popular discourses – whether Romani or non-Romani? 2) What are the common features of Roma-ness from the perspective of the Romani musical stage across various genres and styles? 3) What is the role of Roma-ness in the K&K Romani musical economy, and what other consequences does it have in the everyday life of musicians?

[96] UK-based Gypsy Travellers, to whom Okely refers above, represent partial exceptions to these rules. UK law tolerates this culturally specific approach to education and, due to their nomadic nature, allows a more individualised school attendance plan for Gypsy Travellers (cf. 1996 Education Act, section 444 [6]).

“Making people dance!” – “Aliveness” and ‘Flow’ in Music

In January 2019, I was invited by Vladimir Sendrei’s son (the organiser) to a Romani ball in Kokava’s Local Cultural Center. Vladimir expected about 200 attendees at the event, mainly the Roma from Kokava, for whom he summoned two Romani bands. The event’s headliner was the Trio Band UK – a band comprised of two Czech and one Slovak Roma who came all the way from Newcastle. “I’m the first one who convinced them to come to Slovakia! It cost me 1600 euros, but it was absolutely worth it,” Vlado Jr. told me after the event. The second band was billed under the name EPAS; they were a group of two Slovak Romani musicians, both singers and keyboard players (“I gave just 100 euros to each”). Their role, as Vladimir explained to me, was to play when Trio Band UK had breaks. So the event was planned to have an uninterrupted musical programme, something of which the organiser was duly proud: “If it’s a Gypsy party [*cigánska zábava*], then it should be Gypsy-like in all aspects.”

Box #21 – ‘Roma Ples’ in Kokava

I was asked to make a short video excerpt from this event by Vladimir Sendrei Jr., who then used it for social media promotion. The video features a Romani song performed by the Trio Band UK. It was filmed on the 26th of January 2019 in Kokava.

thesis.nuska.me/box/21

At the party, music was indeed omnipresent from its start to its conclusion late in the night. The only pauses, each lasting no more than a couple of minutes, occurred when bands came back and reset their instruments after breaks covered by the other band. While the Trio Band UK performed their sets with confidence, and were met with complimentary comments, audiences cheering and a full dance floor, the EPAS band seemed to be more hesitant in performing. At one moment, they failed to properly communicate between them what the next song would be, needing to stop the automatic beats and tweak the settings on their keyboards before they resumed playing. This whole moment took less than ten seconds, yet the event’s energy felt suddenly broken. The crowd hummed with disappointment as dancing ceased. Words of contempt and ironic laughter were addressed to the band. At that moment, I was sitting right next to Vladimir Sendrei senior. He turned to me and said: “You see? This is a huge bummer! This can’t ever happen at a party.”

26th of January 2019, Kokava nad Rimavicou

In K&K backstages, I encountered a phrase that Romani musicians from K&K use almost like a mantra: “to make people dance” [*roztancovať ľudí*].[97] For instance, in the ethnographic excerpt from the hotel Donovaly (cf. ⇦“Tonight, we play this party for you!”), Vlado stated: “People are not hooking up [with our music] […] Let’s play some folk songs [*ľudovky*], we need to *make them dance* [*Musíme ľudí roztancovať*!]” On another occasion, I read Vladimir’s Facebook status posted from a Sendreiovci wedding gig: “What a beautiful wedding ceremony in […] Poltár – everyone is dancing! It’s a known thing that good music makes you dance

[97] The Slovak verb *roztancovať* in this form and context especially stresses the change between a non-dancing state (of a person, people, a party etc.) and – so to speak – the ‘full-dancing’ state. *Roztancovaní ľudia* [people made to dance] are usually dancing at full energy.

[*roztancuje*], even for people who haven't danced for years!" In the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that recurring references to making people dance represent an important feature of the K&K Romani musical craft, carrying key anthropological significance for the entire music culture of K&K Roma – from musical performances of professional musicians to informal *bašávely* in Romani households.

In Slovakia (and beyond), there are widespread cultural heterostereotypes about Roma, ascribing them a special gift (and a special power) to make people dance. Delivering a musical performance that makes people dance is expected from both non-Romani and Romani audiences. This strong association of Romani bands with dance likely comes from the tradition of Slovak folk music. 'Traditionally', Romani string bands accompanied various dance opportunities, fulfilling the "entertaining" function (e.g. Feinberg 2018b, 72–73; cf. also ⇦"Playing traditionally"; ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). Romani musicians are certainly not the only musicians in the world who are expected to make people dance (⇦Essential Note #4). Yet, their position is strengthened by their status as *strangers*. As I discussed earlier (cf. ⇦Romani 'Strangeness), Roma (*strangers*) tend to be picked by non-Roma (*non-strangers*) for music performance to "get away from the ordinary" (cf. Nettl, 2005, pp. 423–427). The belief that Romani musicians are the best choice for evoking such ritual liminality is enforced by both auto- and heterostereotypes about Romani musical distinctiveness ('musical blood'). To this day, thus, Romani bands are the top choice for events where people are expected to dance, such as weddings, birthday celebrations, company parties and so forth. 'Making people dance' is a task that Romani musicians are believed to be most qualified to accomplish out of all musicians.

For Romani musicians, this represents an autostereotype, with which they willingly identify and which they take almost as their *vocation*. It reaches beyond the Slovak border and is taken as a distinct feature of Romani music-making in general. Bonini Baraldi, for instance, noted that for Romanian Roma, "music is not working if nobody is dancing" (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, p. 48). In K&K, this vocation represents the ultimate challenge for any gig. I remember Barna's disappointed sigh when we were at a gig mostly attended by people in their retirement: "Not even God could make these people dance!" [*Tie neroztancuje ani pánboh!*]. But what God was not supposed to make happen, the Barnovci band gradually achieved in the course of that evening, with the floor eventually becoming full of dancing people, regardless of their age. And the musicians were justly satisfied with their performance. Roma also believe that they can make people dance *better* than any other musicians. The most common folk explanation of this belief that I encountered is the auto-conclusive answer about 'having it in their blood'. Nevertheless, the skill of making people dance seems to be more a result of musical impression management strategies, particularly their effort to make (and keep) music *alive*.

I found figurative expressions about "aliveness" in music consistently the most fitting overarching term occurring to my research participants for describing the differences between the music-making of Roma and non-Roma. Both Romani musicians and non-musicians believe that Romani music is *livelier* [*živšia*]. It is one of the main reasons why Romani music (or Romani interpretations of *any* music) is considered the best choice for dance parties. In the ethnographic literature, I have found various analogous notions about 'aliveness' in Romani music. This phenomenon has most notably been observed by Bonini Baraldi (2021) in his recent monumental work on the emotions of Romanian Roma. The fact that Roma consider music "more alive," he argues, stems from Romani musicians' conscious efforts in "bringing music to life" by employing specific musical techniques. He points out that, for Roma, music even acquires the status of a live agent (a "musical being") (cf. esp. pp. 239–298). The idea about bringing music to life is highly relevant for the context of K&K. As I have already noted, the Romani musical soundscape in K&K is quite fragmented in terms of musical styles, genres and the variety in musical instruments seen (cf. ⇦"Playing traditionally"). Yet, the idea of bringing music to life permeates all K&K Romani music – both in professional and non-professional performance. "Our music is *livelier* [than that non-Roma]. What we feel is what we give out [...] it is encoded in our mentality," *primáš* Janko Deme told me in an interview in 2015.

"Livelier music," though, is not something taken for granted as automatic just for the fact that musicians are Roma (at least for Romani musicians). Roma in K&K believe some do it better than others, and some are even true masters of this craft. The skill of making music lively is especially relevant for band leaders – whether Romani *primáši* or lead singers. Quite counterintuitively, the skill of making music come alive is not directly related to musical virtuosity. Among Roma in K&K, some musicians are known for being great masters of their instruments but not having the talent for making music feel alive, and vice-versa. Musicians typically mention Vladimir Sendrei as an example of this paradox. I have heard repeatedly from not only members of Sendreiovci but also other Roma – both musicians and non-musicians – that Vladimir may not be the best singer, but he is a showman [*šoumen*] and knows how to make people "entertained" and "dance." The skill of making music alive is also vital for the music business. It is the main premise for economic success – whether in the form of direct extra earnings (cf. ⇨"Making people sing!") or in the form of boosts to the credibility of bands who fulfil the expectation for lively music production – which makes people entertained and dance – making them likely to be called again.

While the idea of putting life into music differs depending on the genre/style performed and the musical instrument, there is one overarching idea in common: music must be *maintained* in this state of aliveness. Giving life to music is not a one-off act; it is musicians' responsibility to ensure that life emerges and remains until the end of a performance. The opening ethnographic excerpt of this section provides a good illustration. The uninterruptedness of the musical production is seen as something essential for the party's success. It is also thought of as something typically Romani ("If it's a Gypsy party, then it should be Gypsy-like in

all aspects!"). The sudden interruption of the music felt like an unforgivable mistake on the part of the musicians ("This is a huge bummer! This can't happen at a party"). In a way, stopping the music in the middle of the set resembles *killing* the music.

For analysing aliveness in the music of K&K Roma, I have found Csíkszentmihályi's concept of 'flow' vitally useful. In his work, flow is understood as a distinctive state of mind accompanying certain human activities (producing visual art, doing sport, dancing, etc.) in which the mind becomes fully immersed in the activity so that the person experiences timelessness, enthusiasm and joy. Csíkszentmihályi's coined the term in the field of psychology, but due to its conceptual versatility, it has found applications in various fields. Indeed, its appearance in music studies dates from the time the theory first emerged (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 108–111). While 'musical flow' can be observed on an individual level (i.e. as an individual experience), there is also a significant body of work related to collective experiences of flow. Special attention has been paid to live music events, where the shared experience of flow has an important ceremonial and social function. Csíkszentmihályi claimed live music events to be analogous to Durkheim's condition of 'collective effervescence' – that is, the experience of shared energy accompanying social gatherings, which Durkheim considered a pivotal component of religious experience (cf. Ibid., cf. also Durkheim, 1912).

In science (including music science), Csíkszentmihályi's concept of flow has also found numerous relevant applications. For instance, it has been studied as a measurable and quantifiable manifestation of musical experience (Diaz, 2011; e.g. Nash & Blackwell, 2011). Despite the term's widespread appearance in ethnomusicology discourse, its usage and conceptualisation are not entirely consistent. It often appears as a purely descriptive term expressing a certain musical quality (e.g. of electronic music) or the skill of specific musicians (e.g. of DJ's) (cf. Attias, Gavanas, & Rietveld, 2013; Emmerson, 2017). In work of this kind, the term is simply borrowed from folk discourses, without any reference to Csíkszentmihályi's concept. Moreover, there are also analogous (almost synonymic) concepts to flow in ethnomusicology – such as 'vibe' (e.g. Garcia, 2020) or 'groove' (e.g. Feld, 1988; T. S. Hughes, 2003; Zagorski-Thomas, 2007). A particularly useful theorisation of flow – consistent with Csíkszentmihályi's original concept while further developing it for specific purposes in ethnomusicology – was made by Turino (cf. also Rahaim, 2019; 2008, 2014). Most notably, Turino incorporated the concept in his much-quoted theoretical distinction between 'participatory' and 'presentational' performance (Turino, 2008, pp. 23–65). He advocates flow as an essential component of the participatory type of performance; in his words, "[p]articipatory performance […] is about the opportunity of connecting in special ways with others and experiencing *flow* (Ibid., 35; italics mine).[98]

[98] Although Turino is considered the inventor of this distinction, it actually appeared much earlier in ethnomusicological and other literature. In German-language scholarship, analogous ideas can

Considering Csíkszentmihályi's and Turino's theoretical work helps untangle the case of 'aliveness' in the music of K&K Roma, especially when seeking to understand the importance of the audience's active participation in Romani musical performance. 'Aliveness' here should be looked at from both the points of view of musicians and audiences. For Romani musicians, putting life into music means to bring distinctive Romani qualities to the performance. As I pointed out at the beginning of the section, producing livelier music is what distinguishes their practices from the 'life-less' music interpretation of non-Roma. In turn, it is the aliveness of music that gets the audience entertained and turns them to dancing. Thus, putting 'life' into music is an important musical impression management strategy with a key role for the Romani musical craft, and for ethnicity performance (the performance of Roma-ness) more broadly. The upcoming section is dedicated to analysing how Romani musicians put 'life' into their music, or, in other words, how they facilitate and manage *flow*.

"And we are going on!" – Flow Management Strategies

> "[Radičovci from Kokava] were capable of bridging the individual melodies of our folk music in a quite original way [...] the songs flow like a stream, from which the melody of another song suddenly rises. Whoever originally invented this had great taste."
>
> (Dubovec, n.d.)
>
> I invited the Sendreiovci band to my wedding in 2005. They were not at all famous then, so they agreed to come for just 200 euros, including travel costs to the Czech Republic. And it turned out that inviting a Gypsy band for the wedding was a great choice indeed! I've never thought I was such a dancer, but when they started playing, I realised I might be half Romani.
>
> J.H., Klenovec, May 2013

Although the Romani knack for making anyone dance is often ascribed to their special powers and 'musical blood', I have observed a specific set of skills and activities that Romani musicians employ to fulfil the audience's expectations. While these differ for particular genres and styles of music (e.g. 'modern bands' vs 'traditional bands'), there seem to be some universal features present across the entire K&K musical soundscape (and present also in Romani non-professional music performance). This section aims to uncover this set of strategies: the specific treatment of tempo, special care for musical continuity, and a specific way of communication employed inside the band.

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be found in the work of Heinrich Besseler (2011, p. [1925]) and Ernst Klusen (1969, 1989). In English-speaking literature, it appeared in the context of ethnochoreology 13 years before Turino, when it was first proposed in the work of Andriy Nahachewsky (cf. also Morgenstern, 2018; Nahachewsky, 1995).

The tempo of Romani music (and the music of Roma) is a feature discussed across various Romani cultures around the globe. In popular discourses, Roma tend to be associated with music that is *fast* or, at least, *faster than usual*. I remember a concert by a renowned Czech (non-Romani) violin virtuoso Pavel Šporcl with Romano Stilo – a Romani string band from Slovakia – in which he performed notoriously fast pieces of classical music, such as Brahms' *Hungarian Dance no.* 5, Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* and Monti's *Csárdás*. These pieces were played in a notably faster tempo than the already very fast norm. During the concert, Šporcl made a memorable comment that elicited laughter from the audience: "I must confess one thing to you: since I've known the guys, I've had to improve [...] my ability to play fast. I used to think I played 'very fast'. When we started rehearsing [with Romano Stilo], I found out that I only played 'fast'."[99] The concert was a part of a successful tour, and, later, Šporcl collaborated with several other Romani string bands from Slovakia. Both marketing campaign and extensive media coverage of these projects enticed the audience with the "devilish coupling [of] Šporcl and gypsies [*sic*]," "a combination of great mastery, temperament and gypsy boiling blood" and "hellishly fast Hungarian *csardases* [that] quickly get not only the musicians but also the whole audience into a frenzy" (idobryden.cz, 2010; Kratochvíl & Kaňková, 2014; Kultura.cz, 2010).[100]

While the ability to play fast pieces (or *any* pieces fast) is generally a sign of virtuosity and mastery of a particular musical instrument, in the case of Romani musicians, popular discourses tend to assign this ability to Romani ethnic traits, determined on a primordial basis. It is related to both the notion of Romani 'musical blood' and several features of Romani 'strangeness': namely their supposed emotionality, temperament, and wildness (cf. ⇦Anatomy of Romani 'Musical Blood'; ⇦Romani 'Strangeness'). These features are often stressed in the context in which Roma engage with their own musical traditions. This is typical for dancing, during which Roma are known for making "their feet go so fast you can hardly see them" (Sinclair, 1907, p. 26; ethnographic resource). In professional music-making, the fast tempo has another specific role. Fast music – or the ability to play music fast – can be seen as a symbolic marker of Romani musical distinctiveness, stemming from their *ethnic* distinctiveness. It is a

[99] This verbatim quotation comes from a concert organised under the umbrella of Smetana's Litomyšl Opera Festival, held in 2010. The concert is available online (Tesáček, 2010), and Šporcl's comment starts at 59:40. Other media coverage shows that Šporcl repeated this comment several times during more than 220 events as part of this project.

[100] Note the recurring word 'Gypsy' (sometimes in its non-capitalised form) in these marketing texts and media outputs. Although, as I have already noted, the Slovak word *Cigán* (and the Czech word *Cikán*) does have racist connotations (cf. ⇦Essential Note #2: Roma or Gypsies?), it often appears as a functional marketing label for Romani bands, as it seems to strengthen the audience's notion of Romani strangeness (cf. ⇦Romani Strangeness). One of the most successful contemporary Romani string bands in Slovakia, for instance, performs under the name Cigánski Diabli [The Gypsy Devils]. Judging by the band's success, this double literary estrangement works quite successfully for selling the band's music, and neither the audience nor the musicians themselves seem to be concerned about the racist connotations.

heterostereotype that raises audiences' anticipation about Romani musical performance. The fast tempo is taken as a distinctive feature of Roma-ness in music in many Romani musical traditions. Typical examples include the "hellishly *fast*" *csardases* of Hungarian Roma (cf. above); the "fierce and *fast*" guitars of French Manouche (Dregni, 2004, p. 274; italics mine); and, last but not least, the Romani brass bands from the Balkans "[mesmerising] the audience with their *speed*, skills, and expressiveness" (Szeman, 2009, p. 106; italics mine). K&K Romani musicians are no exception in this respect. I have observed that fast tempo is a tried and tested method for making music *livelier* (leading to getting people to dance), and that it has the power to display authentic Roma-ness in musical performance.

In K&K, Romani musicians talk openly about tempo treatment in almost strategic terms. Romani entertaining bands always have an abundance of fast tunes in their repertoire, ranging from Romani and Hungarian *čardáše*[101] (the special domain of 'traditional bands'), to bouncy Slovak folk songs, and popular songs of recent release. During entertaining performances, Roma do not play *only* fast tunes or tunes at a fast tempo. Bands in K&K are cautious about balancing slow and fast numbers – both for the sake of the audience and the musicians' stamina (to preserve musical *continuity*; see below). In entertaining performances, slow songs are also represented by a whole range of genres. 'Traditional bands' like to mix their fast *čardáše* with sorrowful *halgáta* (sing. *halgató*)[102] and slow Slovak folk songs. 'Modern bands' employ a rich mix of slow folk and popular songs (from Slovakia and abroad), which are familiarly nicknamed in the Romani musical business *slaďáky* (sing. *slaďák*).[103] Yet, the musicians are aware that songs with fast

[101] The name *čardáš* (in Hungarian spelt *csárdás*) comes from the Hungarian word *csarda* – a roadside inn – pointing to where this Hungarian dance was born and typically performed (Sárosi, 1978, p. 90). This dance was a pilar genre for the *magyar nóta* music tradition, spread and popularised by Romani musicians mainly in the 19th century (cf. ⇦"Playing traditionally"). It is usually played in a fast tempo; alternatively, it builds up to this speed gradually (Jurková, 2003b). *Čardáš* is nowadays considered the oldest layer of Slovak Romani "folklore," one which, nevertheless, tends to fuse with other musical influences and has seen much innovation diversification over time (Andrš, 2016, pp. 20–26; Belišová, 2010b, 2010a).

[102] The term *halgató* comes from Hungarian (spelled *hallgató*) and originally referred to a sub-genre of slow songs of the *magyar nóta* tradition (cf. ⇦"Playing traditionally"). In Romani cultures, it has evolved into a unique sub-genre of Romani music especially popular in Hungary but also known and performed elsewhere, including Slovakia. *Halgáta* are sung with Romani lyrics and usually deal with despairing topics, such as poverty, imprisonment, death and so forth. Typically, they are performed by Romani women (*a cappella* or with a simple musical accompaniment such as that of a lone guitar) with a considerable emotional strain (cf. Jurková, 2003c).

[103] The term *slaďák* is a Slovak slang word, figuratively derived from the adjective 'sweet' [*sladký*]. While in popular Slovak discourse the term is usually perceived rather negatively (as something simplistic and/or of a mass-market quality), Roma use it as a descriptive term for a specific style of contemporary Romani music (especially in the area of music which researchers tend to mark as Rom pop; cf. Jurková, 2009). In the music business, this term is used freely to mark *any* slow song. I have also noticed that Roma in K&K use it as a straightforward synonym for playing slowly ("Don't

tempos have the power to mobilise the audience to leave the comfort of their chairs and release their energy on the dance floor. The situation in Hotel Donovaly (described in ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!") illustrated this phenomenon perfectly. Since the Romani musicians were not satisfied with the audience's engagement, they called for an attempt at "making people dance [*roztancovať ľuďi*]" by playing "livelier" numbers and "folk songs that people know." One round of fast Slovak folk songs (*Nepij*, *Jano*, *nepij vodu*; *Krčmárik maličký*; *Zuzu*, *Zuzu*, *Zuzulienka*) did the trick. These rounds are often greeted by laudatory audience comments such as: "Oh, these Gypsies! They do know how to make us dance!" In other words, rounds of fast songs, which force the audience to leave their chairs, are very much expected from Romani bands, and Romani musicians do their best to meet these audience expectations.

Box #22 – Bubamara

The song *Bubamara* was written by non-Romani composer Goran Bregović, featuring lyrics from the Romani poet Jovan Nikolić. Thanks to its appearance in Emir Kusturica's film Black Cat, White Cat (1998), it is among the best-known Romani songs globally and is also in demand for Romani bands in K&K and beyond. Interestingly, the Sendrei's may have been one of the first importers and popularisers of this song in Slovakia. Once, Vladimir complained to one of my colleagues, anthropologist Tomáš Hrustič: "You know what happened? [The Romani band] Kmeťovci has stolen *our* song! The Bubamara song!" The first music video shows the original version from Black Cat, White Cat. The second shows this song performed by Vladimir Sendrei's band on the 14th of February 2019 in the Galileo hotel in Donovaly (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). The video illustrates the practice of "playing to an [audience's] ear" [*hranie do úška*] that I will cover later in this section (cf. ⇨"Making people sing!").

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Besides the demand for fast songs, Romani musicians also play songs with both gradual and sudden tempo changes, making extensive use of *ritardando* and – especially – *accelerando*, which are both typical of *čardáše*. As a notable example of this practice, there is the Romani song *Bubamara*, which practically all Romani bands I have met had in their repertoire.

The song starts *lentissimo* (sometimes in free rhythm; often sung *a cappella*), and it gradually progresses to *prestissimo*. Many other songs in K&K band repertoires follow the same pattern of gradual *accelerando*, especially Slovak folk songs (e.g. *Išel Macek do Malacek*, *Eště si já pohár vína*, *To ta Heľpa*) and folk-*like* songs (e.g. *Hej Sokoly*). Interestingly, songs with gradual tempo changes also appear in the repertoire of 'modern' bands, which are rhythmically guided by the automatic beats of digital keyboards. I observed many times how Romani keyboardists

play it like *slaďák*" = Don't play it so slowly). Analogously, Roma sometimes use the antonym *čardáš* ("Don't play it like *čardáš* = Don't play it so fast).

manually adjusted bpm units during a performance with almost mathematical precision.[104] Romani bands also perform songs with sudden changes of speed. This, again, applies especially to some Slovak folk songs, whose last verses Romani musicians play notably faster than what came previously (e.g. *Zuzu*, *Zuzu*, *Zuzulienka*). Although this creative use of *ritardando* and *accelerando* is by no means a Romani speciality, I have noticed that these musicians push the differences between slow and fast parts to extremes, ending up with the *prestissimo* passages that are so well-received by the dancers on the dance floor. These types of songs are a vital contributor to the 'aliveness' of a musical performance, and Roma put them on the playlist whenever they need to wake the audience up.

Romani singers have a proven – typically Romani – strategy for communicating these changes in tempo while encouraging the flow of the dancing crowd: adding various interjections and exclamations, all of which are well-known beyond the Slovak border. The most common include "*joj*," "*čib-čib*," "*hajdé*," "*sa-va-la*," "*um-ca-um-ca*," "*digi-digi-digi*" "*šaj na naj na*"; and by far the most popular: "*ho-pá!*" (Belišová, 2010b, p. 354; Bonini Baraldi, 2021, p. 34; Kovalcsik, 1987, pp. 60–64; cf. Sárosi, 1978, p. 24).[105] Besides stimulating the

Box #23 – Hej Sokoly

Hej Sokoly [Hey, Falcons!] is a folk song well-known in Poland and Ukraine (marginally also in surrounding countries). Its catchy, celebratory melody is complemented with lyrics (existing in several local versions) playing on the patriotic sentiments of Poles and Ukrainians. In this sense, the lyrics of the Slovak version evoke similar sentiments, but they are quite unique as they were not created in the 19th and 20th centuries – as the Polish and Ukrainian ones were respectively – but only in 2017. This most famous Slovak version comes from the Slovak pop band IMT Smile, created for the Slovak film The Line ([*Čiara*] 2017; directed by Peter Bebjak). Soon after its release, it came to dominate the Slovak music charts. During my fieldwork, it was still one of the most played tracks on Slovak radio stations. Since its release in 2017, it has had over 21 million views on YouTube. Due to this extreme popularity, the song quickly became incorporated into the music repertoires of Romani bands around K&K. The second video shows this song performed by Sendreiovci at a charitable concert in Velký Krtíš on the 12th of October 2018. The video illustrates several strategies discussed in this chapter. Gradual tempo changes are encouraged by Vladimir's interjections. At the end, the song transitions smoothly into the Slovak folk song *Išel Macek do Malacek* without any pause, and the entire band adapts as soon as Janka – the singer – announces the name of the upcoming song on the microphone.

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[104] Romani musicians in K&K, especially those who perform in bands with digital keyboards, often use information about bpm (i.e. beats per minute) in normal communication. While they do not use any particular word for it, the number always conveys the information ("*Hráme to na stodvadsat*" = "We'll play it at 120 bpm").

[105] As these interjections appear transnationally, there is no standardised method for their phonetic transcription.

tempo shifts (and "aliveness" in music), these interjections also seem to have an aesthetic function. I have often encountered them during informal Romani *bašávely* and noticed that they are considered something typically Romani. Interestingly though, I have encountered Romani musicians sometimes mentioning these interjections in an unflattering context when commenting on music which was "too Gypsy-like," as if having too much Roma-ness in music may ruin the music as such ("This music is too *hopa-či-pa*!" or "Nobody wants to listen to *um-ca-um-ca* the whole evening").

Box #24 – Ciocârlia

The song *Ciocârlia* (*The Lark*; known among K&K Roma by the Slovak name *Slavík*) was composed by Romanian Rom Angheluş Dinicu in the late 19th century and popularised by his grandson Grigoraș Dinicu. Among Roma who play 'traditional' music, this piece is known as notoriously challenging; it features a variety of violin techniques and is played at a very fast tempo. Many Romani *primáši* I met had this piece in their repertoire to show their individual mastery. It was no coincidence that *Ciocârlia* was also part of the repertoire of the Pavel Šporcl & Romano Stilo music project mentioned above. This video shows *Ciocârlia* performed by Marek Balog – a well-known Slovak-Romani virtuoso now based in Prague – for the opening of the photography exhibition by Claude and Marie-José Carret in the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno (Czech Republic). It is interesting to note that Marek Balog comes from the neighbourhood of K&K. He was born into a family of musicians in Lučenec. After the concert, he told me that as a little boy, he used to take part in rehearsals of the Klenovec-based Romani dance ensemble Upre Roma (cf. ⇦Footnote #76).

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I have also encountered musicians intentionally pushing the tempo of particular songs to the very edge of playability. Once, for instance, I witnessed a rehearsal in which the *primáš* Karol Radič from Klenovec was practising the Romanian song *Ciocârlia* with the rest of the Sendreiovci band. They intended this song to open their concert at a festival, so they spent about half an hour going over it. In the course of the rehearsal, Karol insisted on setting the tempo faster and faster. A digital keyboard accompanied the band with an automatic beat, so the song's tempo was pushed a few bpm higher with every new attempt. Eventually, they reached the point when the musicians found the song unmanageable. "Listen. It's not good! The music is falling apart! The guitar's not on the beat," Martin complained from behind the keyboard. "What do you mean I'm not on the beat?" his father Barna objected strongly. The musicians had a short argument, in which Karol advocated for the fast tempo regardless of the potential imperfections. After testing only Barna alongside the digital keyboard, and realising that it was indeed too fast for Barna's off-beat accompaniment, Karol agreed in defeat to slow the song down by several bpm.

I have noticed that this practice of setting the tempo to a level as fast as one can play gives musicians slight discomfort, which they sometimes reflect upon off-stage. The Sendreiovci musicians, for example, occasionally complain about Vladimir, who (when not guided by the automatic beat of a keyboard) likes to push

the tempo of the music with heavy reliance on the typical 'Romani' interjections (described above), whistling and stomping to the very edge of playability. In this sense, musicians not only talk about aesthetical deficiencies caused by the fast tempo ("That's not good – it's falling apart" or "This is not a *čardáš*, this is techno!"), but they are also cautious about whether they are able to sustain the energy for the entire evening. Romani musicians apparently think about tempo similarly to long-distance runners. Fast tempos are desired for making the music 'livelier', but it must not interfere with another vital feature of Roma-ness in music – musical *continuity*.

While tempo can ignite the spark of life in the music, the most important task for Romani musicians is to *keep* life in the music throughout the entire performance, and this is achieved through various flow-management techniques. Most notably, this is seen in the structure of the performances, which may be seen as typically Romani. During my fieldwork, I encountered a couple of events accompanied by non-Romani entertaining bands. Although overlap with the repertoire of Romani bands was significant (especially when it comes to Slovak folk and pop music), there was a notable difference in how the repertoire was presented. For non-Romani bands, the *songs* were basic units of the performance structure. Each song was followed by applause, then came another song and another round of applause etc. As outlined in Turino's theory, such a structure is typical in presentational performance, in the context of which he talks about "organised beginnings and endings" (Turino, 2008, p. 59).

In Romani entertaining performances, on the other hand, songs do not seem to represent the main and the most important outcome of music-making; rather, they are a construction material for building a continuous *flow* throughout the evening. This approach requires structuring the performance into longer sets of songs (commonly around 20–30 minutes long) played without a break.[106] The songs are usually clustered according to tempo, genre, rhythm, mood, and other aspects, about which Romani musicians sometimes briefly communicate before starting to play ("Let's play dance songs [*tanečné piesne*], folk songs [*ľudovky*], waltzes [*valčíky*], pop songs [*moderné*], csardases [*čardáše*] etc.; cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). These sets can be played literally without a second of pause, one song immediately following the other. If the band needs to make a relatively major change in the key, rhythm, or tempo, they usually pause for not longer than a couple of seconds, shouting a popular exclamation I heard countless

[106] I found the same practice at informal Romani *bašávely*. In the later stages in an evening, sets of songs were sometimes an hour or more long. During these occasions, it was not rare to see musicians playing an instrument with one hand while drinking coffee or smoking a cigarette, the flow of music apparently of higher priority than the musicians' immediate needs. The importance of musical continuity, thus, appears to have significance also for Romani non-professional music-making. Hence, it would certainly be worth exploring relationships between this feature and the musical aesthetics of Roma (cf. ⇦Essential Note #1) as well as its role and anthropological significances in the context of Romani *bašávely* specifically (cf. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #1).

times from many musicians at all kinds of junctures: “And we are going on!” [*A ideme ďalej!*]. After this punctuation, they resume playing in a matter of seconds without waiting for applause. While the musicians strategise about which set, featuring which mood and tempo, should follow, they rarely discuss what *particular* songs should be played and in what order. This approach diminishes the significance of each song in favour of preserving the musical continuity and keeping the music *alive*. Moreover, I often noticed that bands perform the same song twice – sometimes even three or four times – in one evening, which is hardly imaginable in many other kinds of presentational performance. For Romani musicians, individual songs seem less important than the flow that songs generate when played together in a set.

The fact that music performance is almost always organised into longer sets for optimising musical continuity leaves minimal communication space among the band. For an uninvolved spectator at Romani entertaining performance, each set of songs may seem to be prepared in advance, as one song is followed by another effortlessly and flawlessly. It is, however, very rarely the case, at least for the Romani bands from K&K (“If we did rehearse, we would play even better,” Barna Jr. complained, reflecting on the fact that the Barnovci band practically never prepared in this way). The sets of songs are quite often organically created in the course of performance. To achieve this while keeping the playing uninterrupted, Romani musicians have developed a specific system of communication, as well as a clear awareness of hierarchies inside their bands.

‘Traditionally’, the responsibility for the continuity of a performance was the duty of the *primáš* (cf. ⇦“Playing traditionally”). In the context of today’s ‘traditional bands’, this rule is still alive and is taken as an indisputable policy. The *primáš* is responsible for choosing an appropriate repertoire to which the audience can relate (cf. ⇨“Making people sing!”), along with all other musical practicalities associated with this responsibility, such as choosing the key, tempo, dynamics, etc. Playing the leading role of the *primáš* has its own rules that need to be learned. A young Romani *primáš* Jožko from Klenovec, who was learning to play the fiddle from his uncle Karol Radič, explained to me: “[Uncle Karol] always told me and others: ‘Everyone needs to follow you [*ísť podľa teba*] because you are the leader [*hlavný*]. If they make an error, you need to turn your head towards them and knit your brow so that they realise they were out of tune.” In today’s Romani entertaining performance around K&K, the role of the *primáš* is often diminished in favour of lead vocalists. When a Romani entertaining band features both a *primáš* and a singer, the singer is usually the one who takes responsibility for song selection, management of tempo and continuity and, thus, this position overrides the ‘traditional’ privilege of the *primáš*. In some cases (typically, in the settings of ‘traditional bands’), *primáši* sometimes turn into singers. Yet, their role – as the *primáš* Karol explained to me – “is not to sing through the entire evening, but rather to make people sing [*rozospievať ľudí*]” (cf. ⇨“Making people sing!”). The vocal skills of *primáši* around K&K are usually very good, and in some cases

exceptional. Learning to sing is a skill complementary to carrying out the role of the *primáš*.

The *primáš* or lead singer always communicates the selection of songs within a set, and the rest of the band is expected to start accompanying the song immediately. Upcoming songs (especially in cases where lead singers are in charge) are sometimes established by calling out the song name as the last tones of the current one ring out. In most cases, though, this communication is unobtrusively performed by the *primáš*/singer introducing the first musical phrase of the song they have in mind. Apart from communicating information about which song comes next, this method also inherently defines other important information for the rest of the band, such as the tempo and the key. In the *primáši* case, the information about the key is intentional; in the case of singers, though, it is mostly unintentional and intuitive. For sets led by a singer, it is quite common that the entirety is played in one key or closely related keys (e.g. the dominant). Most Romani singers are familiar with which key suits their vocal range for any given song, so they sometimes call out the name of the first chord to change the key (or to ensure that accompanying musicians are already playing in the right key) before they introduce the first phrase of the song. This does not happen secretly; singers often shout it aloud into the microphone along with a stimulating interjection ("Aaaand! A minor!"), making it part of the performance. *Primáši*, on the other hand, tend to change keys more often, although they usually do not communicate these changes in words (cf. ⇨"Making people sing!").

Box #25 – Duj, duj, duj, dešuduj

The song *Duj, duj, duj, dešuduj* is one of the most well-known Romani songs in the former Czechoslovakia, presumably because it was interpreted by Karel Gott (1939–2019), the most celebrated Czechoslovak singer that ever lived. It was written by the Czech Romani composer Antonín Gondolán, and it was released in 1968 by Supraphon.

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The rest of the band usually starts accompanying immediately after the first phrase is introduced, no later than from the second phrase. For instance, in the case of Vladimir Sendrei's favourite song *Duj, duj, duj, dešuduj*.Vlado would sing the first line "Duj, duj, duj, duj, dešuduj" over the fading tones of the previous song, with no accompaniment (if it is the start of a new set, he sings it *a cappella*). At this moment, the band would get ready, and for the second line ("te čumidav, te čumidav parno muj,") all the accompanying instruments would join in at the tempo and key suggested by the singer (or the *primáš*). The bands sometimes follow this pattern too when the first musical phrase is thrown out by someone from the audience (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). This ability to accompany songs without previous preparation and negotiation (sometimes based on audience suggestions) is associated with another set of skills that I will cover in the upcoming section.

“Making people sing!” – Tailoring Repertoire and Musical Flexibility

> Like the *gádže* audience, like our playing [*Save gadže, avka bašavas*].
>
> Romani proverb.
>
> One evening in October 2018, I followed the Sendreiovci band to Králiky near Banská Bystrica to a pre-election meeting organised by Králiky’s mayor. The event had quite a rich communal programme – from a raffle to a competition for the best homemade plum brandy [*slivovica*] – and the band was expected to perform on the stage only in dedicated time slots between the various parts of the programme. Towards the end of the evening, when the musicians were having a break and were sitting backstage, a man approached them, asking whether they could play the popular Slovak song *Dědina*. “Sure, we can,” said the *primáš* Janko with a warm smile. The man was satisfied with Janko’s response. As soon as he left, Janko started searching for the lyrics on his smartphone. But as the musicians’ pause was coming to an end, Janko realised that he was not entirely confident with the song’s lyrics. “Guys, are we gonna play it?” he asked. “What? *Dědina*? Did he order it?” Martin asked. “He did. But he didn’t pay for it,” Janko replied. The musicians were back on stage in the next few minutes, but the song *Dědina* appeared neither in the upcoming set nor for the rest of the evening.
>
> As soon as the official part of Králiky’s cultural centre programme was over, the musicians started packing up their instruments and moving their sound equipment into the van. At that moment, the people in the small crowd blocked the way for *primáš* Janko in the foyer, asking for more music and shouting over each other the names of their favourite Slovak folk songs. Without hesitation, Janko pulled out his fiddle from its case, pointing at the fingerboard. As soon as the first banknote found its way under the fingerboard, Barna took out his accordion and started accompanying Janko for another set of Slovak folk songs. They played unplugged, singing together, Janko taking the main melodies and Barna adding parallel voicings. Their singing was massively amplified by the cheering crowd. With each new order, more notes appeared on Janko’s fiddle. Meanwhile, the rest of the band carried their cases to the car, barely paying attention to what was happening in the foyer. Barna and Janko performed for about 20 minutes, finishing the performance suddenly as the sound of an engine starting marked the band’s completion of the packing. “So how much?” asked Vlado in the van. “Some 70 euros.” “That’s not bad for such a short while.” Janko handed the money to Vlado, the band’s manager and the lead singer for the evening. When the band made their traditional stop at a gas station, Vlado divided the extra money equally among all the musicians, along with the honorarium for the evening.
>
> 20th of October, 2018, Králiky

Alongside the renowned ability to make people dance, Romani musicians are also known for another special skill: making people sing [*rozospievať ľudí*]. Like the former, this skill has a vital role in the musical economy of Romani entertaining performance and plays a significant part in determining its form. Making people sing can be achieved when musicians play a piece that the audience knows and/or to which it can relate. Just like with the effect of ‘livelier music’ on dancing, the audience’s engagement with the familiar repertoire increases the level of participation and has a positive impact on experiences of flow (cf. ⇦“Making people dance!”). Indeed, performing music that people like to hear is one of the most effective strategies in the Romani toolkit of musical impression management.

Romani musicians perform this strategy successfully thanks to their ability to tailor repertoire for each audience and to their exceptional musical flexibility, which this section aims to cover.

The Romani proverb "like the *gádže* audience, like our playing" (Hubschmannová & Bandyová, 1991, p. 13) grounds the practice of many Romani professional music-maker communities across Europe. Roma have a reputation as 'musical psychologists', as those who have the empathy to access the hearts and minds of their customers and always find the right song – as the following quote laconically summarises: "The doctor cures the body, and the gypsy [*sic*] cures the soul" (Berkes in Sárosi, 1978, p. 199). The strategy of adjusting repertoire according to audience demand and needs has been observed in Bulgaria (e.g. C. Silverman, 2012), Serbia (e.g. van de Port, 1999), Hungary (e.g. Sárosi, 1978) and Romania (Bonini Baraldi, 2021). The latter study – Bonini Baraldi's ethnography from Ceuaş – analyses this strategy in detail, describing the unique ability of Romani musicians to tailor repertoire according to criteria linked to various levels of customers' identities – "national," "regional" and even "personal" – meaning that Romani musicians can customise repertoire down even to the individual level (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, pp. 45–57). Tailoring repertoire should not be seen *only* as a strategy employed by these musicians, though. From the perspective of customers too, demanding a specific piece from Romani musicians is a popular cultural practice in itself. In various parts of the world, it is almost a folk custom to approach Romani musicians demanding one's particular favourite songs. And Romani musicians are expected to live up to their reputation as the most qualified to satisfy these demands. Thus, the ability to adjust repertoire for customers can be seen as a component of Romaness in music – a construct built on heterostereotypical ideas held by non-Roma (and also Romani non-musicians), in turn motivating Romani musicians to acquire and cultivate these skills.

Box #26 – Dědina

The song *Dědina* was written by the Slovak band Ščamba, who come from Eastern Slovakia and began their career in 2000 as a typical (non-Romani) entertaining band [*zábavová kapela*]. The song was released in 2017 and, during my fieldwork, it was still one of the top-played tracks on Slovak radio. In November 2021, it had 21.4 million views on YouTube. Both the song's lyrics and the musical structure clearly refer to the song tradition of Slovak folk (and folklore).

thesis.nuska.me/box/26

In K&K and elsewhere in Slovakia, I have had abundant opportunities to observe this practice of repertoire customisation in various types of performance. I have also encountered the widespread heterostereotype pointing out that Roma are able to play *anything*. For Romani musicians from K&K, thus, it is convenient to meet these expectations; immersing the audience in the repertoire of their preference always results in greater engagement. This grounds the popularity of Romani bands and stimulates the economy of Romani entertaining performance. In my interviews with K&K musicians, they were clearly well aware that playing

what people like makes the performance 'livelier' and the audience happier. It was seen as an important facet of the ultimate goal of Romani music-making – "to get people entertained" [*zabaviť ľudí*] (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!").

This skill of tailoring a performance is among its most evident in the activity described in the opening excerpt (and elsewhere in this thesis) – performing *songs on request*. This activity appears either as a much anticipated part of the programme of a Romani performance (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!") or it may emerge *ad hoc*, without previous preparation, negotiation, or announcement (cf. opening vignette). Among non-Roma in Slovakia, the activity is referred to as "playing to an [audience's] ear" [*hranie do úška*] as musicians approach their audience to almost an intimate distance. The name, and the activity itself, comes from the tradition of café music [*kaviarenské hudby*] (cf. ⇦"Playing traditionally"). The basic form of the activity has not changed to this day, and Slovak people of all generations are familiar with how it works. No matter where I went with K&K musicians in Slovakia, never did non-Roma seem to hesitate about exactly where to attach a note onto the fiddle of the *primáš* to initiate the service. This activity seems to have a deeper anthropological significance: as I have argued elsewhere, the act of placing money onto the fiddle may be interpreted as a ritualised confirmation of the relationship between a non-Romani master and a Romani musical servant (cf. ⇦"Show must go on!").[107]

Romani musicians from K&K often refer to this service as "playing at tables" [*hrať pri stoloch*] or "*earning* at tables" [*zarábať pri stoloch*], as it is typically carried out when Roma leave a dedicated 'musical stage' and move towards the guests sitting at tables (although this activity is not always defined strictly spatially, as the opening vignette illustrates). As is obvious from the Romani terminology, it has a notable economic significance for their music-making – it allows for money to be earned on top of the contracted fee. Musicians can make up to several times more than the honorarium negotiated in advance (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). And as the opening excerpt shows, Romani musicians consider performing songs on request – whether on or away from the stage – as a special service in their business portfolio, one requiring an extra fee ("He did. But he didn't pay for it"). Extra earnings alongside the regular honorarium are often expected both by the musicians and from the audience. And musicians always divide the earnings equally.

I have noticed that the economic motivations for tailoring repertoire and performing songs on request are sometimes strengthened by *špekulanstvo* – the ritualised outsmarting of non-Roma, for which these moments represent ideal occasions. They often take place during late hours when the audience and patrons are drunk and willing to spend a lot of money to hear their favourite tunes. In this case too, the *špekulanstvo* seems to have clearly defined game rules, as connected to ethnic boundaries. It is always non-Roma who are expected to *pay* and Roma

[107] The practice of playing to an ear is illustrated well in the video in which Sendreiovci perform the song *Bubamara* in the hotel Galileo (cf. ⇦Box #22 – Bubamara).

who are expected to *play*. Although Romani clients do demand songs from Romani musicians, I have never seen them pay (or to be expected to pay) for this service (although, it must be said that musicians did not always fulfil their requests). This fact may relate to the motivations for performing *špekulanstvo* I have already discussed – especially resistance against non-Romani 'oppressors' and symbolic strengthening of the (ethnic) group's identity (cf. ⇦"Špekulanstvo"). This is also reflected in another Romani proverb: "A Rom never steals from another Rom" [*Rom Romestar na čorla*] (Hubschmannová & Bandyová, 1991, p. 37). Many stories of exemplary *špekulanstvo* during these activities are shared among musicians to explosions of laughter, and they are remembered for years. Thus, performing songs on request may be seen as part of the ritualised outsmarting of non-Roma. This, apart from its importance in economically profiting from non-Roma, also reflects the meanings of the practice in Romani socio-cultural resistance and ethnic self-empowerment.

Non-Roma often associate the Romani ability to play any song with Romani musical distinctiveness – their 'musical blood'. Nevertheless, I have observed that this ability depends on two major aspects – the importance of building an extensive repertoire and the skill of musical flexibility. In the former, it is mainly the responsibility of *primáši* and lead singers to build a repertoire that will sustain 'lively' music throughout the performance. Each *primáš* and singer has their specialities – their repertoire niches. Building such repertoire niches is as common today as it was in the history of the K&K musical craft. Janko Gazda senior, for instance, told me once that while the *primáš* Miško Grbato was a specialist in fast Hungarian *čardáše*, the *primáš* Drôto was an expert in Slovak folk songs (⇦Box #10 – Miško Grbato Cibuľa; ⇦Box #9 – Imrich Drôto Oláh). Their repertoire specialisations are what they are remembered for these days. Despite the divergence of the majority's musical tastes and the expanding territory in which musicians operate (thanks to cars), repertoire specialisations have remained important in K&K. Another *primáš*, Karol Radič, for instance, is one of the few musicians from the K&K musical network who still does business in Hungary. For these occasions, he has needed to acquire the repertoire of *magyar nóta* and Hungarian folk songs. Thus, Karol is the number one choice whenever the Sendreiovci play anywhere near the Hungarian border (or in Hungary). To give another example, the repertoire speciality of the singer Barna Cibuľa is – in his own words – 'modern music' [*moderná hudba*]. This means quite a diverse musical repertoire – Gypsy Kings, Queen, Chris Rea, Juanes, Elán, Michal David, Meky Žbirka, Bratři Nedvědi and many more. Thus, Barna is a welcome member of the Sendreiovci band when they expect an audience from the younger generation or from larger Slovak towns and cities where – as musicians claimed to me – Slovak folk music is less popular than in the countryside. For both Karol and Barna, their respective repertoire specialities define their music-economic niches and help them find opportunities to earn their living by performing their craft.

Yet, very different repertoire specialisations do not prevent Barna and Karol from performing together on one stage. "It doesn't matter what or how you play it. The important thing is to know how to *adapt* [*vedieť sa prispôsobiť*]," I often heard from musicians. Others described the same musical virtue in similar words: "a musician needs to be flexible" [*flexibilný*], "universal" [*univerzálny*], and an "all-rounder" [*všestranný*]. Musical adaptability and flexibility include not just the ability to play any repertoire but also the ability to play under any circumstances, with any fellow musicians (and fellow musical instruments), in any style, tempo, key and so forth. It is also very common among Romani musicians in K&K to play more than one musical instrument. "When you get to know your instrument [*poznať nástroj*], it's so easy to get to know another one," musicians repeatedly told me. Adaptability is hence one of the most valued features of a good musician among Roma in K&K.

In the eyes (and the ears) of non-Roma, musical adaptability ("they can play *anything*") is heterostereotypically associated with Romani musical distinctiveness. Romani musicians show off this special skill and sometimes go as far as amazing their audience by playing songs the musicians have never even heard before. Janko Gazda described such a situation in an interview:

> "I remember us playing at an event somewhere [...] During a pause, a guy came up to ask: 'Guys, do you know these two songs?' and he named two songs I had never heard of before. But it didn't matter. We went out to have a cigarette with my cell phone and opened up YouTube. I found these two songs and played them, saying to my bandmates: 'Guys, listen to them carefully, we're playing that in five minutes!' [...] When the guy heard his favourite songs, he was amazed. He said: 'Whoa! I've never seen anything like it. Here, have 50 euros!'"
>
> Interview with Janko 'Gazda jr' Oláh, 18th of May 2015, Klenovec

This phenomenon raises the eyebrows of non-Romani audiences and represents something the musicians are duly proud of. "People often ask us: 'do you have absolute pitch, or what?'" reported Janko Gazda Jr. to me with a laugh, as he knew that absolute pitch is as rare among Roma as it is among non-Roma.[108] Yet, there is one related skill that professional Romani musicians do consider an important component of their music-making, and part of what distinguishes their music-making from that of non-Roma: the ability to "play by ear" [*hrať od počutie*; *hrať z ucha*; *hrať podľa sluchu etc.*]. Laco – a *bráča* player from Kokava who started playing music only at the age of 28 – made an interesting comment about this skill: "I don't

[108] "I knew one cimbalist who had [absolute pitch]. I saw that someone slammed a door and he could say what note it was. [...] When he was playing the cimbalom, he sometimes played with one hand and tuned the cimbalom up with the other [...] [But] in my all life, I have only met this one guy who possessed it," Laco – a *bráča* player from Kokava – told me in an interview (Nuska, 2015b, p. 71). Although I did not specifically research absolute pitch in K&K, I have not myself met a musician who had (or claimed to have) absolute pitch. Once I played a game of guessing the note in a pub with the young musicians David, Dalibor, Miňo and Vlado, but it seemed that neither 'Romani blood', 'music-aristocratic' ancestry, early musical experience, nor formal musical training had led to the emergence of absolute pitch in any of them.

know how [it] occurs. They say you need to play and play and, after some time, your *ears get opened up* [*uši sa ti otvoria*]."

While *primáši* and singers are primarily responsible for ensuring that there is musical material (repertoire) to be played, the responsibility of the rest of the band is to musically follow the *primáš*/singer immediately and wherever they go – whether into speciality repertoire or pieces they do not know at all. This concerns accompanying instruments – such as *bráča*, double bass, cimbalom, accordion, guitar and digital keyboard. While most K&K Romani musicians cannot read music,[109] all of them are familiar with the names of particular keys or – as they say – *chords* [*akordy*]. Chord names serve as the main code of communication, whether ahead of a performance or during its course. When, for instance, there is an abrupt change in key between songs and the musicians struggle to find the right one, other musicians help out the rest of the band by calling out the name of the first chord. I have noticed that for K&K Romani musicians, the first chord of the song has more determining weight than the actual key. Musicians tend to say that they play "from a chord" [*z akordu*] – for instance, "*from* A minor" [*z á molu*], rather than what is more common in colloquial Slovak "*in* A minor" [*v a mol*]. For example, when a song starts with a dominant chord, such as the G major in the key of C, musicians communicate it as a "G major" song. This, nevertheless, seems to have minimal impact on the ability to flawlessly accompany the song with the appropriate harmony.

Setting the first chord is typically the task of the *primáš*, although sometimes cimbalists or keyboardists can substitute in this role because – as musicians explained to me – they can quickly try out a whole variety of keys. In the middle of a musical performance, the names of keys in Slovak may often sound hardly distinguishable from each other (e.g. '*a mol*' [A minor] sounds similar to '*h mol*' [B minor]; '*d mol*' [D minor] sounds similar to '*b mol*' [B flat minor] etc.). For this reason, musicians have developed a specific system for clarifying: "D is Dežo […] E is Eva, F is Fero, G is Gejza, A is Adam and so on," Janko Gazda Jr. explained to me (cf. also Nuska, 2016, pp. 72–76).[110] The first chord of a particular song, when it is needed, is usually the only information the musicians communicate. Then, the ability to approximate and play the subsequent harmonic progression is exactly what musicians call "playing by ear" and what I call *flexibility in harmony*.

In my MA work, I also studied the skill of *key mobility* – that is, "the ability to immediately transpose to the key in which a song is being played" (cf. also Nuska, 2015b, pp. 69–72, 2016, p. 75). This skill also has a vital role in the music business. As Janko Deme told me: "When a *gádžo* starts singing, say, in E minor, I can't tell

[109] Although this has been gradually changing (cf. ⇦From Transmission to Adaptation; ⇨"I Want to Break Free!").

[110] Similar nicknaming of keys to facilitate communication in performance may be found elsewhere, e.g., in American country music (cf. Fox, 2004, p. 173).

him: 'hey, hang on! This is fine, but do you mind if we play it in another key?' This cannot happen. You need to follow and play it in any key immediately!"[111] My earlier work considered the skill of key mobility a common trait of Romani music-making in K&K and one of the results of the specific music enculturation of K&K Roma (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 69–72, 2016, pp. 75–76). A longer-term perspective on my research, however, has uncovered this phenomenon to be more complex. Key mobility is actually an advanced skill that not all Romani musicians possess. It is an ability associated with great prestige and something that K&K "musical aristocracy" stress as a sign of true musicianship: "Among us, a musician who's not able to play in any key is not a musician," the older Janko Gazda concluded.

But key mobility – that is, the ability to play in *any* key, including unconventional ("difficult") ones – does not come as naturally as I previously reported. In K&K, some musicians are recognised for possessing this skill, but others are known for struggling with it. While they would hardly admit it themselves, I heard this from their fellow musicians (and promised not to reveal their names). During my fieldwork, I also encountered various comments suggesting that even for the most experience musicians, some keys are simpler ("Beautiful is what is simple. Let's play it in A minor"), and some are more difficult ("He was such a great musician that he even knew how to play in F sharp minor").[112] Thus, the skill that Romani musicians talk proudly about, "to play any song in whichever key a drunk *gádžo* starts singing it," should be regarded with some reservations. Most of the time, Romani musicians do not need key mobility to perform their craft. As I have noted, musical sets are often played in one key or a few closely related ones (cf. ⇦"And we are going on!"). Moreover, Romani musicians seem to prefer conventional keys to unconventional ones. Julo – a non-professional musician from Dolinka – once told me: "B flat minor [*B mol*]? I've never heard of such a chord. Listen, I know all Gypsy Koro [a Romani band] songs by heart. All of them are either in A minor, C minor or D minor. We, Gypsies, like things simple." When the situation of the "drunk *gádže*" who starts singing occurs, they are either good singers who sing in the same (or a closely related) key ("When you stop playing, people still have the tones of the previous song in mind. This makes things easier for us," Janko Gazda

[111] I have repeatedly heard this, in similar words, from many K&K musicians, especially *primáši*, who are responsible for mediating the communication between the singing audience and the band. Interestingly, the same saying (again, almost in the same words) was recorded by Hübschmannová in an interview with Jožko Fečo – a renowned Czech Romani *primáš* of Slovak origin (Hübschmannová, 1997).

[112] It is also worth mentioning that these more conventional keys are also a popular choice for music played at *bašávely*. Imro – a Romani non-professional (playing keyboard and drums) living in Dolinka who used to organise local *bašávely* – once handed me a list of songs he had made for playing with his friends. The list contained 59 Romani songs, for each of which he marked bpm units (for setting automatic beats on the digital keyboard) and key. 24 songs were in A minor, 15 in D minor, 12 in E minor and one in C minor. As for major keys, there were five in G, two in C and one in A. It is worth considering, though, that this preponderance of certain keys may not just be typical for Romani music-making (whether professional or non-professional) but in fact reflect trends in other kinds of music too, especially those that feature piano/keyboard and/or guitar (cf. Palermino, 2015; cf. also ⇦Essential Note #1).

Jr. explained to me); or they may be a bad singer, in response to which a Romani *primáš* usually has the space to manipulate the tune and settle it down into a convenient key for the rest of the band.

While key mobility is a rather advanced musical skill in the K&K context, the ability to "play by ear" seems to be a firm part of Romani musical knowledge and a universal trait of Roma-ness in music. "Playing by ear" is the ability that Roma stress as their major point of difference from the musicianship of non-Roma, and it is something I encountered not only on musical stages with Romani professional musicians but also at various informal *bašávely* around K&K. Flexibility in harmonic playing is one of the most important components of Romani musicians' overall flexibility. This is the mechanism behind the renowned Romani ability "to play *anything*," including songs they have never heard. It is the reason why Romani musicians can tailor repertoire for every occasion, making any audience truly excited and, eventually, "making people sing." I have also observed that "playing by ear" is closely related to the phenomenon of so-called *Romani chords*. I found these Romani chords an important aspect of Romani music-making, reflecting Romani musical aesthetics and forms of impression management, and a cognitive model of musical enculturation which can bring a greater understanding of how Romani musicians grow into their music-adaptation skills. This thesis does not elaborate on this topic, but it represents an exciting opportunity for further research (cf. ⇨Seven Questions for Future Research #7).

“I Want to Break Free!” – Closing Remarks

> “Heeeyyy!” The quiet string jam on motives from the popular Romani song *Rátyijicá* is interrupted by a sharp whistle and loud exclamation from Jaro Zvara, the leader of the Vepor ensemble. “Don’t you get it? There are new dancers today! You’re just messing with their heads with your playing! If there were old dancers, I wouldn’t mind you playing whatever!” The young Vepor musicians – David, Dalibor, Vlado, Miňo and Janko – look guiltily at each other. It was the third time Jaro had interrupted their playing. For this rehearsal, they had gathered in full numbers and, as if to celebrate this rare occurrence, they played their favourite pieces whenever they had a break from accompanying the ensemble’s dancers. So the rehearsal was sprinkled with all sorts of music, including jazz standards, Hungarian songs and renowned Romani music hits. Even when playing for the dancers, the Romani musicians smuggled inconspicuous pieces of ‘artistic sabotage’ into the Slovak folk songs – David ornamented them with complex (“Hungarian”) trills and Dalibor peppered some of the accompanying harmony with dense jazz chords on the cimbalom. “A minor sixth!” he commented silently, a final chord that existed audibly outside of the Slovak-folklore box. The band secretly and mischievously chuckled. After the second warning from Jaro Zvara, their artistic sabotage became barely audible, yet their faces were intently fixed on each other and every attempt to spice up the folklore music was followed by subtle smiles. It was hard to tell whether it was due to their enthusiasm for playing the music they liked together, or whether it was an attempt to annoy Vepor’s leader. After the third warning, though, the off-topic playing ceased entirely, and the smiles disappeared from their faces. Now, they played strictly according to the ensemble’s instructions, filling pauses only with quiet conversation.
>
> I caught up with them on the stage later in the evening, when the dancers headed to the dressing rooms and the musicians, finally, had a little while to play what *they* liked. “From the chords you play, it seems you like jazz, right?” I asked Dalibor in between songs. “Sure thing! That’s what I absolutely love. Jazz and classics!” “Yeah, that’s what I would also love to try so much – some experimental music with elements of jazz or classics. I was hoping to join some experimental music projects when I started at the conservatory in Košice, but so far, I haven’t had any luck,” the *primáš* David added. Stanka Zvarová – Jaro’s wife and one of two most important leaders of Vepor – stood nearby and overheard our conversation. Stepping forward, she spoke up: “Guys, I wanted to talk to you about that. I understand you also like different kinds of music, but here, in folklore, you really should maintain the tradition. Here, it’s important to play authentically, like your ancestors did, like the *primáš* Drôto, for example.” More than a reproach, her comment sounded like a plea stemming from sincere concern. The musicians lowered their eyes shyly and murmured in agreement.
>
> 10th of March 2019, Klenovec

This last substantive chapter has shown that Roma-ness in music plays a vital role in the economy of the Romani musical craft in K&K. Its enactment in performance functions on the basis of complex social constructs – symbolic markers of Roma-ness. These are held by the non-Romani majority – the most important ‘client’ that makes the economy of Romani music-making in K&K profitable. These constructs are based on non-Romani heterostereotypes about Romani ethnic distinctiveness, mainly concerning ‘strangeness’ and ‘musical blood’. Romani musicians tend to autostereotypically identify with these constructs and enact them on a musical stage. This is especially the case for ‘entertaining performances’, the main engine of the K&K musical economy. Roma are anticipated to deliver a ‘livelier’ performance than non-Roma; ‘livelier’ music, thus, can be considered a symbolic

marker of Roma-ness in music. To make 'livelier' music, Romani musicians need to bring distinguishable qualities to their performances. The main musical impression management strategies include increasing the audience's engagement by 'making people dance' and 'making people sing'. This concluding section aims to reflect upon these main arguments, contextualise them against arguments from previous parts of the thesis and, finally, focus on contemporary tendencies (and changes) in the performance of Roma-ness in K&K.

On the topic of Roma-ness in music, it is worth returning to the question in the essential note at the start of this chapter: how does Roma-ness in professional music-making relate to Romani aesthetics and musical aesthetics in general? I have also encountered many of the musical features that in this chapter I cast as linked to impression management strategies (e.g. distinctive treatment of tempo, special care for musical continuity etc.) during informal *bašavely* in Romani households, where music is performed by Romani musicians (mostly non-professional) for other Roma. During such events, these features of Roma-ness in music do not have any economic function. Thus, it is misleading to talk about them merely as professional impression management *strategies*. From the perspective of ethnicity theory, these features of Roma-ness in music may still be seen as a distinctive form of Romani ethnic performance: *bašávely* are events strengthening communal identity and expressing resistance against non-Romani oppressors (cf. ⇦Peculiarities of Romani Ethnicity). Simply put, it is a kind of Roma-ness that Roma perform for *themselves*. Nevertheless, returning to the question from the introductory essential note, what if such an interpretation were purely anthropological speculation and Roma perform music this way simply because this is how *they* like it? Where does Romani aesthetics (and musical aesthetics more broadly) end and the intentional impression management performed by Romani professionals begin? This question also relates to the issue I touched upon in the introduction – the question of Romani music and the music of Roma (cf. ⇦From 'Romani Music' to Romani Musical Craft). The great variability of Romani music cultures is mainly determined by borrowing from the music cultures of surrounding majorities. And, with rare exceptions (e.g. Vlach Roma in Hungary), this musical borrowing is influenced significantly by the music-economic relationships of Romani professional musicians to non-Romani audiences. Considering Romani music (and the music of Roma) from this angle, perhaps distinguishing Romani aesthetics from professional impression management is analogous to resolving the chicken-egg question. Whether (or to what extent) Roma-ness in music results from Romani aesthetic or intentional impression-management strategies certainly represents a vast area for further consideration and dedicated research. Yet, there should be no doubt that Roma-ness in music does have a distinctive function in music-economic exchange with non-Roma.

It is also worth reflecting on what 'Romani music' means in this particular context of entertaining performances aimed at non-Roma. The notion of 'Romani music' itself can be seen as a part of the Roma-ness *construct* – possibly the most intentional component, upon which Romani musicians need to work consciously. This came to light especially when I analysed the repertoire featured in the

entertaining performances of all K&K bands and found striking similarities between those performing in various musical styles. Moreover, what 'Romani music' means to non-Roma seems to be constructed on a national level. By chance, I took part in a performance by the band Lomnické čháve in Liptovský Mikuláš.

The band was performing there at a beer festival, which was almost exclusively attended by non-Roma. I was perplexed to find that their repertoire was a virtual carbon copy of that of the Sendreiovci and indeed any other K&K entertaining band. Featured songs included *Dneska vám tu zábavu hráme*, *Keď som išiel cez Košice sám*, *Ó maňo*, *Acalari bomba*, *Načo pôjdem domov*, *Povedz kde si včera bol*, *Na cigánskej svadbe u nás*, *Topoľčianska zlatokopka* and *Ó poštaris avel*. I have noticed that these Romani songs are almost a guarantee that a non-Romani audience will not only start dancing but also *singing* – they have been so massively popularised that many Slovaks know them by heart and sing them along with the Romani bands (including for songs with Romani lyrics; like *Ó maňo*, *Acalari bomba*, *Ó poštaris avel*). As Romani bands are expected to play 'Romani music', it is almost a must to include these popular "Gypsy songs" in the repertoire, whether the musicians like them or not. Vlado once explained: "I can tell you that Janka hates the song *Povedz kde si včera bol*. She just hates it! But people want to hear it, so what can you do?" As I will show later in this section, performing Roma-ness on the musical stage often contradicts the demands of musicians' creative and artistic self-realisation.

Box #27 – Lomnické čháve

The band Lomnické čháve [The Lads from Lomnica] – who come from a segregated Romani settlement in Veľká Lomnica in northern Slovakia – was made famous thanks to the documentary The Band (dir. by Ladislav Kaboš, 2018). This narrative documentary (scripted and mostly controlled by the director) depicts the difficult beginnings of the band and their gradual growth as professional music-makers, with a hopeful climax showing them performing at the largest Slovak music festival Pohoda. Yet, the documentary leaves viewers with an ambivalent message at the end: the 'Band' ceased performing and their members took their musical instruments to pawnshops (not for the first time). The film is an interesting probe revealing that Roma-ness in music (as described in this chapter) is to be found far beyond the K&K region. The attached video shows a performance by Lomnické čháve on a Slovak TV show Czechia Slovakia's Got Talent in 2019. Their performance features many techniques and strategies of musical impression management described in this chapter. Similarly, the jury's reactions clearly show how the perception of Romani music(-making) is based on pre-existing essentialising views on Roma.

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Once again, this chapter has brought to light a special trait of K&K Roma – their socio-cultural adaptability. As I have already argued, adaptability in the musical performance of K&K Roma may be seen as a reflection of a skill emerging in the constant need to adapt – both to challenging socio-economic conditions and to problematic co-existence with the non-Romani majority (cf. also ⇦"You need to know how to adapt!"). The emergence of musical adaptation skills also broadly reflects the anthropological position of the Romani musical craft. I discussed in one of the introductory sections that while the ability to (musically) adapt may be considered a result of specific enculturation, on the other hand, this specific musical enculturation is a result of a specific need to adapt (cf. ⇦From Transmission to Adaptation). This is also why processes of musical enculturation have recently been changing, as I will show later in this section. I have described musical adaptability as possibly the most valued feature among Romani musicians. It is not only a criterium of musical mastery but it also carries an important potential in the music business. At the same time, however, this skill often re-confirms the dehumanising position of 'Romani musical serfdom' (cf. ⇦"Show must go on!"). To tailor a particular repertoire and to play songs on demand is an important sign of Roma-ness in music, and it is often expected of Romani musicians – whether they like it or not – just because they are Roma. This issue is illustrated through the example of two *primáši* who often perform with the Sendreiovci band – Karol and Martin.

Box #28 – Povedz kde si včera bol

Povedz kde si včera bol [Tell Me Where You Were Yesterday] is one of the most popular contemporary Romani songs in Slovakia. It is easily memorable thanks to its simple (Slovak) lyrics, which are repeated over and over again. In the verses, a woman addresses a man "[: Tell me where you were yesterday, you're wasted again / You're totally wasted, you'll explain that to me now :]. And then, the man replies to the woman in the choruses [: Love, I like you, I love you, I adore you so much / now you don't believe me cause I'm drunk / I'm gonna marry you :]. The most famous version of this song is that by David band from 2017 (which has 12.5 million YouTube views today) but it was performed by other Romani bands before them (e.g. Gypsy Štrba), so it is hard to tell who should be credited with the Slovak lyrics. My colleague Francesca Cireddu – an Italian ethnomusicologist – helped me to discover that the verses bear a striking resemblance to an Italo disco song from the 1980s, *L'estate sta finendo* [The Summer is Ending], written and performed by the duo Righeira, while the choruses are vaguely similar to another – even more famous – 80s Italo disco hit, *Sarà perché ti amo* [It must be so because I love you] by Ricchi e Poveri. I have heard this song many times not only on musical stages but also at informal Romani *bašávely*, always played with great passion. The first video is a montage showing this song in seven different contexts of the K&K musical soundscape – including professional performances and informal settings. The second video shows the most popular Romani version, that by David band. The third and fourth videos feature the original Italo disco songs that likely inspired this contemporary Romani hit.

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Karol Radič comes from a family of Klenovec musicians, but nowadays he lives in Hnúšťa. He is well-known and appreciated for his ability to satisfy *any* need of *any* audience. "He is so flexible that he wouldn't have a problem playing a Japanese song if he was asked to [...] He knows how to tune people up, and that's why people love him," his bandmate Janko Gazda Jr. told me in an interview. Karol's impressive skills in musical adaptability have been developed and strengthened thanks to his long career as an entertaining performer. I found him on one of the Carrets' photographs from 1988 performing at a wedding ceremony with his father Špuko and brother Ondro when he was only 15 years old. Karol does not have any formal musical education. He cannot read music and sometimes makes fun of musicians who need to have scores in front of them to perform ("These are paper musicians [*papieroví muzikanti*]," I once heard him say).

Box #29 – Karol Radič

Primáš Karol Radič with his brother Ondrej Radič (on accordion) and father Ondrej Radič (on *bráča*) – both nicknamed Špuko – in photographs by Claude and Marie-José Carret from 1984.

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The second *primáš* of Sendreiovci is Martin Horváth. He comes from Hnúšťa but lives in Rimavská Sobota where he also teaches violin at the Private Music and Drama Conservatory [*Súkromné hudobné a dramatické konzervatórium*]. Unlike Karol, Martin pursued a path of formal music education. He completed a secondary art-school [*stredná umelecká škola*] education in Košice and later also gained an MA [*Mgr.*] degree in music pedagogy. Martin seems to have a different approach to music, and this defines his specific role in the K&K music network. "He is an excellent choice for concerts where he can just stand up and show off his mastery. But he's not good for parties," one of his fellow musicians told me. "I have seen this many times. He would be asked to play a [Slovak] folk song. But he would say: 'I don't know this one' and return the money. Once, I saw him declining an offer of 200 euros." As musicians told me, Martin has his own sources of pride, related to his reputation as an educated musician. In this sense, the habitus of the educated Romani musician seems to partially contradict the habitus of the Romani musician–entertainer.

At the beginning of my research in 2013, I was convinced that informal and non-institutionalised music education is one of the most important pillars of musical enculturation in K&K. As I noted at the very beginning of this thesis, it is now obvious that this idea was highly generalising and partly misleading (cf. ⇦From Transmission to Adaptation). There has always been a *minority* of K&K musicians who have pursued formal musical education, and it is by no means a negligible minority. Over time, the proportion seems to be growing and becoming more and more significant for the entire K&K musical craft and its economy. Among Roma in K&K, those with musical education are called *notisti* (sing. *notista*) – that is,

those who can read music.[113] In the Romani musical business, *notisti* are especially valued and appreciated. Some musicians, including the young musicians from the opening excerpts, become *notisti* after pursuing musical education from early childhood. Others study music as adults, not least Janko Gazda Jr. and Janko Deme, who I interviewed about their experience with formal musical education in 2015. They told me that music education had given them "confidence" and "deeper insights" into music. But, most importantly, it gives them an "advantage over the others."

The musical education of K&K Roma can be looked at from the perspective of the Red Queen effect (cf. ⇦"Show must go on!"). I have already pointed out that parents of young Romani musicians consider musical education to be an advantage – whether over non-Roma ("You are a Gypsy, you need to show more than a *white*," Janko Deme told me) or Roma ("It used to be enough that a Gypsy took a violin and squeaked something out on it. But that's not enough today," Janko Gazda added). Due perhaps to the Red Queen effect, many musicians have completely dropped out of the music business. Jarko Berky – a guitarist and one of the founding members of Sendreiovci – is one such person. As Janka Sendreiová explained to me, Jarko was simply "not good enough to keep pace with the band."[114]

In this sense, musical education seems to be an important advantage in performing the musical craft, as formally educated musicians have a firmer place in the music business. They often also get more lucrative opportunities outside of the K&K Romani network of entertaining performances. For example, the accordion player Tibor Kökény – ten years ago one of the core members of the Sendreiovci – now performs with the renowned Slovak band Para.[115] Roland Horváth – a clarinet player and also a core member from around the same period – is now a director of the Primary Art School [*Základná umelecká škola*] in Jesenské. When I met him on New Year's Eve of 2018 in Hnúšťa, he told me: "Isn't it interesting that those who pulled the Sendreiovci up no longer play with them? No wonder. Vlado pays badly. I would go to perform for 50 euros, and no more! I started when I was six years old. I studied at a high school in Budapest, and I even

[113] I have noticed that in K&K Romani discourses, the difference between formally and informally educated musicians is often equated to the ability to read music. Obviously, a musician can learn this skill without pursuing formal educational training, and I have met musicians like this in K&K. Mostly, they had grasped the skill when collaborating with other 'literate' (and mostly non-Romani) musicians; for instance, playing for bands during compulsory military service or playing in the folklore ensembles Vepor and Kokavan. In some cases, the ability to read music had been transmitted across generations within the musician community. For instance, Píďo, the brother of Janko Gazda and father of David and Miňo, was not able to read music until – as his wife told me with a laugh – "he picked it up from his son." Despite this, Roma in K&K use the term *notisti* as a direct equivalent for someone who has pursued institutionalised music education.

[114] As one of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic, Jarko Berky died in December 2020 at the age of 47.

[115] Para is a Slovak (non-Romani) pop-rock band from Bratislava, performing since 1995. Matúš Vallo – the mayor of Bratislava from 2018 and an important friend of Vladimir Sendrei (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!") – is a member of this band, playing bass guitar.

got a university degree in music. And you get 50 euros for all that? No way, that's not a fair price! A hundred is the very minimum!" Thus, musical education not only makes musicians more valued in the K&K musicians' network but it also opens up better opportunities for musicians, often within the realm of the *formal* economy, providing some elementary social security. And importantly, these opportunities are chances to *break free* of the musical serfdom of entertaining performance.

As I have discussed in this chapter, non-Romani popular discourses attribute Romani musicality to their ethnic distinctiveness. Non-Roma like to believe that Romani musical skills emerge from their 'strangeness' and from their 'musical blood'. These beliefs are often expressed in sayings such as "they don't go to music schools…" or "they can't even read music…" and "…*yet* they are excellent musicians." Thus, the absence of formal musical education can be seen as a symbolic marker of Roma-ness in music. Moreover, it is often heard from both non-Roma and Roma that Romani 'strangeness' and 'musical blood' are caused and conditioned by the absence of institutionalised education. This seems to be a deep-layered construct. For instance, Sárosi comments on an article from 1869 that talks about the "degeneration" of Romani music with the following note: "Most people saw the main reason for this degeneration, strangely, in that the gypsy [*sic*] musicians developed, became educated, studied, and in this way diluted with foreign elements the ancient Hungarian musical tradition […] preserved by them" (Sárosi, 1978, p. 136). In other words, it has long been believed that Roma should stay outside of music schools to preserve the distinctive *Romani* qualities of their music.

Indeed, I encountered this way of thinking among Roma in K&K, especially in the cases of musicians of the older generation, and among Romani non-musicians. They stressed the difference between Romani and non-Romani music-making: non-Roma "drill music from notes on the page at schools" while Roma engage with music "emotionally," "intuitively," and "bring it from the heart" (cf. ⇦From 'Musical blood' to Roma-ness in Music). These self-essentialising autostereotypes about lacking education while compensating for it with distinctive ethnic qualities are a firm part of the social constructs of 'Romani strangeness' and 'Romani musical blood' I have discussed. An analogous situation was observed by Miles Davis – one of the most prominent jazzmen in history – in his autobiography. He was critical of black jazz musicians based in New York in the 1940s for not going to music schools or learning anything about music theory as they were afraid of losing the feeling in their performances, turning them into playing like *white* musicians. He concluded: "Knowledge is freedom and ignorance is slavery, and I just couldn't believe someone could be that close to freedom and not take advantage of it" (Davis & Troupe, 2011, pp. 60–61).

Paraphrasing Miles, it seems that Roma in K&K are nowadays fully aware of the freedom that musical education provides, and their approaches to music education are changing. Educated musicians have a firmer place in the K&K business network, and, occasionally, they are lucky enough to find lucrative job

opportunities outside. Moreover, education opens up horizons of creative freedom that can take musicians beyond the musical constraints associated with the tight niches of the K&K musical economy, defined by styles, genres, repertoire and also conceptions of what 'Romani music' and a 'Romani band' means to their clients. Musical education, thus, is increasingly explored as a way out of musical serfdom, through the potential for creative self-realisation. As the opening excerpt of this section shows, though, the walls around Romani musical niches are quite high and *breaking free* is by no means a simple task. From time to time, thus, musicians craving musical innovation and experimentations are asked to play *authentically*, like one of their ancestors born more than a century ago. Moreover, musical education is not available to everyone. Sending young K&K Roma to music schools requires a significant investment of economic capital that not every family can afford. It is no coincidence that the highest prevalence of educated musicians is found in the families of "rooted musicians" (cf. ⇦"Romani aristocracy").[116]

Besides formal musical education, I have encountered another remarkable path for attempting to break free from musical serfdom and moving towards artistic self-realisation – performing Romani music for Roma. As I have noted, the clear majority of income for K&K Romani musicians comes from entertaining performances, in which the most prominent (and preferred) clients are non-Roma (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). I have also noted that many professional Romani musicians consider 'Romani music' (or, too much Roma-ness in music) to equate to music of dubious quality (cf. ⇦"And we are going on!"). Yet, some musicians find musical self-realisation in 'Romani music for Roma' and, to an extent, they have managed to turn this into a music-economic niche with a certain degree of profitability. Generally speaking, though, this path requires a lot of travelling; it would not be profitable if limited only to the K&K region.[117] And also, musicians tend to combine this niche with involvement in 'standard' entertaining performance.

[116] And even the most prominent K&K Romani families often seek external support to sustain their children's (musical) education economically. For instance, musicians Dalibor Cibuľa and David Oláh are recipients of stipends awarded by the Slovak NGO Divé máky [The Wild Poppies], which supports talented Romani students in pursuing their education. Other K&K Roma who have received these awards in the past include Slávka Oláhová – Gazda's Jr. daughter – for studying singing and Janko Deme for studying medicine (cf. ⇦"Roma like us").

[117] I once had an interesting discussion about the commodification of 'Romani music' with Carol Silverman – an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist dealing with Romani music in various places. She brought to my attention that from the perspective of the 'World music' market, Romani (or Gypsy) music tends to be understood as Gypsy brass bands from the Balkans. In this respect, Romani musicians coming from different music-cultural backgrounds may have a significant disadvantage for commodifying their music on the world stage in comparison with Balkans brass bands. This assumption is certainly worth further exploration.

The young keyboardist Peťo Farkaš is a typical example of a musician pursuing this kind of music career. I met him for the first time in spring 2019 when he was 15 years old. I helped him to film a rehearsal of his start-up Romani band, during which they enthusiastically performed famous Romani music hits for upload on their YouTube channel (later, we agreed not to develop this footage further as the musical performance was – in his own words – "totally unlistenable"). In the summer of the same year, however, he replaced most of the band's members and took the new line-up to the Balvalfest – the Romani festival in Kokava organised by Vladimir's NGO Láčho drom, which is attended mostly by local Roma. His band – performing under the modest name 'Live band' – were squeezed into a short time slot between famous Romani bands, and they played without any remuneration ("First, we need to get ourselves a good reputation" [*urobiť si meno*]). When I brought him the music video I had filmed at the Balvalfest (a cover of Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely*), he proudly uploaded it on YouTube and – following the manner of his music role models (many of whom he took selfies with at the Balvalfest) – he included his phone number in the video description.

Box #30 – Peťo Farkaš and the 'Live band'

Peťo Farkaš and his 'Live band' performed this song at Balvalfest on the 24th of August 2019. I put the name 'Live band' into quotation marks for the same reason as I did for the 'Folk band' (cf. ⇦Box #7 – 'Folk Band' from Klenovec) – I have never seen this name appear again among the many videos featured on his YouTube profile.

thesis.nuska.me/box/30

After the concert, he reflected: "I tell you honestly. I like music so much that I would love to make a living from it. But I don't like the old Gypsy style, like *čardáše* and stuff. I think modern [*moderné*] styles like rhumba – that is, I think, the future of Gypsy music!" It did not take long before Peťo found another musical engagement: he started performing with the rising star of contemporary Slovak Romani music Anička Oláhová.

Like others among his K&K peers, Peťo has started studying the piano at a music high school. I met him again in summer 2021, during the school holiday. He was impatiently waiting to turn 18 to get his driving license, which would allow him to be more independent in his music business endeavours. His calendar was full of gigs, so I could hardly chase him down for a catch-up. There were not only gigs

with Aničká Oláhová, though. During my absence from the field, he had also been incorporated into the Sendreiovci band/network and, twice a week for the entire summer, he was heading with Vladimir's band to *entertain* hotel guests for 50 euros per night.

Box #31 – Aničká Oláhová

Anna (publicly known by the diminutive version of her name Aničká) Oláhová comes from Lovinobaňa (about 50 km from Klenovec) and a modest background. She first came to wide public attention in 2011 when – at the age of 11 – she won the second edition of Romani Superstar. She then took part in the Czech-based Romani children's choir Čhavorenge, under the supervision of Ida Kellarová, who said about Aničká that she is a "once-in-a-thousand-years talent." Although Aničká became a mother at the age of 16, it did not prevent her from continuing her music career, and today she is one of the most talked-about Slovak Romani singers, collaborating with the most famous Romani artists. She performs with her band (pragmatically named the Aničká Oláhová band), which (alongside Peťo Farkaš on keyboard) features two other young musicians from Klenovec – bass guitarist Majo and singer Tomáš. The band's manager is Vladimir Sendrei's son Vladimir.

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To conclude, thanks to Roma-ness in music, K&K Roma have sustained their living for generations. From certain perspectives, however, Roma-ness may be a source of restriction for musicians. They often need to maintain Roma-ness in music due to uncertain socio-economic prospects and a role that is defined by so-called 'tradition'. Roma-ness clearly sets out *what* songs musicians are supposed to play and *how* to play them. It makes Romani musicians so economically dependent on non-Romani clients that the situation verges on symbolic musical serfdom, preventing them from making the most of their creative potential. Music education and performing Romani music for Roma seem to be the best ways to *break free* from these limits imposed by Roma-ness. And some K&K musicians – especially the youngest ones – explore these paths with a mixture of successes and failures.

Conclusions and Reflections

This thesis has presented an ethnographic case study focusing on the professional music-making of Roma in two south-central Slovak municipalities, Klenovec and Kokava nad Rimavicou. I explored this musical craft as a cultural practice distinctive of local Roma, and as a specific adaptation to challenging socio-economic and socio-political conditions. The main contribution of this work lies in the original linkage of three analytical perspectives in the exploration of this phenomenon: I scrutinised its role in Romani ethnicity performance, investigated it as an informal economic system and, finally, I analysed manifestations of Roma-ness in professional music-making practices.

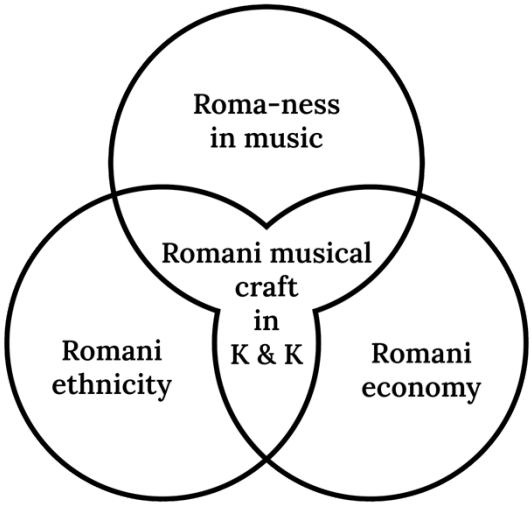

Fig. 1. The scope of the thesis

To bring these threads of research together, I will now highlight the key findings of this thesis: I will revisit the main research questions outlined in the introduction and summarise this thesis in thirty *theses*.

The Thesis in Thirty Theses

What role does the Romani musical craft play in the socio-economic and socio-cultural adaptation of Roma in Klenovec and Kokava?

#1 In the past, K&K was a prosperous region. It was built on a strong tradition of mining and agriculture, and the existence of large enterprises enhanced its economic stability. Due to the decline of the mining industry, collectivisation/re-privatisation of agriculture, and the closure of enterprises, the region faced unprecedented socio-economic decline. This has led to a massive population outflow and has been manifest in various symptoms of anomy (⇦The "hladová dolina" of Klenovec and Kokava).

#2 Roma belong to the group of people most affected in the region. Those who have not left have concentrated in segregated settlements – peripheries of the periphery. Due to the effects of cumulative failure, Roma live in deep structural poverty and are trapped by minimal social mobility (⇦"Inadaptable").

#3 In the perception of the majority, Roma on the periphery are perceived as 'those who don't work'. In twisted political narratives, they are blamed for being the cause (rather than a symptom) of the region's unsatisfactory socio-economic state (⇦"Those who don't work").

#4 Most of the Roma on the periphery need to combine various economic strategies – social aid, wage-labour jobs provided by the local formal economy, periodic migration, and parallel informal economic activities. In most of these spheres, Roma tend to experience difficulties (e.g. insufficient literacy and racism in jobs in the formal economy; exploitation in the informal economy) (⇦"Unemployed"… yet making a living).

#5 For many generations, the professional music-making of Roma has represented the most suitable strategy for adapting to these conditions – it has enabled decent and sustainable ways of living and respectful treatment from the non-Romani majority. Thus, the Romani musical craft may be seen as a distinctive socio-cultural response among Roma to the conditions of the *hladová dolina*. This fact significantly determines how Romani musicians perform their craft in K&K (⇦"You need to know how to adapt!").

How is Romani ethnicity performed in the locality, and how is the musical craft constitutive of the performance of Romani ethnicity?

#6 Scholarly discussions on Romani ethnicity contain many peculiarities. This is because: a) Roma are an (ethnic) group with a peculiar relationship to symbolic manifestations of ethnicity, meaning that various ethnicity theories

not fit very well; b) ethnicity is a peculiar social-science concept that can be understood in various ways (⇦The 'Peculiarities' of Romani Ethnicity).

#7 For my ethnographic analysis, I found it fruitful to consider ethnicity as a) socially constructed; b) dynamic and processual; c) requiring focus upon the perspectives of its agents. My approach, thus, is not to define what (Romani) ethnicity is, rather, what it does (for Roma) (⇦'Fruitful Conceptualisations' of Ethnicity).

#8 Ethnographies from across the world suggest that the ethnicity of Roma is formed in significant part by the pariahdom boundary (⇦The Pariahdom Boundary).

#9 In my ethnographic interpretation, I analyse various forms of boundary markers as constructed in the triadic relationship of a) a sign (i.e. a marker of ethnic difference); b) an object (i.e. an ethnic boundary); c) an interpretant (i.e. the idea of ethnic difference) (⇦Markers of the Pariahdom Boundary).

#10 In everyday life, Roma in K&K face strong effects of the pariahdom boundary. The pariahdom boundary in K&K is defined and maintained by iconic, indexical and symbolic boundary markers (⇦"Black–Ragged").

#11 To avoid the effects of the pariahdom boundary, some K&K Roma attempt to integrate. Integration is dependent on cumulative intergenerational success, and it often requires leaving behind individual Roma-ness (⇦"Roma like us").

#12 The level of Romani integration in K&K coincides with the level of professional musicianship. The Romani musical craft in K&K has hereditary aspects; there is an explicit pressure to maintain the craft in families and to pass it on to following generations. 'The aristocracy' of Romani musicians represents a distinct life-style group that tends to distance itself from the 'black–ragged Gypsies' – lesser-integrated Romani non-musicians. (⇦"Romani aristocracy").

#13 While integrated Roma often need to put their Roma-ness aside (e.g. by working in wage-labour jobs, or by the eradication of Romani language), on the musical stage, they are allowed (and welcome) to put it on display (⇦"We haven't eaten for a week!").

#14 Thus, Romani music-making in K&K can be seen as a distinct performance of ethnicity. It allows opportunity to avoid the harmful effects of the pariahdom boundary, while at the same time affording opportunities to enact individual Roma-ness. It enables people to be (and remain) Rom while not being judged (and persecuted) for it (⇦"If you don't play here, you're not a human").

To what extent, and how, does Romani musical craft constitute a form of economic exchange?

#15 The phenomenon of Romani economies represents a distinctive ethnic and cultural practice in the experience of various Romani communities across the globe (⇦The Phenomenon of Romani Economies).

#16 The existence of numerous Romani informal economies reveals not an incompatibility with (and inadaptability to) the economic systems of non-Roma; rather it is an active, distinctive and creative socio-cultural adaptation (⇦Romani [In]Adaptability).

#17 Although Romani economies are mostly dependent on economic exchange with non-Roma, their existence is motivated by the ideas of socio-cultural independence from and resistance against economies (and, more broadly, the culture) of non-Roma (⇦Romani [In]Dependence).

#18 Outsmarting non-Roma is a phenomenon ideologically rooted in these notions of Romani cultural independence and resistance (⇦Romani Outsmarting).

#19 Roma construct, exploit and maintain various economic niches, some of which may turn into ethnic monopolies. These have a prominent place in Romani music economies in various corners of the world (⇦Romani Niches and Monopolies).

#20 Romani musicians in K&K make most of their income through entertaining performance. This is a niche ethnicised from both sides – non-Roma like to seek Romani musicians, and K&K Roma specialise in performing for non-Roma (⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!").

#21 The most notable ('traditional') niches and monopolies of K&K Romani musicians have included: Slovak folk music, folklore music and café music. Although today's musicians have been influenced by these niches, they have constantly innovated them (in style, repertoire and performance type) and they seek new ones. Their relationship to 'tradition' has been instrumental, not sentimental (⇦"Playing traditionally").

#22 Romani tendencies to seek to outsmart non-Roma in music ('*špekulanstvo*') have a special place in the music business. They are partly tolerated by non-Roma (as a marker of genuine Romani performance) and can be seen as a ritualised form of performing Roma-ness (⇦"Špekulanstvo").

#23 Some musicians find themselves in a peculiar aristocracy–servant paradox: although they are recognised as an aristocratic elite among both Roma and

non-Roma, they often need to comply with their role of servants to keep their music businesses going (⇦"The show must go on!").

How does Roma-ness manifest itself in Romani professional music-making?

#24 Romani ethnic impression management in music-making works mainly due to pre-existing symbolic markers of Roma-ness. The most typical markers are 'Romani strangeness' and 'Romani musical blood' (⇦Impression Management in Romani [Music] Economies).

#25 To non-Roma, Roma are strangers in the senses of both 'outsideness' and 'otherness'. While Romani strangeness is highly problematic in an everyday context, Romani musicians can enact and commodify it on a musical stage (⇦Romani 'Strangeness').

#26 'Romani musical blood' is a deeply layered social construct, determined by differences between Romani and non-Romani musical concepts (mainly concepts of musical 'talent' and musical enculturation) (⇦Anatomy of Romani 'Musical Blood').

#27 The main goal of K&K musicians is to produce "livelier" music, with which they "make people dance" (⇦"Making people dance!").

#28 Roma achieve this by managing 'flow' – specifically through distinctive tempo treatment and care for musical continuity (⇦"And we are going on!").

#29 Roma can flexibly tailor repertoire and play songs on request, by which they "make people sing." This ability is conditioned by skills of musical adaptability (⇦"Making people sing!").

#30 Roma-ness can also be a source of restrictions – it tends to re-confirm power relations between Roma and non-Roma in the music economy and to distance musicians from creative self-realisation. Formal musical education and performing 'Romani music' for Roma appear the best ways to break free from the restrictive aspects of Roma-ness in music (⇦"I Want to Break Free!").

Seven Questions for Future Research

Besides the topics outlined by the main research questions, during my research, there emerged several other important themes that I was unable to fit into the thesis. I have picked out the seven most significant ones for brief discussion in this section, and I phrase them as questions for future research:

#1

What impacts do informal music sessions – *bašávely* – have for professional music-making in K&K?

To analyse the Romani musical craft in K&K within the range of one thesis, I limited my scope to professional performances and put informal musical sessions – which Roma commonly call *bašávely* – aside. This decision was justified by preliminary ethnographic observations – I noticed that the more musicians are involved in their musical business (and related activities, including attending music schools), the fewer opportunities they have for taking part in informal music-making. Hence, most of the *bašávely* sessions I have participated in took place in households of Romani 'non-musicians' or, more precisely, non-professionals. My first opportunities to look at *bašávely* featuring Romani professional musicians came only with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the initial lockdowns suddenly interrupted their immense workloads and meetings within the family circle - with musical instruments in hand – became the primary way of pursuing some sort of social life. Thanks to video glimpses from these events aired on their Facebook profiles, I realised that no matter how marginalised these activities have become in the lives of professional musicians, they certainly have an important place in Romani culture and, as such, they affect the practices of Romani professional musicians.

Several key topics would certainly have to be tackled in any dedicated study of Romani *bašávely* in K&K. In my earlier work, I pointed out their importance in the formation of musical aptitude, especially in the early stages of musical enculturation (cf. Nuska, 2015b, pp. 63–67, 2016, pp. 73–74). This could be explored further with an emphasis on new music enculturation trends such as the proliferation of formal education (cf. ⇦"I Want to Break Free") and the impact of New Media (cf. below). Another important issue worth exploring is the significance of bašávely for the communal identity of K&K Roma. What importance do they have in strengthening community cohesion? What is the role of family ties in these events? How is Roma-ness manifest at *bašávely*? And, do they represent an act of socio-cultural resistance against non-Roma 'oppressors'? These all represent relevant enquiries for further research (Bonini Baraldi, 2021, pp. 64–95; cf. Kertész-Wilkinson, 1997; Stewart, 1997b, pp. 181–203). Finally, it may also be worth looking at the role of *bašávely* in transmission, preservation and innovation in 'Romani music' (cf. ⇦From 'Romani Music' to Romani Musical Craft). While I have noted that Romani professional musicians often need to retreat from performing

'Romani music', *bašávely* are examples of events at which 'Romani music' is expected almost as the default musical material. And yet, my preliminary observations have shown that the musical preferences of each individual sometimes challenge the *exclusive* role of 'Romani music' in these events. This should also be explored further.

#2

Which aspects of professional music-making of K&K Roma can be considered universal musical practices of Romani music professionals in Slovakia (and elsewhere), and which aspects are unique for the locality of Klenovec and Kokava?

In August 2021, Vladimir Sendrei's son Vladimir was about to get married. We sat with his father at lunch when I asked them: "So, will your father's band play at the wedding?" "No way!" the younger Vladimir said with a laugh. "Are you mad? It's a *Gypsy* wedding! They want modern [*moderné*] Gypsy songs. We only play old ones for *whites*," the older man exclaimed. He continued: "You know, we – the Sendreiovci – are special. Sure, there are other famous Gypsy bands. They travel the world. They play in England and elsewhere. But they only play there for other Gypsies. We, however, only play for *gádže*. There are just a few bands like us in Slovakia!" This conversation fittingly summarised some of my long-term observations (and suspicions): some aspects of Romani professional music-making described in this thesis may be very specific to the K&K locality. The clear preference (and – in the cases of some bands – the almost *exclusive* policy) to perform for non-Romani clients is an example of such an issue. It is a feature upon which the entire economy of K&K musicians is based. As well as with the Sendreiovci band – by far the most prominent 'employer' of local musicians – I have encountered this clear preference among a vast majority of the K&K bands I have worked with.

In the thesis, I have discussed the importance of this feature in several respects. I have noted that playing for *gádže* is a sign of prestige that underpins musicians' status as members of a local (Romani) elite. I have also explained how this elite status stems from the deep musical *roots* of the local musicians, ones bound to the very municipalities of Klenovec and Kokava. In addition, I have encountered how musicians proudly stress the locality of their origins and use this almost as a professional trademark (along with their ethnic background). And I have also come across their contempt and doubts about music-making in other, *root-less* localities ("If they don't wanna pay us properly, they should just call some Gypsies from Čierny Balog [a municipality in the neighbouring district], and they'd get the squeaking [*vŕzganie*] they pay for!"). Other times, I heard them commenting on the music of a Romani band from Eastern Slovakia: "It's good to a Gypsy standard! [N*a Cigány dobré*]." The implication was that the K&K standard was higher than an average Romani standard. Perhaps, the popularity of the local musicians in the

realm of Slovak folklore music – in which they have been known as the "perfect musicians" for generations (cf. ⇦Preface) – also relates to their roots and to the continuity of the local craft.

In the past, other places in Slovakia, such as Galanta in the West of the country, were known for having "excellent [Romani] musicians" (cf. also Nichols, n.d.; Sárosi, 1970, pp. 68–9). But in sustaining such a long continuation of Romani professional music-making, K&K seems to be a unique locality. This opens up a series of relevant and interesting questions for further research. For instance: why has the professional music-making tradition been continuous in K&K for centuries while it has disappeared from other places? Does this relate to the craft's position among the adaptation strategies for the socio-economic peculiarities of the region? And how do musicians use identification with the municipalities of their origins in their music business? For all these questions, it would be worth looking comparatively to other Romani communities of professional music-makers in Slovakia, enabling the exposure of both universalities and specificities in Romani musical *crafts*.

#3

What has been the role of Romani women in professional music-making in K&K, and what are the gendered aspects of the craft?

In the introduction, I explained why male musicians dominate heavily in this thesis – most Roma in K&K consider the *exclusive* privilege of men to play a musical instrument a binding and respected socio-cultural norm (cf. ⇦From 'Romani Music' to the Romani Musical Craft). From my conversations with the oldest K&K musicians, I got the impression that this norm has been rooted deeply for as long as K&K Roma remember. Janko Gazda from Klenovec, for instance, told me: "It was regarded a piece of luck when boys were born, but not girls – they couldn't be turned into musicians." Similarly, Gombík from Kokava told me: "My granddaughter plays the fiddle, but I'm not even commenting on that. That's not how things are supposed to be!" It seems that from the time of Panna Cinka – a legendary Romani *primáška* (the female form of *primáš*) who was born at the beginning of the 18th century in Gemer (less than 40 kilometres as the crow flies from K&K) – right up to this day, women instrumentalists are extremely rare in the Romani business (cf. Sárosi, 1970, pp. 66–84). Romani female singers represent a certain exception to the rule, but trends from the K&K field suggest that professional involvements for even these women are limited to the period of life before marriage. After that, most Romani women converge into the role that all Roma in K&K consider the natural state of affairs – that of homemakers (cf. Nuska, 2015b, pp. 78–80). Singers like Janka Sendreiová and Anička Oláhová are some of the few professional singers *and* mothers in the locality. It is worth asking whether their nationwide popularity relates to the fact that Romani female singers are scarce commodities on the musical market.

Yet, this immense male dominance of the Romani musical craft should not prevent us from considering its gendered aspects. We should ask whether and how the features of Romani professional music-making are affected by this male dominance. For instance, I once had an interesting discussion with my colleague Karolína Ryvolová – a Romani studies scholar working for the Czech publishing house KHER, which specialises in producing literature from Romani authors. In comparison with music, the world of Romani literature is more gender-balanced. When I explained to her the phenomenon of the distancing between Romani musicians and non-musicians in K&K (cf. ⇦"Romani aristocracy"), she noted that she has mainly come across similar behaviour among Romani men while Romani women tend to show solidarity with other Roma, including those affected by poverty. Thus, future research may explore whether and how gender performance affects the construction of the Romani musical craft.

Similarly, it would be interesting to scrutinise the less visible roles of women in the business (at least those that musicians do not talk about so often) – women as the wives (and partners) of musicians. In this form, it seems that Romani women may have more influence and power than some musicians would be willing to admit. Once, for instance, I experienced the abrupt interruption of a *bašável*, as bass-guitarist Miro put down the phone and exclaimed in panic: "Guys! We need to finish up. My wife just called me to say that snow has destroyed our roof!" I asked him at the next *bašável* whether he managed to fix the roof. "Ah, that roof? That was nothing. My wife didn't want me to stay there too long, so she made this story up." Similar tales of smart manipulation are also told among professional musicians. Saxophonist Milo Deme, for instance, admitted that his wife liked to direct the course of things so that he ended up playing for the band with the highest honorarium. Sometimes, she did not hesitate to send his musical instrument ahead with the band so that he would not be able to back out. Perhaps, while men play the instruments, it is women who stand in the background of the business, acting skilfully as the personal managers of each musician, and thus playing an indirect role in the generation of the family's resources. This idea may be worth exploring in depth.

#4

Which other boundaries constitute (Romani) identities in Klenovec and Kokava?

One of the most important threads of this work concerns the boundaries of (ethnic) identities. I focused almost exclusively on the pariahdom boundary – that is, the identity boundary by which non-Roma define and discriminate against Roma. While I found this particular boundary to be the most significant in the ethnicity construction and performances of K&K Roma, this does not imply it to be the only boundary that affects performance. Future research may investigate, firstly, how this boundary combines with other identity boundaries and, secondly, how boundaries exist between various groups (and sub-groups) of Roma.

For the former, I pointed out in the thesis that the region of K&K is fragmented when it comes to national identities – Slovak and Hungarian ones. I showed that the Slovak folk(lore) music in the region has partly formed as a socio-cultural manifestation against deep-layered Hungarian oppression, opening up interesting music-economic niches for local musicians. And yet, K&K networks of Romani musicians – as important bearers of the local musical tradition – never seem to care much about geographical divisions in the region. During my fieldwork, I got to know many Roma who were part of these networks and identified as Hungarian Roma. Most of these musicians speak Slovak to an excellent standard, so, at first glance, no one would even think to distinguish them from their Slovak colleagues – all until they pick up their phones and speak Hungarian with their wives and children.

I noticed that among these musicians, their otherness is often defined musically: "We, Hungarians, like to use bows [when playing the double-bass]. That's how we – Hungarians – like to play it," double-bass player Béla explained to me once. His colleagues told me about him: "He is Hungarian. You can tell just by listening to his double-bass – he *feels* music differently." Hungarian identity also plays an important role in the lives of musicians who identify themselves as Slovak Roma. Many find 'Hungarian music' more enjoyable than 'Slovak music'. The *primáš* Karol from Klenovec is a notable example, being well-known for smuggling an infamous 'Hungarian' influence into his performances. Once, I heard Milo and Vlado commenting on Karol's fiddle part in the video *Dze še kuri* (cf. ⇨Reflection on Visual Methods): "That's bad! He can't play Hungarian fiddle in a Slovak folk song!" Milo shot back: "Slovak folk song? Come on, there are drums and a synthesiser, that's not a folk song anymore" (cf. ⇦"Playing traditionally"). However, this Hungarian mimicry is a very important strategy for Karol and other musicians alike, allowing them to generate income from a Hungarian repertoire (or from playing in a Hungarian style) for Hungarian audiences in Hungary.

As I understand it, it is not so much the payment in Hungarian forints that makes travel in and around Hungary worthwhile, but rather the prestige attached to it. Might this relate to the historical status of Romani café musicians who once started in Hungary and catapulted the ancestors of today's musicians into the highest levels of social elite status among Roma? And, if so, do musicians really acquire the desired social, cultural and economic capital through incorporating Hungarian repertoire and style? Or, perhaps, are they looking back to something that is only a utopian memory from the deep past? Further research, thus, may focus on how national identities – whether the one inscribed in the musicians' passports or the one attached to the region's historical memory – affect musicians' performance of identity.

As for the latter, the dominant focus in Romani studies seems to fall on the ethnic boundary between Roma and non-Roma (just as it does in this thesis), while ethnic boundaries between various groups of Roma are under-explored (cf. Salo, 1979, p. 73). Yet, focusing on these boundaries may be highly relevant in some contexts. In

the case of K&K, I need to acknowledge the group of Vlach Roma [*Olašský Rómovia*]. Although I do not know a single Vlach Rom either in Klenovec or in Kokava, there are notable populations in nearby towns, mainly Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota and Poltár (Mušinka & Matlovičová, 2015, pp. 237–8; fig. 8.5). For K&K musicians, Vlach Roma represent a favourable clientele; their events are characterised as glitteringly luxurious, and they pay reliably and well, even though they are notoriously hard to satisfy musically. In the literature, Vlach Roma are often singled out for their distinctive musical culture, exceptional against other forms of Romani music in the surrounding region.

Due to their long nomading tradition (terminated, in Czechoslovakia, only with their forced settling in the 1950s), their musical culture is based mainly on singing, with the musical instruments common among other groups having never found a firm place in Vlach Romani musical practice. Thus, they do not play the same role of professional music-makers (and entertainers) for surrounding non-Romani minorities as other Roma do (e.g. Jurková, 2003a, p. 25). Yet, in the K&K case, I have noticed that Vlach-Romani music professionals occasionally interact with the main networks of musicians – as bandmates, music producers, music recordists etc. Thanks to these interactions, I was able to observe how K&K Roma tend to stress the otherness of Vlach Roma – making them the *others of the others*. The construction of this status bears resemblance to how the pariahdom boundary is built, and I have heard K&K Roma describe Vlach Roma with reference to the same sorts of boundary markers – iconic ("For years, I thought he was a *gádžo*. Only recently, I got to know he is a Vlach Rom. They are paler than us, you know?") (cf. Elliott, 2005, pp. 234–240); indexical ("When I listen to this album [made by Vlach Roma] I hardly understand [the Romani lyrics]") (cf. Hajská, 2018); and symbolic ("Vlachs [*Olaši*] are born-businessmen. That's why they are so rich!") (cf. Virág & Váradi, 2018). Future research, thus, might focus on mapping out musical activities of the sub-ethnic group of Vlach Roma in the region and it may explore how their exclusiveness and otherness affect identity performance for themselves and other Roma.

#5

What has been the role of busking and other music activities based on periodic migration in the subsistence strategies of K&K Romani musicians, and what significance do they have today?

In the section dedicated to the subsistence strategies of K&K Roma, I mentioned the role of busking in the locality and briefly outlined its golden period and gradual decline (cf. ⇦Periodic Migration). One interesting question that can be investigated further relates to the significance of busking during the transformation of social stratification among K&K Roma in the 1990s. I have pointed out that socio-economic differences between Romani musicians and non-musicians in K&K are immense. I have encountered a vast number of testimonies from Romani buskers from the 1990s recounting their ability to earn up to ten

times more than those who stayed at home and worked in factories in the midst of economic transformation (I heard that some factories still owe salary to their workers to this day). This points to a hypothesis that Romani busking significantly amplified the socio-economic stratification of K&K Roma and resulted in the group fragmentation outlined in this thesis. An interview-based study focusing on K&K busking in retrospect would help clarify this assumption.

An ethnographic study elaborating on busking as a contemporary practice would also be a relevant contribution. I have noticed that most musicians with a firm place in K&K musical networks tend to go to busk abroad less and less frequently, while musicians from the periphery remain more adherent to this strategy. A potential study would employ ethnographic methods – i.e., following buskers to their destinations – and focus on how this activity combines with other income-generating strategies (cf. Grill, 2011). It might also explore how the performance of Roma-ness on the streets differs from that on musical stages and how under-/over communication of various ethnic boundary markers compares in these two different environments.

Lastly, I have encountered one further interesting trend in the locality: musicians who go away for months-long trips to perform on cruise ships. Like with busking in the 1990s, musicians can earn significantly more on these ships than they can in formal-economy jobs and even more than through casual entertaining performances (up to 4,000 EUR/month). They embark onto ships on rivers in Germany, Austria and Hungary – which allows for irregular returns to see their families – or ocean-going ships travelling around the globe, which forces musicians to be disconnected from their families for a significant part of a year. I have met several of these musicians from K&K and surrounding areas who have been using this strategy for years and for whom music-making on cruise ships has become the main strategy for sustaining the family income. As musicians are often hired as an entire entertaining *Romani* band, a "cruisicology" of K&K Roma would be a helpful contribution both to understanding the music-making economy of the region and to the ethnomusicology of Roma in general (cf. Cashman & Hayward, 2020).

#6

How are New Media changing the world of Romani professional music-making?

Structural poverty caused by the socio-economic underdevelopment of peripheral regions in Slovakia is responsible for a massive digital divide, a development of which Roma are the most notable victims (cf. Jursová Zacharová, 2019). In the section dedicated to the subsistence strategies of Roma in K&K, I gently touched on how insufficient digital literacy and access to electronic media complicate admission to the formal-economy job market (cf. ⇦Involvement in the Formal Economy). Education is another area where the digital divide causes major issues. This became apparent especially during periods of the Covid-19 pandemic when children were fully dependent on distance learning supervised via online

platforms (cf. Digital Freedom Fund, 2021). But despite this digital divide, New Media have found a firm place in the everyday lives of K&K Roma, including those on the periphery. A smartphone is nowadays an essential tool for every Rom, from teenagers (if not younger children) to middle-aged people, all of whom use it in the same manner as their non-Romani peers; whether listening to (and commenting on) their favourite music on YouTube, chatting over WhatsApp, or posting messages, photos and videos about their lives on Facebook. Quite naturally, New Media have had a massive impact on Romani musicians and their craft.

I see the first important impact of New Media as about music promotion. Musicians have taken to sharing pictures and video samples from their gigs. Some have become masters of this skill, generating social media engagement that even a marketing professional would not be ashamed of. And some are already discovering the potential for music-business marketing of music videos created specifically for distribution on social media platforms (cf. ⇨Reflection on Visual Methods). I have mentioned already in the thesis that musicians think of their music videos as a tool for reaching out to potential new clients (cf. ⇦"Tonight, we play this party for you!"). But, perhaps, this may change when they realise that these videos can also be commodifiable in themselves. My brief exploration of the world of Romani online music videos has unearthed one unique aspect: unlike music videos produced by Slovak non-Romani musicians, Romani music videos reach the audience in Romani online communities transnationally. From my ethnographic observations, I have noticed that Romani hits from Slovak Roma are extremely popular in the Czech Republic and vice-versa. Similarly, Roma interact with Romani music videos from other countries, such as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. It would be interesting to analyse these transnational interactions through dedicated tools (e.g. certain methods from digital humanities). If the assumption about the transnational reach of Romani music videos is correct, one may question what effect this would have on the position of 'Romani music' in the Romani musical craft of K&K and elsewhere (cf. ⇦From 'Romani Music' to Romani Musical Craft). With a population of around 5.5 million, Slovakia represents quite a small (and, thus, difficult) market for expansion through online video content. But a wider online *Romani* market could make Romani music more commodifiable and, thus, represent a desirable future path for the musicians. I have briefly described current manifestations of these tendencies among the musicians in K&K (cf. ⇦"I Want to Break Free!"), and I am curious to see whether they transform into a trend.

New Media have also brought about an important change in transmission and music enculturation among Romani musicians. In this respect, K&K Roma follow global trends. Much like elsewhere, the "YouTube effect" has re-wired the field of informal musical learning and the video platform has become an important tool for acquiring and enhancing musical skills (cf. Cayari, 2011; Kruse & Veblen, 2012). YouTube is being used across all generations of K&K Roma, including mature musicians. *Primáš* Janko Deme once told me: "If it weren't for YouTube, I might not even enjoy playing the fiddle anymore. I'd likely be stagnant. YouTube has

given me a new spark to play." Yet, although YouTube seems to have had an immense effect on musical enculturation and transmission in the locality, perhaps the underlying principles have not changed as much as in other music cultures. Music enculturation and the transmission of musical skills among Romani professional musicians in K&K has long been based on informal educational processes mainly dependent on listening and imitation (Nuska, 2015b, pp. 51–81, 2016, pp. 72–77). In this respect, the Romani principles of musical skills acquisition seem to have stayed the same while the rest of the world is – to put it hyperbolically – turning to Romani ways. Thus, it may be worth exploring further whether and how these New Media have changed the music enculturation of Romani musicians and how these changes relate to contemporary trends in music education across the globe.

Finally, New Media have brought up another issue that may be worth exploring – changes in the concept of the ownership of (Romani) songs. In this thesis, I have pointed out that "borrowing" (e.g. C. Silverman, 1996, p. 245), "copying" (e.g. Sárosi, 1978, p. 142) and even "stealing" (e.g. Szeman, 2009, p. 109) have been typical practices for Romani music-making in various socio-cultural contexts. I gave a number of examples of how Roma commodify songs that are not *theirs*. Entertaining bands from K&K are a typical example of this phenomenon – their repertoires are based on the commodification of songs that *make people dance* and *sing*. These are mostly songs to which musicians – legally speaking – do not hold copyright ('public domain' folk songs represent certain exceptions). While this has long been tolerated (as has the whole system of the parallel economy of Romani entertaining performance), the rise of New Media has brought the question of authorship to the fore. When posting their cover versions on social media, Roma are becoming increasingly aware of potential copyright issues. Similarly, I encountered some Romani bands claiming ownership of music they felt had been 'stolen' by other Romani bands. Soon, this may become a trend redefining Romani conceptions of music ownership and – through new emphasis on authors' original creation rather than the making of 'Roma-nised' *copies* of other songs – it may possibly even redefine *what Romani music is*.

#7

What is the role of Romani chords in Romani professional music-making, in Romani music and Romani culture more generally?

During my first trip to Klenovec in 2013, I experienced an interesting moment: at a *bašável*, a keyboardist was asked to play the note 'B' so that another musician – a bass guitarist – could tune up his instrument. After a moment of confusion, it was obvious that the musician played the note 'G' instead of 'B'. It turned out that this was not an issue of mishearing – the musician simply did not know where a 'B' was located on the keyboard. This would not be surprising if the musician were a beginner, but throughout the entire session, he was accompanying all of the songs flawlessly and confidently. Later, I realised that this moment might be a

manifestation of an interesting phenomenon in Romani music-making known far beyond K&K – the phenomenon of so-called *Romani chords*.

Romani chords relate to the skill of flexibility in playing harmonies ("playing by ear"), which I described – along with its importance for the music business – in the last findings chapter. This skill is ultimately connected with performing the craft successfully, enabling musicians to *make people sing* and *dance* (cf. ⇦"Making people sing!"; ⇦"Making people dance!"). The knowledge of Romani chords seems to be especially relevant for instruments providing harmonic accompaniment (such as guitar, accordion, cimbalom, *bráča* and digital keyboard), yet, even the players of solo instruments (typically the *primáš* on the fiddle) need to be acquainted with this knowledge as it is essential for communication inside the band (cf. Ibid.). While I have often heard my research participants talk about Romani chords (or, more often, Gypsy chords – *cigánské akordy*) and their importance in their music and music-making, in the literature, mentions of this phenomenon are rather rare (de Spur, 1962, p. 17; Dregni, 2004, p. 202; Krol, 2019, p. 3) and no work has so far theorised it in depth. Although I did not have space to open up the topic fully in this thesis, it represents a major avenue for stand-alone ethnomusicological research.

My further observations have suggested that this skill may not just be related to its instrumental use in business, but that it could be a key component for explaining how Roma understand and conceptualise music per se. While formal music-educational systems usually approach chords through theories of harmony and consider them sets consisting of multiple notes, for Romani musicians, chords seem to be the most fundamental component of music. Returning to the example from above, it is not so important to know where the note B is located on the keyboard as it is to know where a B minor chord is. This seemingly simple difference on the input side can make a huge difference on the output side of Romani musical aptitude. The fact that Romani musicians do not grow into *notes* but rather to *chords* and *harmonies* may be considered a culture-specific cognitive model. Could this model be responsible for the emergence of some essential skills that popular discourses tend to assign to Romani musical distinctiveness ('musical blood') – such as the flexibility in harmonies, key mobility, musical adaptability, and improvisational skills that I have described?

One way of tackling the phenomenon of Romani chords is to consider it a result of a distinctive *visual* input in the development of musical aptitude. Especially in the case of the instruments providing accompanying harmony, K&K musicians often stressed the importance of visual-based transmission. The key to the success of learning an instrument is – in their recurring words – "to look at the fingers" [*pozeranie sa na prsty*] of other musicians. The role of vision in learning a musical instrument has been seriously underestimated and understudied, yet, especially in the cases of some instruments, vision seems to have a crucial (if not the predominant) role in forming musical aptitude. Crump, Logan and Kimbrough (2012) addressed this issue in their unique study dedicated to the acquisition of guitar skills, specifically in examining "the role that vision may play in developing

representations of musical structure derived from watching oneself and others play an instrument" (p. 37). Results of their two experiments suggested that the role of vision in acquiring musical skills may be much greater than is implied by the sparseness of dedicated studies, and that it may concern other musical instruments as well.

Another related question concerns the role of Romani chords in music transmission and enculturation. While the practice of looking at the fingers suggests that specific knowledge about chords is transmitted as part of the enculturation processes, there are other reasons to think that harmonic paying is actually a matter of innovation from each individual musician. Thus, Romani chords may stem from old Romani knowledge passed through many generations while also being a result of personal creativity. Romani chords are sometimes referred to as a personal (or family) secret in K&K. From older musicians, I heard that when they were young, some senior musicians refused to play with them outside the music business as they did not want to reveal their secrets – their chords. These chords were regarded as items of knowledge that musicians guarded and only shared with family members. Nowadays, one might anticipate that transmission and innovation in Romani chords will be influenced greatly by learning from YouTube (cf. above) and by the proliferation of formal musical education, allowing for the combining of old Romani knowledge and a 'Western' understanding of harmony.

Another way of framing the phenomenon of Romani chords is through theories of Romani musical impression management. I have noted that a musician's role is to play a distinctive ('estranged') copy of tunes that are popular with the majority. The significance of the accompaniment's harmony in this estrangement has been pointed out (e.g. Sárosi, 1970, p. esp. 209–253) but never properly theorised. One interesting way to explore this is by comparing what Roma consider their style with – so to speak – *a gádžo style*. An ethnomusicological analysis of this kind, one that featured a comparison between a 'non-Roma-nised' and a 'Roma-nised' version of certain music material, was recently offered by Bonini Baraldi in an analysis of the melodic lines of Romani string instruments – and this led to various interesting insights (2021, pp. 172–215). Thanks to an interesting idea suggested by one of my research participants, I piloted a series of similar analyses focused on harmonic estrangement. During an accordion 'lesson' that I was video-recording, Barna from Hnúšťa suggested: "You know what? So that you grasp everything better, I'll play the tune first as a *gadžo* would play it and then, I'll play it as we – Gypsies – play it." Then, I compared the two versions of each song ex-post on video. Comparison of his usage of harmonies unearthed the single most striking difference. While the '*gádžo*' version featured mainly chords consisting of basic minor and major triads, the 'Gypsy' version was overflowing with incomparably more complex harmonies. I encountered a similar way of thinking five years before with Lajo – a guitarist from Kokava. While showing off his guitar skills to me, he stated: "You know why I dislike *gádže* music? Because it's boring! You – *gádže* – play like that," he said, demonstrating triad-chords on the first three frets of the guitar. "Boring, isn't it? And this is how *we* – Gypsies – play it!" he said, showing off

his skills by changing chords on every beat, moving across the entire fingerboard to build a complex set of harmonies.

Finally, an interesting question relates to whether and how Romani musicians *theorise* their chords. When asking K&K musicians about Romani chords, it has become clear that their understanding mostly does not rest on 'Western' harmonic theory. Rather, they seem to have a particular way of conceptualising these chords. For instance, during the meeting with Lajo just mentioned, as I was holding his guitar, he instructed me to "Play a D minor!" When I did (to the best of my knowledge), he continued: "Fine, and now play D minor *upside down!* [*Chic D mol naopak!*]. Unfortunately, as Lajo passed away shortly afterwards, I will never get to know whether by 'upside down' he meant a different configuration on top of the root note, whether it had something to do with the arrangement of the fingers on the fingerboard, or possibly something else. But it seemed that Lajo had his own way of thinking about and understanding the chords. I heard something similar from Zolo when he was lecturing me about Romani chords on the accordion (luckily, the instrument was my own Roland FR 1x V Accordion with a midi output, so I was able later to analyse the structure of the chords he demonstrated with 100 percent precision):

Box #32 – Zolo on Romani chords

This short video shows Zolo – an accordion player from Klenovec – explain to me some of the secrets of Romani chords (recorded on the 22nd of March 2019).

thesis.nuska.me/box/32

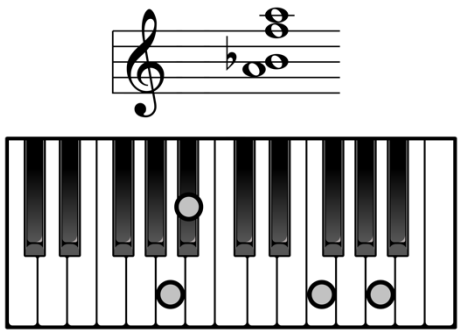

Fig. 7. "*Dimenzovaný*" chord according to Zolo

"For instance, you can have *dimenzované* chords [*dimenzované akordy*]." The Slovak word *dimenzované* does not quite exist in Slovak music theory; the appropriate translation for a 'diminished chord' (internationally known under the abbreviation 'dim') is '*zmenšený septakord*'. However, even more interesting, was the chord he showed me: it consisted of the notes A–A#–F–A. A theorist trained in Western harmonic practice may find it problematic to find an appropriate name for such a chord (even more so as Zolo did not indicate what the root of this chord was) – the note A is doubled; the chord lacks a third degree (or a fifth when looked at as rooted on F) and it features the dissonant interval of the minor second (A–A#). Yet, in Zolo's performance, such a chord has its place and even a name – a *dimenzovaný* chord.

All of this points to the value of looking at *the Romani theory of chords* – to approach it through Romani emic categories and concepts. After all, Western theory should not have a monopoly in describing global variability in harmony. Visual ethnomusicology seems to offer an ideal combination of methods to explore this old wisdom of Romani musicians.

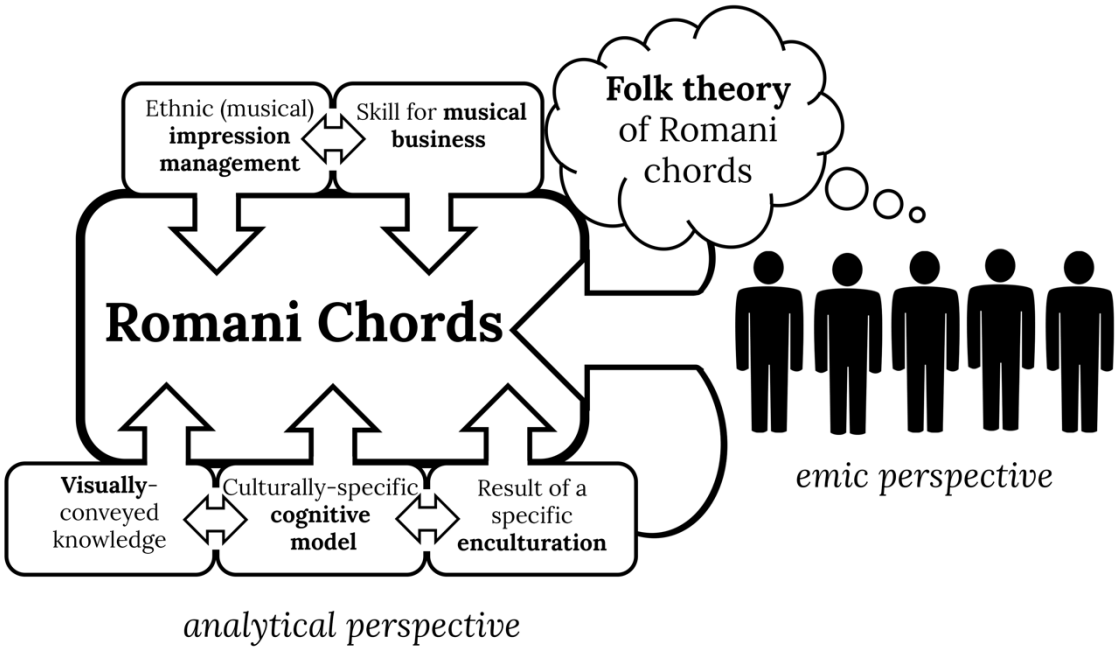

Fig. 7. Proposed perspectives on the phenomenon of Romani chords

Reflections

In this final section, I will critically reflect on my research methodology. The ethnographic data presented in this thesis come from quite a wide period (2013 to 2022), during which the methodological toolkit gradually changed as I pursued various methods in various phases of the research for various research objectives (cf. ⇦Introducing Research Methodology). To tackle this range, I will dedicate one sub-section to reflecting on my ethnographic methods, one to my visual methods (use of photographs and music videos), and in the last sub-section, I will describe the path that has led towards the ethnographic films produced *after* the writing of the thesis. In these sub-sections, I will also critically evaluate my positionality as a researcher in relation to the methods involved, and I will share some – complete or partial – results from my visual-ethnography and visual-ethnomusicology work.

Reflection on Ethnographic Methods

The shift from interviews (mainly a focus in 2015) to ethnographic observational methods (from 2018 onwards) was a key moment of methodological development worth emphasising. The interview method allowed me to be highly efficient in ethnographic data acquisition, thanks to which I gained a significant amount of knowledge in a relatively short period. It also allowed me to identify a set of relevant questions that were at the core of my MA thesis and of my first publication on K&K Romani musicians (Nuska, 2015b, 2016). When presenting my research outcomes in my thesis defence, however, I received critical feedback from my principal supervisor Zuzana Jurková: "One thing you don't seem to understand is that what people say they're doing is often not the same thing as what they're *actually doing*." When I returned to Klenovec three years later as a PhD researcher, this comment became the main motive for rethinking and rebuilding my research methodology in favour of observational methods. Thanks to associated new insights, I uncovered many examples of smoke and mirrors clouding my interview-based MA thesis. And it was this methodological change that led me to redefine my research questions to those at the heart of this PhD thesis.

My ethnographic observations were shaped by several specific factors. To start with, my fieldwork experience was formed to a large degree by the fact that I do not own a car. This occasionally raised eyebrows or even suspicions among Romani musicians. After their musical instruments, a car is the second most essential work tool in carrying out their craft. And because public transport coverage in the locality is not very dense, the idea that someone could get around independently without one was hardly thinkable (and I must admit that it was not always easy). Yet, from a research perspective, starting to travel in cars with musicians became a turning point.

Following Romani musicians in their activities gave me invaluable insights into the routines of their craft, especially as, in many respects, these differed from the image that I had constructed in the interview-based MA thesis. Alongside the energising Romani music performances, I also experienced the toil and tiredness that come with the craft, but about which musicians barely talk (cf. ⇦"Show must go on!," ⇦"I Want to Break Free!"). Being in the middle of Romani music-making (rather than hearing it explained to me) allowed me to experience the Romani musical craft first-hand. Although I was not plucking the strings of the instruments, I too experienced the regular sleep deprivation, an essential part of musicians' lifestyles. In the mornings, my ears ached from the effects of the noisy audio gear, my stomach felt like water due to fast food from gas stations, and my body was broken by the contorted positions in which we stayed during the long hours in the car.

Sitting packed in like sardines, surrounded by musical instruments, cables, and stands increased the intimacy of my relationships with research participants. Our journeys often lasted several hours, so we had opportunities to chat about a whole range of things – whether related to music and the musical craft or indeed *anything* else. The seating arrangements in the car usually changed organically after each stop, so I often had a chance to have long conversations with each member of a particular band during any one journey. Our conversations were different – both form- and content-wise – compared to the ones we had shared in 2015 when I exposed musicians to a digital recorder and a question sheet. They were also more information exchanges as musicians too were interested in how things work in the UK or the Czech Republic, where I come from.

Our mutual physical and social closeness, our long-term acquaintance and the exchange-based nature of our collaboration – these have all naturally developed into friendship. Eventually, friendship became one of my key ethnographic 'methods', especially through the dynamic of information exchange (cf. also Glesne, 1989; Tillmann-Healy, 2016). It seemed that the more we got to know each other, the fewer questions about the nature of my work I got (although these were fairly abundant at the beginning of the research). On various occasions, nevertheless, it was obvious that musicians remained aware (and alert) about my role as a researcher. For instance, on the way back from a gig in August 2021, Karol was telling me with a laugh about how he had recently played at a "Gypsy funeral" that had turned into a party overflowing with alcohol. Barna interrupted Karol's story with a loud exclaimation: "Oh my, don't tell him this! He's gonna write about it, don't you know? He's been *sent* to write about us."

In this respect, I have encountered interesting moments during which I was exposed to sudden transparency about my ethnographic endeavours. Among the strongest memories of this sort comes from one *bašável*, at which Peťo asked me: "What is this notebook for?" "This? This is a *field* notebook. I make various notes about what I see and what I hear. About music-making and musicians too. Wanna have a look?" I handed it to him. For a long moment, I felt – so to speak – naked. I took notes in Czech – my mother tongue. But thanks to the closeness of Czech

and Slovak, Peťo could have understood everything I had noted about that evening and earlier events. He patiently leafed through the notebook for a long while, then handed it back to me with a smile. Another interesting challenge I undertook was a presentation at an academic festival called Ethnological Days [*Etnologické dni*], in April 2021 (Nuska, 2021b). The event was held online due to the Covid-19 outbreak, and thanks to online promotion of the event, the invitation to attend found its way to my research participants in K&K. I had previously given a lot of talks about Romani musicians from K&K, yet always far removed from the place and, moreover, behind the safe veil of the English-language barrier. Suddenly, I was expected to talk about musicians from K&K to an audience in which some of them were present, and in a language they could easily understand. The presentation went well. Janko Deme – as it turned out, the only one I know of who saw the presentation – told me he found it "really interesting," especially my notes about the history of the Romani craft. Yet, I must admit I do not remember ever being so nervous during any academic presentation. Those and similar moments tested our mutual trust and, indeed, friendship as an ethnographic method.

One of the things that I found a positive contribution to our friendship was the fact that I am a practising musician. I made my mark on the memory of local Roma as early as during my field research trip in 2013, when I found the courage to participate in singing the song *Bubamara* at one *bašável*. After the song, Muki – an older Dolinka inhabitant and the son of the legendary *primáš* Drôto – brought me a shot of vodka and exclaimed: "But *you* are a Gypsy!" Marcela later recalled about my first visit: "From that moment, I knew you were a good guy as you sang really well. I even knew you would eventually come back." Although we – non-Roma – do not seem to think much about the correlation between singing abilities and being a good person, some of my Romani friends certainly did think about me this way. Having a common topic was also one of the reasons why conversations with my research participants never stalled. Talking about things about which my research participants and I have a genuine passion worked as a miraculous ice-breaker. Quite naturally, musicians' perception of me as a musician significantly shaped how they interacted with me during the fieldwork. "Are the vocals clearly audible?" is an example of a whole genre of questions I got whenever accompanying my research participants for music gigs. In this sense, my presence certainly distorted the situations that are described ethnographically in this thesis. Yet, imagine an ethnographer making the note in their field notebook that 'Roma like to drown out the vocals in the mix' rather than telling them, 'Guys, put the vocals more to the front!'

While the music was a focus for positive affinity in our collaboration (and friendship), I also need to acknowledge things that challenged it. These surely included our different identities. For my research participants, I am and will always be a *gádžo* – a non-Rom. For several years, I have been coming to K&K from the other side of the pariahdom boundary (and also from a more privileged part of Europe). In my perceptions, this aroused a certain distrust among my research participants in the early days of our acquaintance. From Romani friends I have known for the longest, I have learned that K&K Roma are on guard against non-

Roma who just come and hang out with Roma – people including missionaries, social and NGO workers, and – sure enough – *researchers*. "These are all *špekulanti*. They pursue projects *on* Roma [*robí projekty na Romy*], but they give them nothing," I heard often.

In this respect, I was but an exemplary type of such a *špekulant*. Being a fully-funded student at a recognised UK university, paid to pursue a project 'on Roma', I have been transforming information and experiences that my dear research participants shared with me into symbolic capital that may eventually help me with mobility on the academic ladder. Meanwhile, my friends continue to be trapped in the conditions of a *hladová dolina* with zero social mobility, working extremely hard to – quite literally – *survive*. The fact that I sometimes bought a missing string for a musical instrument, helped to sort out a problem with a TV or to light a fire in a dying stove did not relieve my feelings that I effectively gave *nothing* back to my Romani friends in K&K. In this respect, eventually my visual methods helped me to feel a little less guilty.

Reflection on Visual Methods

Since 2015, whenever I have set foot in Dolinka, I have immediately been surrounded by dozens of Romani children asking me two typical questions: either "Would you take a photo of me?" or "Have you brought photos today?" It has become an important ritual for me to bring back photographs I took last time. Although I started performing this ritual without thinking of it as an ethnographic method, over time, photographs have become an important means of communication between myself and Roma from K&K – especially those families of 'non-musicians' living in distinctly less privileged conditions. For many of them, I have become "Peťo from Czechia who takes and brings pictures." My participants have always accepted photographs with genuine pleasure and excitement, and the smartphone era – bringing a certain devaluation of photography as a medium – has not seemed to diminish this. I was glad that I found *something* (albeit something tiny and insignificant) that I could give back to my research participants and friends regularly. It was not until autumn 2018 that I realised I was not the first one in Klenovec and Kokava to practise the very same routine.

During one of my endless car journeys with musicians, I sat next to Janko Deme, who told me that some 30 years ago, a couple of French photographers came to Klenovec and took photos of local musicians. Thanks to the keywords he gave me, I managed to find an outdated web portfolio of photographers Claude and Marie-José Carret with an email address that I soon contacted. I did not have to wait more than one hour for their enthusiastic answer. We met in January 2019 in Klenovec, and we came up with an idea for the repatriation of their photographs – that is, co-organising photo exhibitions in which we would show their pictures to Roma from Klenovec and Kokava for the very first time. To start this project, they provided me with digital copies of their photographs, which I soon found to

be a powerful research tool. I started visiting my research participants with printed copies of the Carrets' photographs, my camera and an audio recorder. I was primarily interested in the names of the pictured musicians for captioning purposes, but people rarely stopped talking after giving me this information. This encouraged me subsequently to use the photo-elicitation method more systematically and purposefully.

Through this method, I ended up learning a lot of stories about local musicians from the past. It was fascinating to see how even the youngest generation of local Roma relate to their predecessors in the pictures taken more than three decades ago. In return, my participants often showed me photographs from their family archives, some of them allowing me to make digital copies and thus enrich my photo-elicitation sample further. In August 2019, we exhibited 28 of the Carrets' photographs on large canvases in Kokava, and, one month later, we moved the exhibition to Klenovec.

Meeting Claude and Marie-José was serendipity with an immense effect on how my ethnography shaped up. Photo-elicitation sessions revealed historical perspectives on the Romani musical craft in Klenovec and Kokava, encouraging my participants to talk about its glorious past, dubious present and uncertain future. Both at the sessions and the exhibitions, the photographs were received with fascination and strong emotions. As I distributed the digital prints of the Carrets' photographs to descendants of the people in the photographs, I felt that I had finally returned to my Romani friends in K&K *something* truly extraordinary and meaningful.

Box #33 – Exhibition 'The Rooted Musicians'

"Whenever a boy was born here in Klenovec, he would be given a bow. And if he grasped it and pulled it, it was obvious that he would be a musician!" That is how many stories I heard about Romani music-making in Klenovec began. Anyone aware of the basic curiosity of all young children might wonder if Klenovec could really end up with so many musicians. But it is only people who have not visited the village that could have these doubts. "We are rooted musicians," one older musician explained to me. The first Roma came to Klenovec with two families of musicians invited by the local aristocratic family of Kubínyi in the 18th century. And with employment opportunities in the village always limited, it was music that ensured families' livelihoods, passing proudly from one generation to the next. The exhibition of photographs by Claude and Marie-José Carret takes us back to the 1980s and 1990s, when the craft was performed by the fathers and grandfathers of those who are taking it forward today. The photographs are alive with the rich chords of Romani music that has echoed around Klenovec for generations and is likely to be heard for many years to come.

thesis.nuska.me/box/33

The use of video in my ethnography was also influenced by serendipity. Although I did travel to K&K equipped with a video camera for my PhD fieldwork, I had not been quite certain as to how I would use it in my ethnography. Luckily, I got one

strange question during my first journey in October 2018. “Are you gonna put that somewhere?” [*Budeš to niekam dávať*?] a musician asked me right after I had filmed his band’s outdoor performance (with their consent). “Of course, I’m gonna give it to *you*. Then you can upload it wherever you like.” “Really?” Their enthusiastic reaction surprised me. It was not long until I got the exact same question from another Romani musician: “Are you gonna put that somewhere?” I cannot count how many times I heard this phrase throughout my fieldwork. It made me realise an important fact about contemporary professional Romani music-making in the locality: Romani musicians are used to being filmed while playing, but rarely do they manage to get hold of the audio-visual material afterwards. When I first brought them digital copies of my videos, they accepted them with genuine joy and excitement. So, I started doing it on a regular basis. I sometimes brought audio tracks, sometimes videos, sometimes both on my USB drives. Whenever possible, we reviewed the material together on the musicians’ TVs or my tablet. Over time, these audio-visual media exchanges became the very core of our collaboration.

My role as a video documentarian also justified my presence in the field. In the eyes of my research participants, my activity in gathering and distributing the audio-visual material made my presence somewhat more comprehensible for them. Later, I learned that some of them saved my phone number under a nickname: “Peťo *the Cameraman*.” For the musicians, I was, indeed, a cameraman who always had something to give them back. I think it was one of the main reasons why they gladly accepted me into their crowded cars on their journeys to perform their craft. Romani musicians (who – as I got to know – tend to have very business-oriented minds) seemed to have accepted our *quid pro quo* ‘business model’. And this model was, indeed, highly beneficial to my ethnographic work. Thanks to our media exchanges, we always had good reason to meet. I learned what musicians like (and dislike) about their music (it is worth adding that the vast majority of the material ended up unpublished as the musicians did not find the playing good enough). The videos provided a unique insight into how musicians think about the commodification of their music and, last but not least, into what *they* consider makes ‘Romani music’ truly Romani (and what does not).

From 2021 onwards, our collaboration developed into a more distinct form: we switched from documenting live events to making scripted and directed music videos. For these collaborations, I stayed in my role of ‘cameraman’ (and later, editor) while letting my participants become directors and producers – that is, in control of their self-representation. As this collaboration was very much in progress as I finished up this thesis, it is far too early to evaluate it now. I am sure, though, that it will eventually fill the pages of a dedicated methodological paper (cf. ⇨Updates on Music Videos).

Overall, although I consider visual methods auxiliary to this ethnography and while none of their outcomes is essential for comprehending the content of this thesis, they have certainly played an important role in the collaboration with my research participants – in forming our mutual relationship and providing me with access to the core information upon which this ethnographic thesis is based. I also think

that visual methods assisted me with balancing the asymmetry of our relationship, a quality inherently present in almost every relationship between an ethnographer and their 'informants'. I hope I did not use visual methods merely as an "extension of participant observation" (e.g. Hurworth, 2004, p. 173), affirming my "monopoly on observation" (Rouch, 2003, p. 46). Rather, my intention was to employ them so that my research participants could stay in control of how they wanted to be represented. I hope that visual methods helped me effectively fulfil the role of a "non-Romani ally" to my friends, with all the responsibilities and dilemmas that this role implies whenever combined with the role of researcher (cf. C. Silverman, 2018). Finally, I hope that these visual methods supported me in doing research *with* Roma and *for* Roma, rather than just *on* Roma, and that I succeeded in giving *something* useful and meaningful back to my research participants and friends. It is up to them to judge that, though.

Towards the Films...

For the ongoing and upcoming production of the ethnographic films, I will also have to develop my role of 'cameraman' towards those of producer and director, something I have not yet explored much in the context of my field. But there is a fundamental wish I share with my research participants (and film protagonists) to maintain the model based on the collaboration just described. As I pointed out in the introduction, there are two ethnographic films – one short and one feature-length. The former is in its late-postproduction phase, and the latter is awaiting production in spring and summer of 2022 – that is, around the time when this thesis will likely be examined. The films are produced under the umbrella of the Annual Diego Carpitella Scholarship (facilitated by Fondazione Giorgio Cini), which I was awarded in June 2020.

The first film is 16 minutes long. It depicts perceptions of Claude and Marie-José Carret's photographic work expressed by Roma from Klenovec and Kokava. It is based on my footage from photo-elicitation sessions and the preparation of the two photographic exhibitions. A preview of this film is now available here.

Box #34 – The Rooted Musicians from Klenovec

French photographers Claude and Marie-José Carret first came to Klenovec in 1984. They were immediately fascinated by the life of the local musicians and have returned every year since, capturing generations of the town's famous musicians. Their work reveals the depth of Klenovec's musical roots and how characters from the past live on in the memories and practices of local people. The short film Rooted Musicians from Klenovec: Life in Photographs depicts a joint effort of the French photographers and a Czech anthropologist to repatriate images to the places where they were taken.

thesis.nuska.me/box/34

The second will be a feature-length film (50–80 minutes) based on participatory music-video making, showing portraits of three Romani bands from Klenovec and Kokava and documenting the creative processes behind the making of the music videos. The film starts – conceptually speaking – where the thesis leaves us. The main question for the film is: what would Romani musicians do if they had chance to "break free" from restrictions associated with their craft and to fully explore their creative potential? (cf. ⇨Updates on the Films).

My aim is for the films to complement the thesis with new insights. I hope, though, that they will not only be useful in affording a deeper understanding of professional Romani music-making in Klenovec and Kokava, but also in appreciating the needs of my research participants and friends. I see them not as a *full stop* for this long research project. Rather, I hope the films will be an *ellipsis*, breaking ground for further collaboration…

Updates

Updates on the Research

http://thesis.nuska.me/research-updates

Updates on Music Videos

http://thesis.nuska.me/music-videos

Updates on the Films

http://thesis.nuska.me/film-updates

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