# Being Isolated in Togetherness.
# The Coexistence of Roma
# and the Majority of Society Living
# in Slovakia during the 1930s and 1940s

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Alterity — Roma — Coexistence — Gypsy Camps — Czechoslovakia — World War II

## INTRODUCTION

The Roma were often depicted by Slovak society as an extraneous element which did not correspond to accepted notions of the Czechoslovak, or in this case, the Slovak nation.[1] The common perception of what it meant to be a Gypsy was simply not compatible with current ideas of a decent and loyal citizen in interwar Czechoslovakia. [2] Indeed, being "a Gypsy" was frequently linked to Hungarian culture, and this may have caused an ambivalent approach towards the Roma community. Since Roma musicians performed at Hungarian patrimonial courts, Hungarian culture was to some extent influenced by Roma culture.[3] Moreover, Roma occupied a rather indifferent interspace between the majority population and other minorities, for example Germans, Hungarians etc. They had a competitive position in relation to Slovak workmen, for example, as they represented a cheaper alternative for potential customers — many of them found employment as trash collectors and many other typical professions and characteristics could be listed.[4]

Which role did the Roma play in Slovak society? How did the approach of the state and local authorities towards Roma changed over the period considered? How and on what grounds did the majority of the population create categories to classify Gypsies?

2   The term Gypsy will be used just as a historical category in the historical context. "Roma" is employed as an umbrella term comprising various Romani groups living in Slovakia.
3   See Emília Horváthová, Cigáni na Slovensku: historicko-etnografický náčrt, Bratislava 1964, pp. 98–99. This was mainly the case of Southern Slovakia.
4   E. g. blacksmiths, horse traders etc.

I would like to concentrate in this brief article mainly on the relations between the Roma and Slovak society, considering their coexistence in different places in Slovakia, situational distinctions and their social dynamics. In the various subchapters, I would like to highlight selected issues and elements, which in my opinion played a crucial role in that period.

One of the key aspects involved in this conceptualization is the term *alterity* used by Emmanuel Levinas. This philosopher wasn't the only theoretician who tried to define and explain this term. Such attempts to conceptually grasp and define *alterity* can also be observed among various sociologists, historians, etc.[5] Employing preserved archival materials and the available testimonies of living witnesses from the studied period, the research is de facto highly dependent on the so-called image of the other produced by the wider society. It represented a summary of certain characteristics, attributed to a person, who was classified as *"a Gypsy"* by society.

In respect to that, a question could be posed about the specificity of the ascribed features. Were those typical exclusively for the population of Slovak Roma or can this framework be applied to contemporary society in general?[6] For my attempts to answer this question, I employed the theory of Levinas, because he endeavored to describe precisely the process of forming a subject through alterity. A being[7] would relate to the existing[8] and the *I-subject* possesses control over the existing, because it objectifies and renders with this step from being something. This means that I can describe and perceive such elements due to this process of objectivization.[9] In this case, an individual from the wider society can become aware of the existence of a certain minority. The moment of discerning the other appears retrospectively as a breaking point; more precisely it is always perceived by the subject *ex post*. The subject needs otherness to realize its own identity and in that way he or she is able to grasp the otherness of the individual. Simultaneously, the alterity approach enables an attempt for an alternative interpretation of the historical narrative and its reconstruction, because it symbolizes another perspective. Through these actions the Roma are discursively visualized and partly reconstructed as an agent due to passively formulated documents by local and state officials in the cases where no other evidence has been preserved.

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5   See Lucie Storchová et al., Koncepty a dějiny, Prague 2014, p. 242. Works of Quasthoff, Bausinger, Spivak could be mentioned in that context. *Alterity* concept is often used as a complementary to identity, as a definition of otherness necessary for forming its own identity.

6   See Judith M. Okely, The Traveller-Gypsies, Cambridge 2002, pp. 66–67.

7   I could be defined as mental perception of self.

8   It is the physical existence of the subject.

9   See Emmanuel Levinas, Ethik und Unendliches. Gespräche mit Phillipe Nero, Graz-Wien 1996, pp. 37–39.

## CHOSEN PLACES

The Roma inhabited various places[10] in the wider society according to spatial theories.[11] It could be seen as a special type of social geography or social topology which determined the location of Roma dwellings. The Roma population usually lived in the same types of places, which included the outskirts of villages, on river banks, on special streets in the towns which were designed exclusively for the Roma, in Romany camps situated outside the village, etc. This social construction meant an imaginary framework of separated places where Roma were expected to live and if they chose to live elsewhere that could have been interpreted as a potential cause for social conflict. Those separated places were imaginary solely in the sense that they were not naturally given, but defined by the wider society as hidden spots which may have been far removed from the village or as precisely defined places in the village or town where the Roma lived. It doesn't mean that these notions existed only in peoples' minds; they were, in fact, realized in social practice. According to that sort of vague conception, local inhabitants could either move the Roma population out or allow them to stay.

Such tensions are illustrated by the example of the town Lučenec from the prewar 1930s where two different approaches to the Roma occurred. On the one hand, there was a street called *Hudobná* [Musical], where many local Roma musicians lived and enjoyed various privileges, on the other hand, there is the example and image of poor Roma living at the outskirts of the town, where a new public swimming pool was to be built. Those Roma were often described by officials as filthy and dangerous for the wider society. It was argued they should be kept away from such places as the spa in Piešťany or Bardejov, where they might contaminate water in which others swam, such as the baths and pools in Piešťany and Bardejov and the proposed pool in Lučenec.[12]

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10  This element is pointed out e.g. in the article by David Scheffel, a professor at Thompson Rivers University. See David Scheffel, Belonging and domesticated ethnicity in Veľký Šariš, Slovakia, Romani Studies 25, no. 2, pp. 115–149. Further David Scheffel, Svinia in black & white: Slovak Roma and their neighbours, Peterborough 2005. Or recently in the master thesis by Jan Ort called Mobilita Romů v kontextu lokálních vztahů. Případová studie z okresu Svidník na východním Slovensku, which is a case study based on relations between Roma and Non-Roma inhabitants. Jan Ort. „Mobilita Romů v kontextu lokálních vztahů. Případová studie z okresu Svidník na východním Slovensku.» Accessed November 16, 2018. https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/184564.

11  Theories connected with the spatial turn occurred during the second half of the 20th century and emphasized the social construction of space. I employed mainly the conceptualization of Henri Lefebvre and his three spatial categories — *spatial practice, representations of space* and *representational spaces*, mainly the first two of them — realization of spatial imaginations and technocratic views and planning by the authorities. See Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, Oxford 1991, pp. 38–39.

12  Pozvanie Ct.členov mestskej rady, 10th July 1933, Box IX, Folder 2, Item Number 1, Mestský úrad v Lučenci I. Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Lučenec.

## MOVING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE AWAY

The forced relocation of Romany camps symbolized a phenomenon which appeared during the entire studied period and continued even during the Second World War.[13] Local officials even in interwar Czechoslovakia attempted at all costs to prevent the Roma's return.[14] This fact can be demonstrated with an example of the village Vtáčkovce not far from Košice, where even now, a Romany camp is located, just as it was nine decades ago. Andrej G.,[15] a local resident, decided to leave his sheep enclosure, which stayed untouched where it was, because G. refused to destroy it himself, as he intended to one day return. In this case, the holders of demolished houses obtained a refund for destroyed housing.[16] It frequently happened that municipalities refused or did not ensure to repay the damage caused.

Generally, it was mandated that local and municipal authorities would build new dwellings for free.[17] Some of them did not obtain sufficient funding, others strove to save up money and turned to local administrative offices to acquire subsidies or which required Roma to co-finance their newly-built houses and this way, partly got rid of the financial burden.[18] Roma were then moved elsewhere,[19] where a water well was built as one of the first and most important items. This demonstrative and practical act emphasized the hygienic aspect of the new housing.

At the same time and more frequently during the 1940s, new Romany camps were often separated from the wider society because Roma were depicted as something undesirable and associated with lack of hygiene and the potential danger of disease. However, such accusations emerged also in cases when Roma lived in houses similar to the dwellings of Slovak inhabitants. Allegedly unsanitary conditions were frequently used as a pretax to move Roma out of villages or towns. It depended mostly on the subjective perception of local officials and Slovak society if the house was

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13  Helena Sadílková also depicts a relocation of Romany camp. See Sadílková, Helena, Resettling the settlement: recent history of a Romani settlement in south-east Slovakia. In: K. Kozhanov, M. Oslon, H. Dieter, Das amen godi pala Lev Čerenkov: Romani historija, čhib taj kultura, Graz 2017. pp. 339–351.

14  Obec Ptáčkovce — premiestnenie cigánov, 17th August 1933, Box 246, Folder 10 628/1933, Item Number 66, OÚ v Košiciach Fonds (1923–1939), State Archive in Košice, Košice.

15  In all cases, I decided to use just first name and initial to balance both — at least partly anonymization the social actors and avoidance of dehumanizing them, i. e. that they would be just some indifferent members of a group. Anonymization of persons was also a requirement in some archives to do my research. State officials can be easily identified on the ground of their position.

16  Ibid., Item Number 65.

17  Ibid., Item Number 50.

18  This occured e.g. in the village Klčovany, Cigáni v Klčovanoch, sťažnost — šetrenie, 19th December 1942, Box 386, Folder 16-1097-1, Item Number 2, MV (1939–1945), the Slovak National Archive, Bratislava.

19  Obec Ptáčkovce — premiestnenie cigánov, 17th August 1933, Box 246, Folder 10 628/1933, Item Number 53, OÚ v Košiciach Fonds (1923–1939), State Archive in Košice, Košice.

classified as typically „Gypsy-looking" or not.[20] According to that, the strategies in the social realm differed as well. Within the meaning of Article 2 of the draft order No. 163/1941 Úr. n.,[21] the municipalities were obliged to move the Roma out of villages or towns and set up Romany camps isolated from other houses. Some municipal authorities, however, tried to keep their families living there, arguing that the Roma had resided in the same place for almost one hundred years or that they helped regularly with agricultural work.[22]

The attempts of municipalities to remove Romany camps from their towns can be interpreted as the enforcement of modern administrative universalism. Those state institutions tried to eliminate any alternative types of self-government and to hegemonize the administration. Such steps enabled the authorities to exert social control and discipline over the Roma minority. The existence of an alternative may have undermined the legitimacy of state power and opened up space for resistance. The above-mentioned ideas appeared, for example, in the works of Victor Smith and were further developed by the Indian political scientist Partha Chatterjee.[23]

## ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ROMA

Relations between members of Slovak society and the Roma differed, as mentioned above, depending on various features and regional considerations. Relations were not marked only by oppression; the record also shows some positive incidents. These demonstrate occasions of cooperation of the wider society and the Roma population during the studied period. Such characteristics could be illustrated by the example of the Roma living in the region of Krupina, located in the southern part of central Slovakia.

Jan and Julius B. had lived in a small village called Patkoš until they were suddenly affected by unexpected and horrendous flooding in 1931. Local authorities who learned of their plight offered them residence in a village two kilometers far away.[24] Their original house was destroyed when the Štiavnička flooded and washed it into the river. Jan and his wife Margita received permission to accept charity which would enable them to build a new home. As parents of five children, it was imperative they have a place to live as soon as possible, which local authorities understood and aided.

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20 This could be illustrated with the example of Banská Štiavnica's region, where gendarmes judged according to unspecified criteria the "Gypsiness" or "Non-Gypsiness" of the housing. See Cigáni — vykonávanie §-u 2. vyhl. čísl. 163/41 Úr.n., 10th August 1944, Box 476, Folder 2108/44, Item Number 4, Okresný úrad v Banské Štiavnici (1923–1945) Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica.

21 Ibid., Item Number 11.

22 Ibid, Item Number 5.

23 „The Colonial State by Partha Chatterjee — A Summary." Clueless Political Scientist. October 14, 2017. Accessed January 26, 2018. https://cluelesspoliticalscientist.wordpress.com/2017/03/30/the-colonial-state-by-partha-chatterjee-a-summary/.

24 Okresnímu úřadu v Dolních Teranech, 14th May 1931, Box 244, Folder 5745/31, Item Number 2, Okresný úrad v Krupine (1923–1945) Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Zvolen.

As Jan had been ill for many years, the family would not have been not able to make enough money on their own had it not been for this permission.

Another instance of social solidarity which was partially initiated by the majority of the population is also worth mentioning. An elderly woman from the Zvolen region was given permission to beg due to her indigence and the fact that she was too old to work.[25] Her begging was forgiven by her polite behavior while asking for small change. Another positive example of the majority populations' treatment of a member of the Roma minority is illustrated by what happened to Daniel S. During a storm, his house was struck by lightning and he was paralyzed. During the storm, he had been sleeping next to a mirror which was hit by the lightning. Slovak members of the community rallied to his assistance and came to help him put the fire out.

Local officials used such examples to support their claims that the Roma's flimsy housing may represent a threat for the wider society — in other words that these houses, which were so easily destroyed, could have led to the destruction of larger parts of the town. For instance, the houses mentioned in the first example were just two meters from the river bank, therefore they were prone to simply collapse and fall into the river. This subchapter demonstrates that relations between the Slovak and Roma populations were not black and white and can not be placed into a binary system of two maxims called conflicts and peaceful cohabitation. Some local authorities even defended their Roma citizens during the Second World War to prevent their deportation to a labor camp, others tried intensively to expel them from the municipality. Rather, they were very complex and varied, determined by a range of circumstances and situations.

## CASTING IN THE SPECIAL SOCIAL ROLE

Special social roles were given to the Roma community according to their qualifications or skills. For instance, they were commonly viewed as a competitive element for Slovak tradesmen. Their commercial activities did not only symbolize an additional economic aspect, they also performed work which was beneficial for the society. Because of the itinerant nature of some professions, they also represented a possibility for the poorest in outlying regions to obtain almost equivalent products available to those who were richer and lived in more populated areas.[26]

Furthermore, some of the Roma were closely linked to musical activities and playing various musical instruments. As was mentioned above, musicians were often treated differently than other Roma. For example, they were allowed to live in the center of towns, as in the case of Lučenec with its special street Hudobná for Roma musicians. Additionally, they could apply for financial support, which was restricted

25  Vd. G. Mária, Bzovik, čís. 100, žiadost o povolenie na sbieranie milodarov, 16th May 1931, Box 244, Folder 5834/31, Item Number 2, Okresný úrad v Krupine (1923–1945) Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Zvolen.

26  Cigánská žebrota a podpora, Box 289, Folder 24078/34, Item Number 3, OÚ v Košiciach Fonds (1923–1939), State Archive in Košice, Košice.

during the profitable periods for musicians, e.g. at Christmas or carnival.[27] Assigning Roma a specific social role could have been a concomitant feature of various expectations Slovak society had of the Roma.

## BETWEEN DICHOTOMIES

This subchapter addresses various dichotomic categories which appear in the discourse connected with the Roma population living in Slovakia during this time period. Among these classifications occur categories such as the division line, which separates the settled from the nomadic Roma. Other dichotomies include those based on nationality — for example *our* Roma population contrasted with foreign Roma, etc. In addition to these categories, the classification of Roma according to their attitude to work played one of the crucial roles in labeling an individual as antisocial. Such dichotomies and various categories can be viewed as efforts of the Slovak society to construct and comprehend the image of the Roma and to place it into the narrative of the wider society.

Settled Roma were situated partly in a schizophrenic position in the society. They balanced on the division line between the wider society and the rest of the Roma population. Even though they may have lived a settled life in wooden or brick houses, this fact did not always shield them from the hatred of Slovaks which persisted in some villages. Although they fulfilled some of the conditions created by the wider society, they remained identified as Roma.

Homi K. Bhabha demonstrated the aspect called mimicry in his book *The Location of Culture*, where he described the position of colonized people facing acceptance and the refusal of the majority society at the same time. A similar dynamic was also described by Frantz Fanon, who wrote about the everyday stories of colonized people. They often realized, due to frequent travels on public transportation that they were perceived as "the other" despite their attempts to fit in with the wider society. *"One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro."*[28] As Fanon described, colonized peoples were trying to maintain two dimensions of behavior to varied groups and thus, they were partly stuck in a schizophrenic impasse.

## DIRTY PLACES

The Roma population had been frequently described as a public health menace that should be separated from the rest of society.[29] We can observe this in the case of the

27  Zápisnice o pojednávání sociálnej komisii města Lučenca, 18th February 1935, Box IX, Folder 2, Item Number 1, Mestský úrad v Lučenci I. Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Lučenec.

28  See Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, London 2008, p. 8.

29  Báčkovík — Cigáni, premiestnenie, Box 300, Folder 1359/35, Item Number 2, OÚ v Košiciach Fonds (1923–1939), State Archive in Košice, Košice.

village Báčkovik from 1935, near the city of Košice. Roma inhabitants there created, according to the words of local authorities, moral indignation on the part of the majority culture and theoretically a bad example for the wider society.

According to some accounts, many Roma lived in poverty, mired in human feces, thus in conditions possibly constituting a serious health risk and a threat to the morality of residents in the neighborhood, as they could have easily infected the rest of the inhabitants. Roma were depicted as destroyers of the social system. "(…) they are therefore dangerous both concerning the health and veterinary issues, and so it is in the interest of the municipality desirable to provide them another isolated place."[30] The living conditions of Roma were assessed differently than the living conditions of those in the majority culture, which can be seen from the example of the village Klčovany in the next subchapter.

The notion of Roma regarding hygienic conditions could have been conceptualized in a different way than how it was by contemporary Slovak society. As Michael Stewart mentioned in the example of Hungary, the Roma distinguished between the inner and outer body and according this perception, they used different bowls while washing their hands and washing the dishes. Nevertheless, they were usually seen as "dirty Gypsies".[31] It is interesting to note, however, that they thought the very same about the majority of the society. The Roma could not understand how non-Roma could live with pets at their homes, behavior they considered disgusting and filthy.

## HARD TIMES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The war period brought an increasing intensity of violence and persecution towards the Roma. During the 1940s, proposals were made for a network of labor camps or even a specialized Roma camp were suggested. One of them was, for example, a separated and self — sufficient Roma town. The Slovak society tried to cast the Roma out of the society and spatially out of towns or villages, because they symbolized a potential harm to the wider society. In some villages, the inhabitants sought to move them out as fast as possible and welcomed the idea of building camps for the Roma.

The Roma were classified as an antisocial element in the society. But what did being antisocial mean exactly? Which characteristics were regarded as antisocial? Who was classified as an antisocial person? Were all the Roma in the Slovak society seen as "antisocial persons abominating work"? All of these questions could have been related to the notions of Roma and the plan concerning their future in labor camps. The antisocial behavior, however, was viewed differently by the local and state authorities. It depended on their occupation, their living standards, the number of Roma and various other features. The approach of municipalities played a substantial role, as they had the power to move or to keep Roma in the village.

30  Ibid.
31  See Michael Stewart, Time of the Gypsies. Oxford 2004, p. 206.

The above-mentioned characteristics can be demonstrated by the example of the village Klčovany[32], located in the western part of Slovakia. Members of Hlinkova garda[33] decided in 1942 to draw up a letter accusing six Roma families of beggary, producing dirt, etc. This line of argumentation can be associated with discourse regarding the aestheticization of the space and concern for the shared body of the Slovak nation, which was, in the opinion of those members, endangered by the mere presence of the Roma.[34] They presented the Roma as an element of decay which might have partly functioned as a way of scapegoating the Roma for other troubles within the society. Moreover, the Roma were accused of hurting the interests of municipalities in promoting tourism, due to the fact that they regularly begged and allegedly gnawed on bones in public. The absence of toilets for approximately 71 persons was named as being the source of an acrid smell which spread throughout the entire village and prompted outrage.[35] In response to this, members of Hlinka Guard called for employing the same solution for the "Gypsy problem" as was used for the Slovak Jews.

The local police investigated allegations against the Roma living in the village of Klčovany and concluded that most of the complaints were unsubstantiated. According to their final report, the Roma were actually doing rather well financially, making their livelihood primarily in the construction business.[36] The incentive for authors to write insulting letters about the Roma is unclear and multifaceted. They may have been trying to expel the Roma because they held a grudge against them which was motivated by nationalist tensions. Or they might have hoped they would be able to appropriate Roma property, as happened in other Slovak villages at that time.[37] Those possible explanations are mere speculation and comprise only a few of several possible motivations.

## THOSE WHO ARE NOT BUILDING SOCIALISM
## AGAINST US ARE BUILDING WITH US

Soon after the Second World War, the Roma were depicted in the nascent and slowly forming socialist society as people who did not care about the welfare of society as a whole; they were portrayed as being individualists. According to this line of

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32  See a popularizing article Monika Stachová, Pronásledovaní, Kulturní týdeník A2 12, 2017, no. 1, p. 29.

33  This organization could be defined as a parallel structure of security forces during the Second World War in Slovakia.

34  Odstranenie Cigánov, 10th October 1942 Box 386, Folder 16-1097-1, Item Number 3, MV (1939–1945), the Slovak National Archive, Bratislava.

35  Ibid.

36  Cigáni v Klčovanoch, sťažnosť — šetrenie, 19th December 1942, Box 386, Folder 16-1097-1, Item Number 2, MV (1939–1945), the Slovak National Archive, Bratislava.

37  Zápisnica napísaná na obecnom úrade v Popudinách, 9th August 1944 Box 538, Folder D 1050, Item Number 30, Okresný úrad ve Skalici (1923–1945), State Archive in Trnava, Skalica.

reasoning, the Roma constituted an inappropriate and negative example to others, especially to small children. Such portrayals were not typical only for the post-war period, however, indeed, they had also continuously emerged in the earlier years of the studied period.

This can be illustrated by the instructions to doctors with an address in the region of Košice. The dangerousness of the Roma was attributed mainly to their way of life.[38] Local authorities regularly stressed that the Roma may be carriers of illnesses and therefore represented a "risk for the health of the state citizens"[39] or could have had a detrimental influence in general for the wider society. Some of the Roma were employed stacking garbage which they had collected for days and months. [40] Had they not performed this work, the Roma may have disrupted the existing economic plan. Members of the Communist Party tried to mitigate the alleged indifference of Roma citizens for the socialist thoughts and exert a positive effect on Roma children or attempted to remove them from their parents' care.[41]

The representatives of local authorities monitored the number, the activities and the employment rate of the Roma minority regularly. Unregulated and unreported occupations, such as various part-time jobs or even the consumption of alcoholic drinks, were regarded as something inappropriate which could have threatened the building of socialism and should therefore be eliminated.[42] Very specific consideration was given to the Roma's potential party membership and to the school attendance of Roma children. Some municipalities tried to convince the Roma that the new political system symbolized the possibility of starting a new community life in new housing conditions.[43] This may have convinced some to change their political affiliation and might have even established sympathies towards the Communist Party.

The representatives of municipalities attempted to bring the Roma population living scattered all over the village or the region together, in order to arrange a new mechanism of social control. In addition, they endeavored to send Roma workers to various factories in Czechoslovakia, primarily to Bohemia. Such workers were confronted with different conditions and a new location, partly uprooted from their former social ties and they were forced to create new social bonds. At the same time, tendencies to isolate the Roma from the wider society and, in theory, to therefore mitigate the adverse effects the supposedly had on Slovaks, persisted.[44]

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38  Cigáni — súpis, Box 389, Folder 21671/47, Item Number 22313/47, ONV v Košiciach Fonds (1945–1948), State Archive in Košice, Košice.

39  Ibid. This mentioned the circular to local doctors, created by the head of the district council.
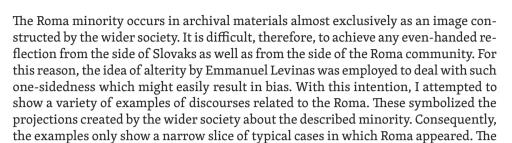
40  Ibid, Item Number 19/24-V/5-1947.

41  Ibid., Item Number 19405/47.

42  Zaradenie osob cigánského pôvodu do trvalého zamestnania, 6th June 1950, Box 137, Folder 474, Item Number 2, ONV Banská Štiavnica, V. referát práce (1945–1960) Fonds, State Archive in Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica.

43  Ibid.

44  Ibid, Item Number 6.

## CONCLUSION

The Roma minority occurs in archival materials almost exclusively as an image constructed by the wider society. It is difficult, therefore, to achieve any even-handed reflection from the side of Slovaks as well as from the side of the Roma community. For this reason, the idea of alterity by Emmanuel Levinas was employed to deal with such one-sidedness which might easily result in bias. With this intention, I attempted to show a variety of examples of discourses related to the Roma. These symbolized the projections created by the wider society about the described minority. Consequently, the examples only show a narrow slice of typical cases in which Roma appeared. The myriad of other examples were presented in my master's thesis.

I attempted to anchor the position of the Roma in Slovak society geographically as well as socially. Attempts to cut off social contact with the Roma often went hand in hand with their geographic isolation. The Roma population even served as a way of externalizing the problems of the wider society and keeping them concealed. The vigorous efforts to move the Roma out of villages or towns symbolized an extreme position in the relations between Roma and Slovaks. Another pole of the relations was related to altruism, solidarity and friendly steps from the wider society. Nevertheless, the attitudes of other nationalities toward the Roma were not black-and-white, but rather complex, based on local context, personal relations or common experience. The position of the Roma, therefore, was not unequivocal and the same for all members of the Roma population living in Slovakia, but rather varied according to diverse features, as this population was by no means homogenous. Even a single individual could have hold various roles.

I tried to illustrate an image of the Roma based on various dichotomic perspectives constructed by the majority of the population and to deconstruct such categorizations due to the fluid borders between them. *Our Roma* could have been perceived as *foreign Roma* e.g. in the neighboring village. Apart from that, *our Roma* could have represented in different documents "trouble-free" Czechoslovak Roma in comparison to "delinquent" foreign Roma coming to Slovakia from Yugoslavia or from other states. Such dichotomic positions can be regarded as attempts to categorize the Roma and to mark the borders between the wider society and so-called "others". One of these differences may have been caused by the distinct conception of dirt and filth. Roma were often dehumanized in such a context and defined as a source of harm for the wider society. Some activities which the Roma considered dangerous and filthy may have been considered as normal, by the major society e.g. having pets at home.

The Second World War can be defined as a historical milestone. This period symbolized an increase in violence towards the Roma. Legislative changes made it possible for most of the Roma population to be labelled as antisocial and subversive elements, thus allowing for their transport to labor camps. The war experience can be seen as a period of severe tension and was one in which attempts were made to realize the most outrageous plans of isolating the Roma from Slovak society. Violence was committed against the Roma minority during the Second World War, reaching from the autarkic town for all the Roma living in Slovakia to concentration camps and atrocities from the last years of the war such as shooting more than one hundred

Roma inhabitants of the village Ilja in Central Slovakia or even burning Roma alive in their houses[45] as was the case in Svätý Kríž nad Hronom.[46]

In comparison to the war period, the post-war era was defined by the reconstruction of the war-ravaged state. The post-war years could have meant a new beginning for the co-existence of the Roma and the majority of Slovak society. Instead, the same attitudes toward the Roma in Slovak society persisted, for example the quasi-colonial discourse of civilization missions, the struggle with hygienic deficiencies of the group and the understanding of their culture's negative traits. Many of these attitudes toward the Roma minority have not disappeared and are present in the discourse even to today.

45   See Ctibor Nečas, Nad osudem českých a slovenských Cikánů, Brno 1981, pp. 139–140.
46   It is a small town located in Central Slovakia, renamed slightly after the war Žiar nad Hronom.