

Kinship, social organisation and genealogical manipulations in Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia

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The article deals with kinship and social organisation in Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia, in particular with the question of genealogical manipulation, which in the Gypsy *osadas* is often used to modify and adjust kinship relationships to the actual needs of individuals or families in question. The basic assumption here is that the social organisation of Gypsy *osadas* is fundamentally based on kinship, which is an essential grid used to articulate and manipulate social relations of other kinds—e.g. economic, political, legal, etc. Kinship is seen as the dominant organisational principle in Gypsy *osadas*, and therefore it is in terms of kinship that political and economic functions are carried out. When an activity or social proximity is to be expressed and legitimized, the genealogy of individuals or family segments is manipulated. Genealogical manipulation in Gypsy *osadas* thus functions as a kind of (proto)political strategy and as a means of legitimizing given states of affairs.

Keywords: Gypsies, eastern Slovakia, kinship, genealogical manipulations, (proto) political strategies, social organisation

Introduction

The data used in this study was gained mainly during fieldwork in a Gypsy *osada*¹ ('settlement' or 'colony')² in Chminianske Jakobovany in eastern Slovakia (the county of Prešov) and in a few other *osadas* in the region (e.g. Richnava, Víťaz, Torysa, Žehra, Spišské Podhradie, Levoča). In most cases the settled popula-

1. The term Gypsy *osada* (sg.)/*osadas* (pl.) is used in the text because (1) the inhabitants of Slovak *osadas* refer to themselves in this way when speaking in Slovak and (2) these localities are referred to as Gypsy *osadas* and are widely known under this term in the region in question. (The term *Romany osadas* is not used in the region. When speaking in the Romany language, terms such as *vatrisko*, *romane gava*, *kolónia* and *taboris* are used.)

2. The problem of the definition and the character of Gypsy *osada* (in eastern Slovakia) is discussed in Budilova and Jakoubek (2005).

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tion of Gypsies, who use the Slovak variant of the Romany language, was under consideration (the only exception is Vlachika Gypsy *osada* mentioned in the text—in the Slovak context a rare and special one—of settled Vlachika Gypsies who speak the Vlachika variant of the Romany language). The method of participant observation and the genealogical method were employed in particular. Although the first intention of the authors at the beginning of their fieldwork was to plot all inhabitants of the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany into a genealogical diagram, in the course of the work it turned out that boundaries of kinship groups are not at all identical with the spatial boundaries of the original Gypsy *osada* and so the focus of interest was extended to a few other Gypsy *osadas* in the region in order to obtain an overall grasp of the studied kinship groups.

Although most empirical material used for this study comes from the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany and neighbouring, kin-related *osadas*, the aim of the article is not to present a case study of the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany, nor to analyse special non-localised kinship groupings comprising people living in several Czech and Slovak localities. As ongoing research in other Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia suggests, the social organisation in these localities has some specific common features, some of which the present article attempts to emphasise. For this reason the text also uses some of the field material collected by colleagues who have worked in Gypsy *osadas* in the same region in eastern Slovakia (e.g. Rožkovany, Rožkovce, Milpoš, Petrovany). An ambition of the article is thus to present a *model* of social organisation and social processes characteristic of Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia. Methodologically, this approach follows the work of some experienced authors; let us mention just Elena Marushiakova and her ‘ideal model of Gypsy group’ (Marushiakova 1992: 72–85).

1. The character of kinship in Gypsy *osadas*

The notion of kinship among the inhabitants of the Gypsy *osadas* follows the common usage of this term in Western societies (and corresponds to the conventional anthropological use of the term)—that is, it is based on the presupposition of consanguineous, biological ties among the people considered to be kin. Inhabitants of the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany as well as inhabitants of many other Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia recognise *cognatic kinship*. From the Ego’s point of view, relatives from all possible descent lines are considered to be kin, usually up to the fourth generation. This kind of reckoning of kinship is versatile, flexible, and prone to genealogical manipulation, notably in relation to remote relatives. Not all members of an Ego’s kindred (cognatic kin group) live at the same place and in the same Gypsy *osada* as Ego.

Some of them live in more or less remote Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia, some of them in Czech towns (after 1945 many Gypsies from Slovakia moved to the Czech Republic, where—especially in the depopulated border areas—they were offered houses and work opportunities).³ No matter how remotely members of a cognatic kin group live, any member of an Ego's kindred is obliged to provide help, hospitality and support for any other member of the kindred. Social proximity or distance thus does not correspond at all with spatial proximity or distance. Therefore, when studying this kind of social group we should follow actual social relationships and not succumb to the—ultimately ethnocentric—misleading notion, that when an *osada* exists as a delimited spatial unit, it also necessarily constitutes an independent social unit (e.g. research reveals that in most cases it is not possible to record a genealogical diagram of a single *osada*; instead, anthropologists frequently end up with a genealogy of a specific social—ultimately kinship—unit which is not at all identical with the original *osadas*).

In a Gypsy *osada* the spatial plan of the dwellings usually corresponds to social organisation, that is, relationships of kinship (in the strict sense of the term). At present it is common that each *osada* houses more than one cognatic kin group; these groups could then be seen from a bird's eye view as specific 'clusters' of houses—let us call them *dvorečky* ('little yards'). The clusters of houses—*dvorečky* usually comprise only part of a cognatic kin group. We will call these localised parts of cognatic kin groups 'actual kin groups'. The character of an actual kin group—those members of a cognatic kin group who cohabit in a *dvoreček* ('little yard') in one Gypsy *osada*—is determined by marriage, migration, economic pressures as well as personal attachments and antagonisms. An actual kin group comes into existence mostly by marriage of a couple of siblings (usually brothers) who build their houses in proximity of their parents' house. Some of the siblings may become part of this *dvoreček*, some of them may constitute their own *dvoreček* in another part of the *osada*, in other *osadas*, or, for example, in a Czech town. Without regard to the locality, members of a cognatic kin group keep their mutual relationships by frequent visits. Members of an actual kin group share most of their day-to-day activities (cooking, shopping, working, earning money, upbringing of children, life expenses, etc.).

The character of the cognatic kin groups in the Slovak Gypsy *osadas* is strongly influenced by marriage patterns. The preferred marital partner is usually a relative—one should ideally marry a person belonging to the same cognatic kin group. As the incest taboo applies to members of the nuclear family, marriages of the first, second, third and fourth cousins take place with the

3. Cf. Kramářová et al. (2005).

highest frequency. The other preferred type of marriage is the so-called marriage *pre čeranki* (this is a Romany term for 'by exchange'), which denotes a situation when two or more siblings marry two or more siblings. As most of the marriages are endogamous (a partner is a member of the same cognatic group), *pre čeranki* (e.g. two brothers marry two sisters), or a combination of these two (e.g. two brothers marry two sisters who are their second cousins at the same time), the cognatic kin groups tend to close in.

The high level of endogamous marriages repeated for many generations results in a high level of overlapping of personal kindreds and thus in multiplying relationships among the members of cognatic kin groups. Thus, the prevailing type of kinship groupings in the Gypsy *osadas* is an extensive, laterally oriented, endogamous cognatic kin group. Members of these groups are normally related to one another by a great variety of different cognatic and affinity ties. The boundaries of the individual extensive kinship groupings are then modified by marriage and by choice of locality. Common ancestors beyond the fourth or fifth generation are 'forgotten' and kinship affiliation is not maintained any more.

The concept of ritual (im)purity should be briefly mentioned here. In general, the inhabitants of the Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia strongly believe in the existence of a specific quality of ritual (im)purity and use this concept for arranging social relationships.⁴ People considered to be ritually pure are ranked high, the impure are ranked low (impurity is given by birth; one of its manifestations is, for example, practising the consumption of ritually impure meat—dogs, horses, cats, frogs, etc.). Commensality and marriage are forbidden between these two kinds of people. Nevertheless, viewed 'from the inside', from the perspective of the families in question, it is impossible to find any objective hierarchy of ritual purity in the Gypsy *osadas*. As the quality of ritual (im)purity relates primarily to commensality and sexual intercourse, the boundaries of the ritual (im)pure group necessarily have to be identical with the boundaries of the kin group. Every individual cognatic kin group considers itself to be ritually pure contrary to the other, non-related cognatic kin groups, all of which are thought to be impure (for example, no-one will ever eat anywhere but in the house of another member of their family). The boundaries of ritual (im)purity could thus be found also within individual Gypsy *osadas* in case they comprise more than one cognatic kin group (which at present is the rule rather than the exception). Mutual endogamy and avoidance of social contact comes into play. Endogamous tendencies in Gypsy *osadas* as well as the spatial distance among individual cognatic kin groups in Gypsy *osadas* can be explained in terms of the concept of ritual (im)purity.

4. For this issue cf. Budilova and Jakoubek (2005).

2. Kinship as a basic principle of social organisation in Gypsy *osadas*

The social organisation of the Gypsy *osadas* we have studied is principally based on kinship. The idiom of kinship has a central role in the thought of the *osada*'s inhabitants. All social relations implying mutual or common interest tend to be assimilated into those of kinship and expressed in its terminology. People considered kin usually live together (conversely, anybody who is *not* a relative could not live in the neighbourhood of the kin group), relatives (and, once again, only relatives) work together, share events in everyday life, relatives join to celebrate feasts as well as all important life events, relatives are also preferred marital partners.

People who live in a Gypsy *osada* spend all their time with relatives—apart from being relatives, they are also their neighbours, friends, schoolmates, colleagues, mentors, and companions. Although children attend school with non-related children, they form kin-based groups of schoolmates in their free time; young people form groups of companions in accordance with family membership—they go either to parties held by their family, or to non-family parties, but then only in the company of their relatives. Because most adults in the Gypsy *osadas* are unemployed nowadays, they have lost contact with non-relatives (and non-Gypsies as well) at the workplace. If a group of adult men arrange a work opportunity, they usually work as labourers in a group of brothers or cousins (if a workplace happens to be in the Czech Republic—which is quite common—such a group of workmen in most cases stay, once again, with their relatives). Christmas, Easter, birthdays, funerals, as well as baptisms take place in family (and family-only⁵) circle.

As we mentioned earlier, the spatial distribution of population in the Gypsy *osadas* is also determined by kinship. The Gypsy *osada* can be viewed as clusters of houses—*dvorečky* ('little yards')—inhabited by related families. Inhabitants of one house usually comprise a nuclear family made up of parents and children. Temporarily this group could be extended by the young wife of one of the sons, but the young couple is expected to build their own house as soon as possible (especially when a couple already has children it is felt as desirable that they should live in their own house). This house is then built in the proximity of the house of the parents of either the husband or the wife. As the preferred type of postmarital residence in the Gypsy *osadas* is patrilocality, the young

5. For example, one of the authors (MJ) witnessed a Gypsy wedding ceremony in one of the Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia in 2005. More than 400 people took part in the ceremony. Of these people, the author of this text was the only non-relative. The fact that he was not a relative of the groom or of the bride seemed difficult to understand for the other participants. Many of them concluded in the end that as the author was not a cognatic relative of either the groom or the bride, he had to be an affine relative, related through a female incorporated into the family by marriage (many people said: 'Oh, well, that's quite clear, I am also from my wife's side.').

couple's house usually stands in the *dvoreček* of the husband's parents. To enter a *dvoreček* of a non-related family is not encouraged and many inhabitants of the Gypsy *osadas* have never set foot in a *dvoreček* of a non-related kin group in the same *osada*.

Thus the principal difference between the social structure of Gypsy *osada* and that of a majority-society village in eastern Slovakia can be seen in the fundamental role of kinship in the social organisation of Gypsy *osadas*. Although kinship also has an important role in the social relationships among eastern Slovakia villagers, other kinds of social relationship could be found (at least in the sphere of models); political, economical, neighbourly, relationships of friends, colleagues, schoolmates or coevals. Social contacts within the Gypsy *osada* are either maintained among relatives or manipulated so as to look as if they hold among relatives. Kinship may be viewed as an institutional sphere with functional priority from which the other institutional spheres (economics and politics, in particular) have not yet differentiated (as T. Parsons says, they have not yet created a specialised social sub-system). In other words, in Gypsy *osadas* kinship presents a total institutional order that encompasses and determines all other spheres.

The frequent critical argument related to the given thesis that 'The Slovak villages function in the same way as the Gypsy *osadas*' (that in the Slovak villages, too, social life is dominated and governed by kinship) is unfounded. In fact, a number of formal organisations exist in the Slovak villages (e.g. association of huntsmen, pub, shop, football club, fellowship of dart players, Christianity congregation, club of pensioners, voluntary fire brigade, folklore group, theatre group, local bases of political parties and many others), and the village is primarily an administrative and political body, even though kinship (competing with relationships among neighbours—see Kandert 1969) plays an important part there. However, in the Gypsy *osadas* the situation is reversed—the Gypsy *osada* is a social unit based principally on kinship, where, from time to time, not permanently, formal organisations might occur.

3. Genealogical manipulation as a kind of (proto)political strategy

There are two main types of genealogical manipulation in the Gypsy *osadas*. In the first case, an individual is *included* in the family by declaring that that person 'is a cousin/uncle/aunt'. One possible way of incorporating a person into the family is establishing a genealogical link to them beyond the boundary of the fourth or fifth generation (e.g. 'his great-grandfather was our great-grandfather's brother/cousin/brother in law'), which means that nobody remembers whether it is true or not. This kind of manipulation prevents this relationship from being challenged (nobody's genealogical memory goes that far). Alter-

natively, the relationship can be derived from an affine relationship (e.g. ‘his cousin married my aunt and so we are kin’). A mutual attachment of two persons (or families) can be expressed only in terms of kinship—that is, both sides try to find some genealogical link that would legitimate their relationship. Provided that no genealogical bond can be traced, a kinship relationship can be established by marriage (e.g. two families make an arrangement that their children will marry when they grow up).

The second type of genealogical manipulation is when a person is *excluded* from the family. Someone can be excluded from the family for inappropriate behaviour or for gross violation of the moral rules (e.g. they do not follow rules of ritual (im)purity or rules of reciprocity within the family circle), or simply for not getting on well with relatives. For example, when someone chooses a marital partner who is considered ritually impure, they have to choose a different one or move away from the *osada* with their spouse (in the latter case they are usually no longer considered kin by their original family). When someone does not meet the moral requirements of the family, they are also excluded (e.g. the girl who moved to the Czech Republic and works as a prostitute is no longer regarded by her parents as their daughter). It is thus common practice in Gypsy *osadas* that people retroactively ‘cross out of their lives . . . those brothers or sisters that are not in touch with them or that are in a row with them, . . . and this exclusion refers to all their past to the childhood’ (Hajská 2004: 257).

On the other hand, when a person or their nuclear family grows in terms of economy and refuses to redistribute their income among the family members, their relationships to the other members of the family are often broken off as well. Milena Hübschmannová describes a situation where two families in one Gypsy *osada* in eastern Slovakia became rich, built their houses close to the majority part of the village, their members ‘gave up eating horse meat [which is an indicator of ritually impure families—authors’ note] after the relocation and *began to trace their descent from the Romany lineage living in one of the nearby towns*’ (Hübschmannová 1999: 132; emphasis added).

When there are people who do not know the local situation very well, this kind of manipulation takes place very often. The interviewed person then ‘simply suppresses selected brothers and sisters . . . because they might from their point of view live in touch with *degeshes* [ritually impure individuals—author’s note]’ (Hajská 2004: 256–7). Ondřej Poduška made a similar observation in the Vlachika Gypsy *osada* in Rožkovany (Eastern Slovakia, Sabinov region), where

there lived a man who was supposed to have no relatives in the *osada* according to information provided by other inhabitants of the *osada*. After his death it came to light that he had belonged to one of the acknowledged kin groups but was disowned by their members for living with a woman from Jarovnice *osada* [inhabitants of this *osada* represent for the first group prohibited partners—authors’ note]. (Poduška 2002: 65–6)

Genealogical manipulations often concern whole families or kinship segments, not only individuals. Primarily it is used for setting down boundaries of kin groups. When a cognatic kin group expands and it is no longer possible to maintain kin bonds within it, it usually splits up (a process analogous to lineage segmentation). Two or more independent kin groups emerge, which means the rearrangement of both people and power. The relationship between the newly established groups is then modified to correspond to the new situation. For example, in the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany, the genealogical research revealed that all the *osada*'s residents are descendants of a few common ancestors. However, this common descent is not maintained any more and the *osada* at present comprises several extensive cognatic kin groups that do not consider each other to be kin.

A similar situation was observed in a Gypsy *osada* near Milpoš (eastern Slovakia, Sabinov region) and described by Bronislav Podlaha.

A Romany blacksmith and his wife came to this *osada* in the 1920s. Nowadays, descendants of his three sons with their spouses live in the *osada*. Furthermore, the stepchildren of one of those three sons also live there—he brought these children into the *osada* together with his wife. These stepchildren have numerous affine ties with the local Červeňák family group. While the stepchildren are recognised as *equal in status* with other residents of the *osada* . . . and *are incorporated in the family group*, one of the direct descendants of the 'brothers founders' is situated at the very bottom of local society. In his own words '*he has no relatives here*, he had a cousin, but he's away'. However, from his genealogy it is clear that he has an uncle (his father's brother), three cousins and many nieces and nephews, and this does not take into account step-relatives in the *osada*. It is obvious that he was not separated by his will, rather he was the victim of this exclusion. (Podlaha 2004: 325)

The crucial fact is that what the residents of a Gypsy *osada* themselves consider, at any given time, as 'family', can differ from what an outsider, based on a specialised point of view such as a genealogical diagram, would define as their 'family'. Family membership is a matter of negotiation and can not be taken for granted as a permanent fact. Even when someone *de facto* lives in the family and *de iure* belongs to it does not mean that the family members consider them as a full member of the family (and treat them in an appropriate way). For example, we noticed a situation when a father, after the death of his wife—against the protests of the rest of the family and his children particularly—started to live with a woman from the majority society 35 years younger than him. That they were officially married was not enough for her to be accepted as a member of the family. The young bride continued to be rejected by all the members of the family. The widower's daughter commented on the situation, 'She should forget ever being accepted as a member of our family'. And his granddaughter (at the time her grandfather had lived together with his new partner for more than

three years) stated, 'She is still an alien person' ('In which way "alien"?'—LB, MJ), 'Well, she does not belong to my family.'

Hence, the term 'family' in the Gypsy *osadas* is a kind of flexible web, and so it can easily happen that 'the individual that was not getting on well with the others is for some period excluded from the family group' (Hajská 2004: 257). In other words, in Gypsy *osadas* the family is, to paraphrase Renan, *un plébiscit de tous les jours*.

We can conclude that in the Gypsy *osadas* politics principally make use of the model of kinship as well as its categories.⁶ (Proto)political relations are articulated in the language of kinship, which legitimises them. Therefore, it is the genealogical substantiation that is used for taking and justifying a (proto)political action. Power positions are determined by the genealogical structure. However, this structure is frequently intentionally manipulated. Genealogical manipulations often occur in accordance with the actual interest groups (coalitions), thus 'making a declaration of relational affinity is a manifestation of coalition relations rather than a reference to "real" genealogy' (Poduška 2002: 65–6). In the Gypsy *osadas* the genealogical manipulation works as a kind of a (proto)political strategy⁷ and as a way to legitimise the final result. However, there is no real political sphere (in the strict sense of the term) that serves as an institutional order with specific terminology and channels. 'Political' structure in the Gypsy *osadas* is thus understood in the terms of structure built on kinship.

4. Godparenthood as a means of constituting kinship bonds

Apart from the processes discussed above, we can find another mechanism used for modifying genealogical relations in the Gypsy *osadas*—namely, godparenthood. The process of becoming a godparent is very simple and similar to the common practice in the majority society. When a child is born, the parents choose a godparent. The person has to take part in a religious ceremony in order to become a godparent in the full sense of the word.

As the godparents are usually considered to be kin in the Gypsy *osadas*, by means of godparenthood it is possible to create a new kinship bond. As Markéta Hajská mentions, in certain *osadas* 'the godparent is taken for such a close relative that an incest taboo applies to his close family' (Hajská 2004: 259). Marriage with a member of the godchild's family is viewed as incestuous. It is obvious that 'to become a godparent is a process that brings a certain individual in the kinship ties with the genealogically different group' (Adamcová 2003: 48).

6. As for this problem in general, see Balandier (1967: 61)

7. See Balandier (1967: 81–3).

Baptism is considered to be a very important event in life. Non-baptised children are believed to be constantly threatened by evil spirits. The institution of godparenthood then usually serves as an additional way of strengthening relationships within cognatic kin groups. In most cases, a child's godparent is either its cognatic or affine relative. By becoming godparent of a child from their own cognatic kin group, someone's affiliation with the kinship group is affirmed and reinforced. As an example, we could mention a case we have witnessed in a Gypsy family in Česká Kamenice (the Ústí nad Labem region in the Czech Republic), which forms part of an extensive cognatic kin group stretched over several Czech and Slovak localities (one of the segments of this kin group lives in the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany). A young girl from this family started going out with a boy who had been brought up in a children's home. For this reason, he was neither a relative, nor did he have any brothers or sisters who could have been incorporated into the family by the *pre čeranki* marriage. When the boy visited the girl's family in one of the Slovak Gypsy *osadas* for the first time, he was baptised by the girl's mother's sister and her husband and it was explicitly stated that by this act he became 'a real member of the family'.

Another example of using godparenthood as a way to transform a relationship into a kinship relationship is the well-known effort of many Gypsy informants from Slovak Gypsy *osadas* to include anthropologists who work in their locality in the family through godparenthood. Nearly all fieldworkers in these localities were asked by their informants either to become godparents of their children or to become their godchildren. This could be viewed as an effort to convert a social relationship which is difficult to understand or categorise into a relationship that is comprehensible to the inhabitants of the *osadas*.

The phenomenon of godparenthood is exceptional because it represents an *explicit*, not a covert, manipulative practice. Contrary to genealogical manipulations, in the case of godparenthood the effort to create a *new* genealogical link and to build a *new* relationship is generally well known and as such it is also declared. Yet, this method allows for the incorporation of an *outsider* into the family. Thus the mechanism of godparenthood—contrary to the practices of genealogical manipulation described above—is overt; its purpose, however, is (among other things) the same as in the case of genealogical manipulations—to legitimise the mutual relationship of two families and to build a new alliance. 'Family' is therefore obviously not a social unit taken for granted with permanent membership given by birth. We might even suggest an interpretation according to which the category 'family' is always constituted *ad hoc* at the *verbal* level, in response to the researcher's question. Genealogies in the Gypsy *osadas* do not always reflect genealogical bonds that are believed to be derived from biological links. Frequently, genealogies (and their modifications) serve as a way to legitimise an existing relationship that is not a kinship relationship. Holý (1963: 35) refers to such genealogies as the 'social genealogies' that differ

from the 'real genealogies' representing ties of consanguinity and affinity (in the strict sense). In the Gypsy *osadas* not only kinship is a social construct built on (or, more precisely: derived from or modelled on) real or putative biological bonds, but also the non-kin relationships (by means of genealogical manipulation) are transformed into those of kin, in order to gain legitimacy.

In the Gypsy *osadas* kinship forms a framework of references in which the (proto)political relations can be realised. The institutional political order has not yet been differentiated from the kinship structure, so there are no explicit channels through which the power could flow. It means that there is no system of authority or representation based on any other principles but that of kinship. All authority has its origins in the family. Politics in the strict sense is a missing principle in the Gypsy *osadas*.

5. Marriage as a (proto)political strategy: how to prevent or solve a social conflict (Roškovce case)

An excellent functional analysis of making use of kinship as a (proto)political strategy is presented in an anthropological study written by Michal Růžička (Růžička 2004), based on his fieldwork in the Roškovce locality (eastern Slovakia, Levoča region). But in order to follow the author's argumentation, we will need briefly to outline the history of the settlement of the Gypsies in the Roškovce locality. The first Gypsy resident in Roškovce, Andrej Kaleja, lived in a state of sororal polygyny with two sisters, Ilona and Jana. He had several children with both of them. At present the descendants of Andrej and Ilona (who was his first and official wife) claim to have the more privileged and dominant position than the descendants of Andrej and Jana. Between the family branches of Ilona and Jana 'in everyday life the omnipresent tension prevails and the interaction of members of both branches is based on constant, latent conflict' (Růžička 2004: 281).

Of great importance is that in the Roškovce *osada*, and in other localities where the partners of Roškovce residents come from, patrilocality is the important and privileged principle of postmarital residence. Despite the prevalence of patrilocality in the Roškovce *osada*, a number of men who originally came from other *osadas* married female descendants of Andrej (from both branches), and stayed to live in Roškovce. 'Those men who married into Roškovce from other kin groups founded new family branches and their descendants are considered to be members of another family or kin group', i.e. non-relatives (Růžička 2004: 284). These men, separated from their original kin group (and called 'newcomers') do not feel very comfortable in the locality (unlike women married into the *osada*). There is much tension between the members of newcomer families and the others—called 'old settlers' in this context.

Thus, there are several descent groups in Roškovce: Ilona's branch, Jana's

branch and the branches of the newcomers—men who do not follow the prevailing principle of postmarital residence and their descendants). However, it must be stressed that in spite of the fact that members of the mentioned family branches understand each other as discrete kin units in principle, there is no place in Roškovce for newcomers who would not have any cognatic or affine ties there. Růžička summarises that all types of potential structural conflict in Roškovce are

(1) a conflict between the ‘old settlers’ and the ‘newcomers’, in other words, a conflict between the neighbourhood and men who do not live in accordance with the principle of patrilocality, or (2) a conflict between the descent groups of Ilona and Jana. (Růžička 2004: 283)

Considering the possible solutions of these conflicts, Růžička states that one of the most frequently used strategies is building a kinship alliance between the opposed sides. The very meaning of this action is to set up a state of loyalty between the two groups based on kinship ties. In Roškovce, marriage between two conflicting descent groups is ‘a way of consolidating relationships between different kin groups’ (Růžička 2004: 291). Only rarely does one marriage suffice, so the first one is usually followed by another, believing in strength in numbers: ‘the alliance between descent groups of Červeňákovci and Kalejovci was confirmed and cemented by quadruplicate marriage’; Růžička (2004: 285). Often, then, the so-called marriage *pre čeranki* is employed here to multiply the newly established bonds.

At the end of the study, Růžička cites a few statements of local Slovak villagers who all believe that incestuous intercourse and relationships occur in the Gypsy *osada* frequently; the widespread opinion is that ‘in the *osada* brothers and sisters live together’. Yet, research proves that this is not the case; Růžička concludes that

Marriages between close relatives (but not between brothers and sisters—this is solely prejudice arising out of ignorance of the situation) can be explained in terms of ‘political’ alliances made between individual kin segments living in the locality. Its *function* is to increase mutual solidarity and to forestall possible conflict. (Růžička 2004: 290–1).

This strategy is one of the very few ways in which families can live alongside each other (in relative reconciliation) in a given locality.

The strategy described by Růžička in the Roškovce *osada* has been observed in other localities as well. We would like to mention the case of the Daleká Ves village described by V. Adamcová because it offers a different, and, in many aspects, an uncommon (or atypical) example. The co-habitation of many non-related families, which in numerous localities leads to the decline and disintegration of the social organisation, was solved in Daleká Ves by a similar, classical, technique

as mentioned above (which was nevertheless not standard under the circumstances).

There is a prefabricated house in Daleká Ves (a poor lodging house) whose only occupants are several non-kin Gypsy families (young families with small children).⁸ In most cases, such a situation, leads to conflicts among the members of the different families and to damage to property, such as broken banisters, windows in the corridors, the lighting, etc. Nevertheless, this never happened in Daleká Ves. The situation in the locality developed in a very different way: the members of once non-related groups became godparents of the children from the other families. Thus, they became relatives and nowadays the residents of the house consider themselves to be 'one big family' (Adamcová 2003: 48). The result is a relatively steady social environment, good relationships, and non-conflictual coexistence.

The character and function of this strategy are comparable with the Roškovce case; when the families had no 'available' adult marital partners for an exchange (e.g. marriage *pre čeranki*) they replaced this by building kinship bonds by means of godparenthood.

6. Kinship, sub-ethnic affiliation and ritual (im)purity as a base of social organisation in the Gypsy *osadas*

We consider kinship to be the dominant institutional sphere in Gypsy *osadas* and therefore an essential factor defining the character of their culture. Every social grouping is determined by the elementary principle of organisation, which sets the character for social interactions and regulates most aspects of social life; and in Gypsy *osadas* this principle is represented by kinship. Gypsy *osadas* are organised in terms of kinship and kinship is the institutional base there. This is one of the most distinguishing features that distinguish Gypsy *osadas* from the rest of (Slovak) society. These two societies have principally different social structures, and the nature of either of them can not be converted into the other (To avoid possible misunderstandings, these structures are mutually exclusive in the ideal-typical sphere, or, in another words, in the sphere of the defined concepts. However, in individual cases of particular localities the question stands 'to what extent' the local situation approximates either of the ideal types.)

The strict definition of kinship as an exclusive organisational principle must be modified to a certain extent here. The social organisation of the Gypsy *osadas* is, to a large extent, influenced also by a sub-ethnic affiliation (by 'sub-

8. This situation was the result of an attempt of the municipality to 'solve' the housing development by moving together into one place all young Gypsy families, in accordance with the pattern 'Gypsies together'.

ethnic affiliation' we mean belonging to different Gypsy groups; in Slovakia especially the Slovak, the Hungarian and the Vlachika Roma/Gypsies) as well as by the institution of ritual (im)purity. The sub-ethnic affiliation and the ritual (im)purity divide the Gypsy *osadas* into endogamous fractions and determine their social order.

Thus, there are three dominant organisational principles in the Gypsy *osadas*—kinship, sub-ethnicity, and ritual (im)purity. The latter two principles can, in many regards, be converted into the kinship principle. The boundaries set down by ritual (im)purity and the sub-ethnic affiliation overlap—in every individual case—with the boundaries of families, thus, in every given Gypsy *osada* they are identical. The principle of ritual (im)purity can bring about exclusion of an individual or of a family segment from the kin group. However, the kinship *system* remains untouched because an act of this kind is usually followed by an acceptance of the individual (or the family segment) into another kin group. The institution of ritual (im)purity affects boundaries of individual families as well as their changes, but only the boundaries and changes of *families*. There is nothing like a club, union, association, or corporation of the ritually (im)pure. The only way an individual can be considered as ritually (im)pure is by means of their family membership. The same holds good for the sub-ethnic affiliation. Neither of these principles have their own channels or associations (they do not function as a base for establishing social groups—individuals do not associate in terms of ritual (im)purity or sub-ethnic affiliation; these principles do not have their own structures). These two principles use channels of kinship. While they may influence and affect kinship, they are dependent on kinship to demonstrate them.

No less important is that the relationships among sub-ethnic groups and among groups separated by the principle of ritual (im)purity are perceived as analogous or identical; the residents of the Gypsy *osadas* understand their principle as the same. The idea of superiority of one's own group over other sub-ethnic groups and ascribing of ritual impurity to members of other groups (without any further distinction among them) is notably widespread among the Vlachika Roma/Gypsies.

To marry a Rumungrica⁹ has always been perceived as a great dishonour and a social fall for Vlachika man, and in many cases it caused his exclusion from a community—analogously as if a ritually pure Gypsy married a woman from a ritually impure family. These *similar* situations may be seen as *identical* in many aspects: for the most

9. *Rumungro* (masc.), *Rumungrica* (fem.) is the term used by the Vlachika Gypsies/Roma for members of all non-Vlachika Gypsy groups. The term is derived from *Rom Ungro*, 'Hungarian Rom'. Hungary (by that time a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire) was the first territory where members of nomadic Vlachika Gypsy/Roma groups (after leaving the Wallachia and Moldavia principalities) met settled groups of Gypsies. In this case, therefore, this term refers to both Slovakian and Hungarian Gypsies.

Vlachika Roma/Gypsies the Rumungre (i.e. the Slovak and Hungarian Gypsies) are not only inferior but also even *impure*. As my informant states: 'All the Rumungri are *degeshes*.' (Podlaha 2004: 348)

However, the opposite view (among the Slovakian and Hungarian Roma/Gypsies, of course), namely, 'All the Vlachika are *degeshes*' is not at all rare.

Both principles thus constitute mutually unequal endogamous groups that are in many regards analogous to the Indian castes or estates in European history. Their structural mechanisms are significantly connected with kinship because the 'Estates (as well as the castes) are simplified kinship in the societies which became so numerous that each member can not remember all rights and duties to other members of the group he lives in' (Keller 1999: 18). The relationships between sub-ethnic groups are transferable to the relationships between the groups defined by ritual (im)purity and those again to the structures of kinship. Hence, the dominant organisational principle in the Gypsy *osadas* is kinship in the wider sense of the word.

7. The social construction of kinship, ritual purity and sub-ethnic affiliation in the Gypsy *osadas*

We have demonstrated how kinship functions in the Gypsy *osadas* and how it is frequently manipulated to legitimise other kinds of social relationship. However, the position in terms of ritual (im)purity can be manipulated as well. This is possible since affiliation to a ritually (im)pure social group always coincides with family membership so that both groups overlap. In other words, the boundaries defined by ritual impurity are always transferable to the boundaries of kin groups. As the fact of being considered ritually (im)pure always arises from the origin of an individual (i.e. from their family), it is obvious that the technique of genealogical manipulation can be used even for affecting the affiliation with a group defined by ritual (im)purity. The above mentioned case of a family who 'gave up eating horse meat after the relocation and began to trace their descent from the Romany kin group from nearby town' (Hübschmannová 1999: 132) is a perfect example of how to purify one's own kin group in the ritual sense.

A similar effort to manipulate the origin of the family for the purpose of purification was noticed in Petrovany (Prešov region), where one of our informants intentionally shifted the date of demolition of the Gypsy *osada*¹⁰ before the date of his birth (despite evidence to the contrary). Now that he lives 'in the village', he generally considers residents of the Gypsy *osadas* to be ritually impure ('all

10. In terms of physical, not cultural, demolition. The old houses of the *osada* were knocked down and in their place a few new streets were built, though the social and cultural particularity remained.

these [i.e. inhabitants of the *osadas*] are *degeshes*', he says). If he had not shifted a date of the demolition of the *osada*, his origin would have defiled himself as well as his family. It is obvious, though, that such procedures are not part of everyday life and can be managed only in specific circumstances.

We noticed another example of modifying the family origin in a Gypsy family who now live in the Czech Republic. The father of the family (orig. named *Červeňák*) came from the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany (which is generally considered to be ritually impure by the Gypsies from other *osadas*), and to disguise his origin, he took his wife's name (*Jaslová*).¹¹ All their children and their descendants use the mother's surname. The husband's surname was to their disadvantage both in the majority society (referring to the 'Gypsy' origin) and in the Gypsy neighbourhood in which they started to live (referring to the origin of the family in the ritually impure *osada*).

Although the procedure discussed is often associated with spatial migration and moving from the original *osada* (as shown above), we also noticed a case of manipulation within the *osada* itself. In the Gypsy *osada* in Chminianske Jakubovany, there live a number of different kin groups whose members' surname is Horvát/Horváth. One of the Horváts, an old man who is the eldest member and family authority of one of the Horvát family branches, has always emphasised, 'We are the Horvát family group without an "h" at the end of the name!' and after this statement made his children show all kinds of available documents (identity cards, etc.). By this statement, he intended to separate his family group from the other branches of Horváths, which he considers to be ritually impure in every sense of the word. The fact that there is no affinity between different Horvát(h)s was supported by a different genealogy (of high relevance is the fact that the man is one of the oldest people in the *osada* so his 'genealogical memory' is more valuable than the memories of other residents; and his assertions can not be checked or questioned). In the beginning, we tried to distinguish between 'different branches' of Horvát and Horváth family in the *osadas*. However, in the course of our fieldwork we found that

(1) in local registers (parish and legal register, school listing, local authority documents etc.) the same person can be registered once as Horvát and again as Horváth. In addition, the children of the same parents can have either one or the other type of surname and the differences are thus caused either by coincidence or by an actual decision on the part of the secretary. (2) Analysis of local registers and genealogical diagram also proved that all residents are close relatives no matter if they have 'h' at the end of the name or not. (Budilová 2003: 23)

11. The process of name-change was in no way easy: when a couple submitted their application at the municipality, they were refused. However, they did not give up—they divorced and after a couple of days, they married once again (and this time they took the wife's surname).

Thus, we are confronted with one of the uncommon techniques of manipulation within the kin group based on the consistent and intentional insistence of recording the names of descendants in a certain form (without an 'h' at the end of the name) which successfully ends up creating a different kin group or family branch (which is supported by the official registers).

An extreme practice (there is a question as to whether it can still be considered manipulation) is the withholding of information about a person's origin, i.e. when the questioned person refuses to talk about his or her past. It can go like this: 'Do you have parents?—Me?—Yes, please.—Not at all.—In Slovakia?—Neither here nor in Slovakia' (Adamcová 2003: 51). The reason for such an utterance is that 'the informant does not want to admit she is originally from the Gypsy *osada*' (Adamcová 2003: 51).



Recent research in the Gypsy *osada* near the village of Rožkovany (eastern Slovakia, Sabinov region),¹² inhabited by the Vlachika Roma/Gypsies, shows that even the *sub-ethnic* affiliation is exposed to a similar manipulation under certain circumstances. As far as the locality of the Gypsy *osada* in Rožkovany is concerned, a possible reason for a manipulation or a construction of sub-ethnic affiliation is that—for the last two generations, at least—there is an acute lack of possible female partners in the Vlachika group, and therefore, the Vlachika men started to marry women from the sub-ethnic group of Rumungre (Slovak Gypsies).

One of our informants, who declared himself Vlachika and is considered Vlachika both by the inhabitants of his own *osada* and by the residents of other, non-Vlachika, Gypsy *osadas*—is in fact a descendant of two generations of mixed marriages (his Vlachika grandmother married a Rumungro man and their son, a 'half blood' Vlachika Gypsy, married a Rumungrica again; our informant is the child of this marriage). Thus our informant is a *de facto* Vlachika, in the sense of '(genetic) origin' only to the extent of one quarter. This does not seem to matter because what is important is that the man can speak the Vlachika dialect of the Romany language, which is at present the main difference in cultural patterns between Vlachika Gypsies and the Rumungre in the region. From the 'native's point of view', the fundamental attributes and the main distinctive features necessary to consider a person as Vlachika are the Vlachika origin (passed on by 'blood'), the Vlachika dialect of the Romany language and the Vlachika identity (or, more precisely, common values and norms) shared by the members of the (Vlachika) Gypsy *osadas*, a fundamental part of which is a

12. The research has been conducted by Markéta Hajscká and Ondřej Poduška since 2000. For some conclusions drawn from this research cf. Poduška (2002), Hajscká (2004), Poduška and Hajscká (2003).

distance towards the Rumungre group and consequently patterns of conduct arising from this distance.¹³ Our informant married a Rumungro woman (once again, because he had no choice) who—despite being considered (perhaps till the end of her life) as Rumungrica—now follows these patterns and takes part in them (though actually she was ‘forced’¹⁴ to share them when she wanted to stay in the Vlachika *osadas*; thus, to a certain extent, we can speak of it as resocialisation) with the other residents as well as the values and norms associated with them. For example, she will never have a coffee in her mother’s house and she warns against meeting residents of her original *osada* because they are considered *degeshes* (ritually impure) by the Vlachika Roma/Gypsies. And, of course, she speaks the Vlachika dialect of the Romany language. Their child is to learn these norms and patterns throughout its upbringing, internalise them, and become a Vlachika; thus, the Vlachika culture gains a new member and the culture is passed on to a new generation.

This case is a good example that what is fundamental is a specific culture (for even though it is an extreme example it gives the gist of the matter; it is the exception that proves the rule). This culture includes shared values and patterns of social conduct, while the over-emphasised ‘origin’ and the ‘romanness/gypsiness’ that is created on this basis (an essence of Roma/Gypsy existence—in this case the Vlachika Gypsy existence) is ‘only’ a construct, often without a ‘real’ base. ‘Vlachikaness’ (as well as ‘romanness/gypsiness’) is not a substantial quality of a certain group of people—passed on by the ties of blood, and thus fixed in the *bodies*—but the set of shared values and norms connected with the patterns of social conduct (with a possibility—e.g. through a process of resocialisation—to change them).

Conclusion

In this article we have tried briefly to outline the character of social organisation in the Gypsy *osadas* in eastern Slovakia. We emphasised that the social organisation of the Gypsy *osadas* is based on kinship; the system of kinship forms their institutional core, and this is one of the principal features distinguishing the society of the Gypsy *osadas* and their culture from that of the majority society. We have outlined the character of kinship in the Gypsy *osadas*

13. An integral part of this distance is a prescription of an endogamous marriage within a sub-ethnic group. Manifest and latent cultural patterns can be studied here; though we will not examine this problem here.

14. Compare this with a statement by J. L.: ‘As for me, for example, when I came to their home for the first time—I mean to my husband’s family—they said me: “You have to forget your customs and to take over ours”’ (Interview with Jolana L. by interviewer J. Haragaľ, *In Paměti* . . . : 67)

and we discussed the role of genealogical manipulation extensively. The positions of power in the Gypsy *osadas* are determined by genealogical structure, but at the same time it is true that this structure is frequently manipulated. We can conclude that genealogical manipulation is a process often used as a kind of (proto)political strategy.

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