



Our God is Gold: Vlashika Rom at a Crossroads?¹

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ABSTRACT

This article explicates the sociocultural dynamics in the changing lives of the Vlashika Rom group in the Czech and Slovak Republics and contemplates the prospective development of this Roma subculture. To provide a better insight into the endeavour of the Vlashika Rom to maintain their integrity and into their adaptation strategies, the author outlines the genesis of this subethnic group, pointing out the historical circumstances that have formed them in the past. Contrary to former descriptions, the author provides an entirely new concept for dividing the Vlashika Rom into subgroups, identifying three distinct levels that create social boundaries within this community. He describes the way of living of this subgroup in the past as well as the relationships between the Vlashika Rom and the dominant society. Frequently antagonistic, these relationships depend on their way of life, substantially determined by the way they earn their living. The author analyses the inner resources that keep sustaining the contemporary Vlashika Rom culture and, drawing on his own experience and impulses from literature, inquires how long this anachronistic yet at the same time very adaptable culture will be able to resist the assimilation pressures deriving from the very nature of the modern national state.

¹ This is a translation of the slightly modified and extended article entitled "*Sociální deviace u Olašských Romů a její příčiny*" (Social Deviations in the Vlashika Rom and its Causes), which was published in the proceedings "*Prevenca sociálnych deviací – přání, naděje a realita*" (Prevention of Social Deviations – Wishes and Hopes vs Reality), (ed. VEČERKA 2013).

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The Vlashika Rom, most commonly referred to as “*olašští Romové*” in Czech literature, are one of the most distinctive ethnic sub-groups of the Roma in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Unlike populations of the Slovak and Hungarian Roma, which settled down and remained that way for centuries, the Vlashika Rom, who were originally nomadic, have manifested considerable resistance to assimilation pressures. The members of this sub-ethnic group have never accepted the views of the majority society, suggesting that they were culturally underdeveloped, inferior beings. So far, they have not succumbed to linguistic assimilation and their culture is still capable of absorbing and processing new stimuli: sometimes to their advantage, sometimes to their detriment. Due to the fact that the pace of social change is constantly accelerating, the Vlashika Rom find themselves at a hypothetical crossroads, nowadays.

Neither the culture, nor the ethnogenesis of the Vlashika Rom have been described in detail so far.² There are several reasons for this. The Vlashika Rom have always been wayfaring migrants, disregarding borders, which made it difficult for administrations of individual states to ever take hold of them. Since they were used to circumventing laws, they were masters in misleading the people around them by subtle tricks. Moreover, protected by an imaginary wall of their language, which is unintelligible to others, they have been able to hold on to their unwritten laws. An ethnic group without its own literature, they rarely leave written records,³ which would testify to their culture from an emic perspective. These are the internal reasons that make it difficult to describe the processes of shaping the culture of the Vlashika Rom and their ethnogenesis. Beyond those, there are external reasons as well. There are just a few written sources on their history and way of life, because, generally, the “Gypsies” were considered a group on the fringe of society and, as such, rarely the subject of scholarly inquiry. The culture of the Vlashika

² One of the seminal anthropological works on this Roma group, albeit concerning Hungary, is the monograph called *The Time of the Gypsies* (STEWART 1997).

³ Except, e.g., the book by P.Stojka and R.Pivoň, called “*Náš život – Amáro Trajo*” (Our life), which was published as a bilingual publication both in Romany and Slovak (2003).

Rom has seen some transformations; however, these took place in a covert manner, leaving only a few tangible traces.

From a linguistic and cultural point of view, the Vlashika Rom are related in particular to those Roma groups in Eastern Europe that have also formed in the Romanian territory of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. Both linguistically and culturally, the Vlashika Rom are the closest to those groups speaking dialects of Kalderash Romani, in Romania as well as in other parts of the world.

Ethnonyms and Social Structure

In the Czech Republic, the “*olašští Romové*” ethnonym is used to denote the Roma sub-ethnic group that, originally, used to live a nomadic life (see Chapter 3). In their own language, members of this group call themselves Rom (to refer both to the singular and the plural); alternatively, in order to distinguish themselves from another Roma groups, they use the ethnic autonym of Vlashika Rom, which, like the “*olašští Romové*” Czech exonym refers to their Romanian origin⁴, referring to their prolonged linguistic and cultural contacts with the Romanians. In the literature, they are often referred to as *Lováři*⁵, which, actually, is only one of their subgroups, the members of which live mostly in Hungary.⁶ As regards specialised terminology, the ethnic autonym of the Vlashika Rom is a near-equivalent of Northern Vlax, as used e.g. by Tcherenkov and Laederich (2004).

From the point of view of language and culture, the Vlashika Rom tend to form a relatively homogeneous group, which, however, is very diverse on the inside. So far, their social structure has only been described in a partial or inaccurate way⁷. In general terms,

⁴ I.e. not directly to Wallachia, which is one of the historic lands of today's Romania, as is often mistakenly believed. This is also the reason why I do not use the ethnonym “*Valašští Romové*” in this article, which, in its Slovak form of “*valašský Cigáni*”, was coined by the Slovak ethnographer Emília Horváthová (1964).

⁵ Less frequently as *Lovára*, which is an expression used in Romani.

⁶ The *Lovára* are one of the most widely proliferated Roma groups in the world. They live in the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland, Austria, the Ukraine, the United States of America and other countries of the world.

⁷ C.f. MARUŠIAKOVÁ 1988, LAKATOŠOVÁ 1994, STOJKA 1995, ŠUSTEROVÁ 2015.

there are three distinguishing features that shape the social boundaries within the Vlashika Rom community. The first is the lineage – the *nípo*. The *nípo* is an essential element in the social macrostructure. The most numerous *nípura* of Vlashika Rom include e.g. *Bougešŕi* or *Jucovára*, the members of which live on both sides of the Czech-Slovak border, as well as in other countries. Their names are derived from the family founders *Bógo*, *Júco* etc.⁸ In the language of the Vlashika Rom, the nuclear family in its most basic sense is referred to using the word *čaládo*. Traditionally, however, the *čaládo* has hardly been a fully autonomous unit as its functions, to varying degrees, used to be delegated to the extended family.

A second way of distinguishing internal borders is belonging to the Vlashika Rom sub-societies, such as *Lovára*, *Drizára*, *Beáša* or *Cerhára*. These subgroups favoured endogamous partnerships and their names reflect the prevailing professional focus of the group and/or its way of life in the past.⁹

A third way of distinguishing internal borders is affiliation with a social group, as witnessed by prevailing linguistic and cultural contacts. In the south Slovakian belt inhabited by Hungarian people, there live the *Ungrika Rom* (Hungarian Roma), including the regionally defined *Baršvamed'ake Rom* (Gypsies of the historic region of Tekov). To the North, there live the *Toucicka Rom* (Slovak Roma), who form the majority of the Vlashika Rom population in the Czech Republic. Between the Ungrika Rom and Toucicka Rom groups, there are only minor culture and linguistic differences, yet they are at arm's length from one another. The distance applies to marriage policy in particular, which is endogamous, and to Roma courts that are established by both the groups separately, in order to solve their own problems.¹⁰

⁸ C.f. STOJKA 2001.

⁹ Tent makers, traders in worn clothing, gold washers, horse-dealers.

¹⁰ Unless sources are indicated explicitly, some of the data presented in this chapter and elsewhere in the text are based on findings, which the author gained during his research in the field in the past twenty years.

Ethnogenesis

For the sake of understanding the culture and mentality of the Vlashika Rom, we need to return to the past. This group is believed to have begun developing on the verge of the 17th and 18th centuries in the eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy – in Transylvania and Hungary. For lack of accurate data, it is believed that the ancestors of the Vlashika Rom experienced servitude, which Gypsies and Tatars were subjected to in what is now Romania since Ottoman attacks on the Danubian principalities, up until the mid-nineteenth century. The strict system of servitude, spanning more than four centuries, was similar to slavery in North America.¹¹ It is believed that the Vlashika Rom ancestors tried to escape this environment, and, ultimately, came to Hungary. There, they became known primarily as middlemen in the horse trade, a profession that influenced their culture greatly.

The first mention of the Vlashika Rom in Slovakia dates back to approximately 1668. It was then that the council of Liptovská *župa* (administrative unit) issued an order to catch a robber gang of “Vlashika Gypsies, called Balážovci...” (HORVÁTHOVÁ 1964:103).¹² A judicial entry is recorded in the Gemerská *župa* records of 1738, mentioning a coin counterfeiter coming from Transylvania, a man by the name of Pavel Stojka.¹³ Among the Vlashika Rom in the Czech and the Slovak Republics, this surname is one of the most widespread. In 1761, the Royal Governor’s Council sent out a memorandum, which, inter alia, orders Gypsies who came from Romania and Transylvania to be expelled.¹⁴ It is these and other reports that show that in the 18th century (or even earlier), the Vlashika Rom repeatedly proliferated to Upper Hungary (today’s Slovakia). A journey into other countries opened after 1782. It was then that – by a decree of Emperor Joseph II. – rogues and rogue groups such as Roma people became vassal subjects in the land territory. They would no longer be expelled when entering the hereditary lands of the Habsburg monarchy. Thus, migration space for the Vlashika Rom and others widened. In the multi-ethnic environment of the Habsburg Monarchy, many Roma sub-ethnic groups were roaming before the end of the First World War. Some kin-related families of the Vlashika Rom, especially the Lovári,

¹¹ Men, women, and children would be sold at markets as cheap labour, families torn apart, serfs, with whom the master was displeased, used to be tortured and maimed. “The owner could kill his/her serf with impunity...” (FRASER 1998:185).

¹² This information was drawn from a secondary source: A. Húska. (Ibid., p. 150, note. 51). However, it remains to be clarified, if, in Prot. Com. Lypt. III., 1668, fol. 202, which was a source to Húska, the adjective of “olaskych” is actually included.

¹³ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

left for Russia, Scandinavia, Western Europe or America in the second half of the 19th century or early 20th century.

In 1893, Hungary saw a very detailed census of the Gypsies. When using it to process statistical data for the territory of Slovakia, it suggests that there were around 2,000 Roma temporarily settled, while 600 were recorded as nomads at that time (HORVÁTHOVÁ 1964:137-138). The sum of these figures may correspond roughly to the number of the Vlashika Rom in Slovakia at the verge of the 19th and 20th centuries, as other members of nomadic Roma groups were rare in this territory. There is no official census for the current Vlashika Rom population. My estimate is 5.000 people in the Czech Republic and my estimate for Slovakia, which is based on data taken from Atlas rómských komunit (Atlas of Roma Communities 2013, In. ŠUSTEROVÁ 2015:56), is 15.000 people.

Regional Mobility

For centuries, nomadic life was characteristic of the Vlashika Rom. Horse carriage and horses have been inherent parts of their lifestyle. Horses were not only a means of enabling itinerant gangs to move quickly if chased, but also the subject of trade and theft. Using various tricks, the Vlashika Rom managed to sell sick and old horses. At the same time, they knew how to heal them, which was closely interrelated. For a member of the Vlashika Rom, the horse was a symbol of his social status; often it was his only valuable possession. Those who were richer, deposited their money in gold. As nomads, the Vlashika Rom did not have immovable property, so, like all nomad populations, they deposited their fortune in jewellery of gold and silver. They wore it not only as decoration but also as a symbol of their social status. In an emergency, they could pay in gold, or even use it for bribes. Continuing scarcity of means and the existential uncertainty in which they lived meant that gold metal was elevated to the top of Vlashika valuables. A Romany of the Moravian town of Brno, by his Vlashika name of Guglo, put it simply like this: "For us, gold is god".

With the emergence of Czechoslovakia and other nation-states on the territory of the no longer existing Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Slovak and Hungarian populations of the Vlashika Rom were separated. They then evolved under different circumstances; however, the contacts between some families of the Ungrika Rom in southern Slovakia and their relatives in Hungary had not been cut off completely. In the 1920s – possibly in connection with the fact that the area available for migration was reduced by the region

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south of the Danube – the Vlashika Rom spread gradually from western Slovakia to Moravia and Bohemia, as evidenced in numerous police records and reports in the press. E.g. in northern Moravia and Silesia, nomadic groups¹⁵ were arriving every year to trade at horse markets and, starting from the 1930s, they stayed in these regions even during winter time (ČERNÝ 2012:25)¹⁶. Despite control over the movement of nomadic groups tightening in 1927 and onwards as a consequence of the Act on wandering gypsies no. 117/1927, in the thirties, migration of the Vlashika Rom not only did not stop, it intensified instead. In 1933, for instance, “the Central Bohemian region was flooded by Roma groups from Slovakia that had a lot of carriages and identified themselves with Gypsy IDs and trade licenses authoring them to lead their nomad way of life anywhere in Czechoslovakia. Since these groups, particularly the Lakatoš and Stojka ones, infringed public order and interfered with private property” (NEČAS 1997:60-61), they were expelled back to Slovakia. Genuine settlement of the Vlashika Rom on the Czech territory began only after the Second World War. The chain-like migration of the times of economic plight in the after-war period was sparked by the hope that they would find more income opportunities in the industrial centres¹⁷ of Bohemia and Moravia rather than in the agrarian region of southern Slovakia.

After recurrent bans on nomadship since the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empress Maria Theresa, this way of life finally came to an abrupt end in early 1959, when the communist regime engaged in violent sedentarisation by implementing Act no. 74 Coll. *On permanent settlement of migrating and semi-migrating persons*¹⁸. By this act, which deprived Romani and Non-Romani¹⁹ nomads of part of their civil liberties, the communist regime interfered with the development of Vlashika culture. Nomads had to stay where they were, or they were made to stop. The crack-down lasted two days, was conducted by officers of the then regional administrations with the assistance of the police (referred to

¹⁵ These included members of the Toucicka Rom (autor's note).

¹⁶ The author is drawing on data collected in his doctoral thesis called *Kapitoly z historie Romů ve Slezsku a na severní Moravě (1918-1938)* (Chapters from the history of the Roma in Silesia and northern Moravia (1918-1938). Ostrava: University of Ostrava.

¹⁷ It was especially the Bohemian regions near the towns of Ostrava and Kladno, but also in border regions.

¹⁸ It was approved on October 17, 1958.

¹⁹ In former Czechoslovakia, apart from the Vlashika Rom, Roma and Sinti of Czech origin were roaming, who survived the Holocaust, yet in statistically insignificant numbers. Among nomads of Non-Romani origin there were mainly operators of circuses, fairground attractions, etc.

National Committee of Public Security at that time). Another act of disintegration for the Vlashika Rom culture was subsequent urbanization, which resulted in disintegrated family ties and, due to the anonymous way of live in cities, opportunities for illegal livelihoods. From the perspective of the dominant society, urbanization was yet another necessary step in solving the so-called Gypsy issue: After stopping the uncontrolled movement of nomads, their way of living in tents and caravans needed to come to an end. Overnight, forced settlement made the Vlashika Rom face radically new conditions, which they were not prepared to face.

Inter-ethnic Relations

Bartoloměj Daniel, a Romany historian and one of the founders of the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno, used to say: “The Vlashika Rom are in undeclared war with the rest of society.” This is an apt analogy. The Vlashika Rom continue to be a very closed group, which is hostile against the dominant society as a whole. They would always live at the margins of society. It was due to their nomadic way of life, thievery livelihoods, and the social distance of all the other ethnic groups, whose disdain and treatment as “Gypsies” they had to endure. Their attitudes, already strongly ethnocentric, were thus strengthened even more by the stigmatization they faced.

In terms of social stratification, the Vlashika Rom see themselves at the top of an imaginary hierarchy, followed by the so-called *Gáže* (the Non-Roma) and, only in third place, there are the *Rumungri* (settled Roma living in Slovakia or having their origin in Slovakia). Within the Vlashika Rom culture, pronounced ethnocentrism is a defence mechanism against assimilation pressures from the dominant society, while inwardly, it functions as a stabilizing factor that prevents cultural disintegration. State controlled assimilation policy, which had been initiated by the Enlightenment monarchs Maria Theresa and Joseph II., met with resistance among the Vlashika Rom and, in turn, it strengthened their cohesion.

Part of the ethnocentrism among the Vlashika Rom is a disdainful attitude towards the values and socio-cultural norms of the majority society. Significantly, this attitude is reflected in a dismissive attitude towards the “Gážo” (Non-Romani) education methods. In general, it was typical for Romani culture – as well as for other oral cultures – that knowledge and skills were passed on in a direct manner from one person to another, which took place by mimicking and imitation. The opposed education system of the majority society, which is based on abstract exploration of phenomena and enabled the transition from oral culture to a chirographic (written) one, is alien to the Vlashika Rom. In a

compelling way, this is illustrated by the angluno Roma authority²⁰, the “Vlashika king”, Ján Lipa, who said in an interview with reporters: “Our children do not need to learn, because they are intelligent enough when they are born.”

However, the Vlashika culture is not delimited against the “Gážo” culture in only an opposing way. The Vlashika Rom’s relations towards the majority society are ambivalent. On the one hand, they despise the Non-Roma, on the other they consider them as a reference group in some ways. This inference involves cultural innovations, such as convening a Romany Parliament or splitting Roma courts in several instance degrees (see Chapter 5).

Roma culture is greatly influenced by criminal subculture. In comparison with the majority society, a disproportionate part of the Vlashika population passes through detention centres. This is where they gain and strengthen criminal behaviour patterns that they carry over to their families and communities. Under such conditions it is not surprising that many Vlashika Rom are inspired by the Italian Mafia and that they aspire to the position of crime bosses²¹.

Identity Pillars

The Vlashika Rom community is supported by the following three pillars: Endogamy, language, and unwritten Roma laws.

Endogamy: Whereas, formerly, they entered marriage almost exclusively among members of their own community, over the past few decades, mixed marriages, either with Roma from other sub-ethnic groups, or with Non-Roma, are more and more frequent within the Vlashika Rom community. Some still prefer marriages arranged by parents, in which the groom pays the bride’s parents for her upbringing.

Language: The language of the Vlashika Rom, often inaccurately referred to as Lovári (according to its most widely known subdialect), is virtually incomprehensible to speakers of other Romani dialects, both in the Czech Republic, and in Slovakia. In addition to the

²⁰ Referred to as “the Vlashika king” by the media, because this is the way the “angluno Roma” position is presented to the outside world by the Roma themselves. In fact, however, the position involves that of “Chief Judge”.

²¹ The Daniš family grave in Ostrava bears two gilded inscriptions over the names of the deceased – “Bos od bosu” (meaning: Boss of all bosses), and the same in Italian, “Kapo de tuti kapo” (which should read: Capo di tutti capo).

standard communication functions, it serves as a secret language: It offers its speakers a symbolic realm where they can share their culture, and, at the same time, a secret code, too, while committing crime or a bulwark against law-enforcement authorities. Other Romani dialects represent a secret language in varying degrees as well. The Vlashika Rom managed, however, to retain, along with the nomad way of life, their language at almost full vitality to date.

Roma laws: common law applies within the Vlashika Rom community, the violation of which is tried and punished before Roma court – *krísi*. At the forefront of the court, consisting of at least five members, there is *angluno Rom* (Chief judge). The most common offenses are failing to show respect, insult, physical assault, fraud and adultery. Transgressions of the unwritten laws are dealt with using moral sanctions, ordering to compensate for the damages, and fines – *štráfo*. Serious infringements – “offenses” – are incest, grievous bodily harm or murder. Such acts are punished by excommunication – *magerimo*, which is the highest of punishments. For a specified period of time he who has been found guilty is denied social contact²², except for the immediate family; moreover, he loses every respect among the Vlashika Rom. The convict can appeal to a second-degree court, and, ultimately, the highest instance, which is *Angluni republikaki románi krísi* (The republic’s Supreme Court of Roma) (in Slovakia).²³

Livelihood Strategies

In earlier times, the occupation of men was particularly trading with horses. Only a small portion of the Vlashika Rom was occasionally going after crafts, e.g. trough makers, but essentially, physical work was considered to make a person impure²⁴, because it did not fit their status of traders. Women, who were the main ones to look after the family, conducted palmistry, stole chickens and they were skilled pickpockets as well. Additional livelihoods included petty theft and rape of the field or forest. These adaptation strategies were part of the life of the Vlashika Rom for centuries. Taking into account that they were once fleeing from slavery (see Chapter 2) and knowing that for many generations they were roaming in areas of agricultural populations for whom they posed a threat, will allow us to better

²² Not more than 15 years, according to P. Stojka (STOJKA – PIVOŇ 2003).

²³ Ibid, p. 53.

²⁴ Some scholars believe that this is a concept of ritual impurity, which the Roma carried with them from their homeland of India.

understand the defence mechanisms that allowed them to survive even in the most adverse conditions. These circumstances, together with extreme poverty, which they had been exposed to for centuries, shaped their value system with double morality. Robbing a “Gážo” or wheedling something out of him/her used to be, and still is today, not considered something condemnable among many of the Vlashika Rom. In the context of their traditional culture, this is a predominant way to safeguarding themselves and their offspring. Professional specialization²⁵, such as pickpocketing or palmistry, provided for physical survival for the Vlashika Rom. With this ethnic group, the concept of honour and respect of a moral code is reserved for their own culture, which is perceived superior to the “Gážo” culture (see Chapter 4).

The communist era, when the state-planned economy was unable to provide a steady supply of daily consumer goods, let alone luxury goods and fashion items, was a time of prosperity for the Vlashika Rom. In the post-war years they traded with tickets used to manage demand for clothing and food, while pursuing supplemental livelihoods – palmistry, pickpocketing, rape of the field, etc. Trading with horses gradually subsided as a result of radical social and technological changes brought about by collectivization of farmland and by advancing mechanization of agricultural production. Horse trading got a final blow upon the prohibition of nomadism, in the course of which, in early February 1959, some nomadic groups saw their horses being taken away. In the late sixties, a new source of livelihood emerged. The so-called associated production was introduced in agricultural cooperatives, the aim of which was construction work or other activities unrelated to agriculture. The Vlashika Rom were among the first to seize this opportunity and “rationalized” these activities soon in such a way that they were able to earn three to four times the average monthly salary. In the 1980s, a new phenomenon appeared, called *veksláctví*, involving the sale of foreign currency on the black market and trading with scarce or fashion items of that time, e.g. with digital watches; the Vlashika Rom got massively involved in these kinds of activities.

The fall of the communist regime opened a broad spectrum of opportunities for pursuing business in a legal manner. Finally, a way opened for the Vlashika Rom to apply their talent for trade, and, indeed, many began to conduct business legally. Some worked in the services sector, others founded and ran used car shops or construction companies successfully. However, a large portion of them remained in the grey economy, where new

²⁵ Before the beginning of the modern era in Europe and, generally, in the Indian caste system these activities were considered professions.

opportunities emerged, too. One of them was called *fakturantství* and involved refusal to pay for goods that were already delivered; another, which is very dangerous for society as a whole, is drug dealing. The narcotics trade is linked with extreme risk, however, at the same time, carries along large and quick profits. It requires exactly those personal characteristics that, traditionally, have been highly valued in the Vlashika Rom culture. They involve risk determination, boldness and quick decision-making, insight into others, and the ability to mentally manipulate and influence others. The narcotics trade, however, got out of hand for the Vlashika Rom and turned against them. Many of them have developed heroin addictions, which causes sickness and death, like alcohol with North American Indians in the past.

Of course, not all the Vlashika Rom make their living in illegal or criminal activities. The actual challenge is that they represent unskilled labour without education, which makes it very difficult for them to find a job. And even if they get employed, usually they lack working habits, as required by physical wage labour, which they conceive as slave labour. This makes the vicious circle complete, because they remain dependent on social benefits and they are looking for ways to earn money. Women offer perfumes to female shop assistants in stores or on the street, in rural areas they try to sell tableware in the villages; men engage in seasonal jobs or they repeatedly try to get rich quickly, with the inevitable consequence of engaging in crime.

Conclusion

The behaviour patterns of the Vlashika Rom are the result of several centuries of sociogenesis, which took place in extreme conditions of life on the margins of society. In describing the Roma life and culture, this article focused on the historical dimension of the processes that resulted in the current condition and shape of the Vlashika community. The article touched upon some fundamental differences that are a source of cultural conflicts between the majority society and the Vlashika Rom. Many of the socio-cultural differences had to be left aside for lack of space, e.g. the relationship between husband and wife, upbringing of children in the family, norms of social behaviour.

In subcultures that had been shaped – like that of the Vlashika Rom – dual morality is seen, which tends to be separated quite clearly. Such groups distinguish, on the one hand, external rules, those of mainstream society, which are can be circumvented and trespassed, whereas, on the other hand, there are internal rules, inherent to one's own culture that must be adhered to. The paradox is that from the ethical point of view, basically, they both form the same set of moral principles that are respected or not respected, according to the

cultural context. Yet, this applies to the majority society as well, albeit from a somewhat different perspective: ethical standards, the respect of which is required by the majority society, do not need to be followed where “Gypsies” are concerned. Thus, distrust, prejudices and unwillingness to improve mutual relations are encountered on both sides. The Vlashika Rom may never have felt a part of the society surrounding them, or only to a limited extent. For the majority population, they were a foreign, disparate element. The esteem, which they lacked on the part of the majority population, the Vlashika Rom compensated for within their own community. In their value system, the notion of *pát'iv* (respect) took a central position.²⁶ In their own world they rejected the brand that they were stigmatised with, and in the “Gážo” world they faced it with indifference. They did not feel ashamed for their actions, which often violated the norms of the outer environment, because, in a world in which they were punished anyway, morality had no place. They did not ask for respect on the part of the Non-Roma society: They showed it among themselves.²⁷

Therefore, some behaviour patterns of the Vlashika Rom – considered antisocial by members of the dominant society – are complex issues that pertain to the society as a whole. From a certain perspective, it might even seem that this is primarily an issue of the majority society, because it is the majority population, not the Vlashika Rom, who has the power, financial means and knowledge (dedicated institutions and specialists in solving various problems). However, state-controlled policies towards nationalities can never solve this type of social conflict. State institutions can only try to create suitable conditions for the transformation of minority cultures into a form that would be more favourable in terms of mutual coexistence. As history shows, enforced assimilation is not a solution to the problem, since a policy based on repression only reinforces the minority’s isolationist and malicious tendencies. Such negative energy, however, can be reverted by supporting cultural and educational development of the Vlashika Rom using their inner potential and in keeping with their culture.²⁸ Yet, unfortunately, this is not happening.

²⁶ This is witnessed by the Vlashika speech etiquette, for example.

²⁷ It was M. Stewart in his book *The Time of the Gypsies*, who, probably for the first time, presented the idea that the “antisocial” behaviour of the Roma is likely to compensate lack of respect and recognition on the part of the dominant society.

²⁸ This was the aim of Soviet Union’s policy directed at individual nationalities in the 1920s. Smaller nations and ethnic groups without written languages were allowed to establish themselves in cultural terms and gain cultural autonomy. Transcribing Romani in Cyrillic script was unified and

This is not happening also because a change like that would have to be initiated by the Vlashika Rom themselves, as such a change cannot be dictated from outside. Here, however, a fundamental clash arises. This idea is understandable and acceptable only if one adopts a universalist opinion seeing neither of the cultures to be of higher or lower value. And this is where both the Non-Roma majority and the Rom minority fail. The majority society, for instance, is unlikely to promote standardization of the Vlashika language and its introduction to schools. This would have to be a desideratum of the Vlashika Rom themselves. Although there are legal preconditions for such a step, the Roma see no reason in disclosing their language, their only refuge, to the “Gáže”. Thus, there is a whole range of questions. How could the Vlashika Rom pursue their education in keeping with their culture, when their oral culture contradicts with the written traditions of European learning and scholarship, and they, as an originally nomad population that settled down only recently, are in opposition to the majority population?

Given the complexity of these issues, it is not surprising that policy-making in relation to Roma is generally dull and helpless in the Czech Republic. There is some confusion among the Vlashika Rom themselves, since their culture that had been deprived of the circumstances in which it used to be formed, does not give adequate answers to the questions of the modern era. The Vlashika culture lacks new and adequate incentives that would lead it away from the antagonistic relations with the dominant society. For the Vlashika Rom, who are in the process of integrating into the majority society, their own culture becomes an anachronism, it is failing. And yet, the wisdom, accumulated over generations of their ancestors, is the only hint on which they can build, if they do not want to “crumble to dust.”

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