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## “We beg you not to equate the names of Gypsies and knife-grinders with honest traders”

Itinerant Trade and the Racialisation of ‘Gypsies’ in the Czech Lands between 1918 and 1938

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### Abstract

This article focusses on common contemporary associations of itinerant trades with ‘Gypsiness’ and the consequent relationship between adopting anti-Gypsy measures and state intentions to regulate the profession of itinerant trades. By analysing the intended bill on itinerant trades, this article shows how administrative police terms such as ‘Gypsies’ and ‘work-shies’ were intertwined. It further argues that limiting space for mobile, self-employed economic activities went hand in hand with legalising the status of second-class citizens in 1927 when a new law On Wandering Gypsies was passed by the Czechoslovak Parliament. The article also analyses the agency of one particular itinerant traders’ association called Kotva (Anchor) and pays attention to the traders’ manifold defensive strategies. Because of their close contacts with Roma and Sinti (with whom they shared social and economic spaces) the traders sought to set themselves apart from Gypsies and to present themselves as ‘decent citizens’, in other words part of the Czechoslovak nation. In their successful effort to shield themselves from being included in the new police register of ‘wandering Gypsies’, they reproduced and amplified the state aim to eliminate ‘work-shies’ among itinerant traders. The article thus deals with the process of racialization of the category of ‘Gypsies’ in interwar Czechoslovakia, with racialization here being presented as an intricate historical process which was influenced even by non-state historical actors.

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A few years after the Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918, the government in Prague received a number of complaints about the “Gypsy scourge” made by local state authorities and municipalities from various districts in Bohemia. The local authorities demanded the adoption of a special law on “Gypsies, itinerant performers, peddlers etc.”<sup>1</sup> When these demands to “solve the Gypsy question” were made again shortly after Czechoslovakia accepted the Munich Agreement in September 1938, local authorities defined the group of inhabitants who were supposed to be targeted

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1 Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague] (NA), Ministerstvo vnitra – stará registratura [Ministry of Interior Records – Old Registration] (MV-SR), karton (k.) 357; NA, Předsednictvo Ministerské Rady [Presidium of Ministerial Council] (PMR), k. 2514.

and interned simply as Gypsies<sup>2</sup> or “wandering Gypsies” – a term which reflected the legislative changes made during the interwar period – and “vagrants” or “work-shies”.<sup>3</sup>

The main aim of this article is to elaborate on the fact that itinerant performers, peddlers, and circus performers – specific economic professions historically associated with a nomadic lifestyle and therefore with ‘Gypsiness’ – were excluded from this category in the late 1930s. I here aim to outline the process of narrowing down the category of Gypsies in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Scholarship<sup>4</sup> on anti-Gypsy measures and social welfare has only very recently started paying more attention to the economic activities (e.g. self-employment strategies) that were described as peddling, hawking, or simply as itinerant professions and were associated with Gypsies. Continuing from current research in the field, this article first examines the state effort to regulate peddling and itinerant trades in interwar Czechoslovakia in connection with contemporary anti-Gypsy measures, especially the *Law on Wandering Gypsies* from 1927. Second, the article reconstructs the agency of itinerant traders themselves. An analysis of the journal *Kotva*,<sup>5</sup> which was published by the Association of Travelling Entertainment Business Owners between 1920 and 1941, reveals the defensive strategies they applied in order to prove they belonged to the society of ‘decent’ Czechoslovak citizens and, at the same time, to distance themselves from the common image of Gypsies.

The article thus aims to contribute to the broader research question regarding the long-term process of racialisation of the category of Gypsies, which is usually grasped in terms of developments either in interconnected expert fields of knowledge such as anthropology and criminology (in particular criminal biology) or in the police practices influenced by the changes of political regimes and ideology (in particular in the ‘Third Reich’).<sup>6</sup> By contrast, this text shows that racialisation was a much more intricate process which was not only shaped by the actions of various scientists, policemen, officials, politicians, and the Nazi leadership, but also affected by non-state actors such as itinerant traders.

2 Throughout this article, I use the terms (anti-)Gypsy/ies and (anti-)Roma with different meanings. By the term Gypsy/ies, I refer to the contemporary usage through which the term labelled various groups of people, such as peddlers, itinerant traders, or vagrants, as well as ethnic Roma and Sinti. When I use the term Roma or Sinti, I am naming individual or collective historical actors, which identified themselves as or were considered members of ethnic Roma or Sinti communities. At the same time, I distance myself from the position, which for example Leo Lucassen advocated that the label Gypsy denominated inhabitants with an itinerant lifestyle. Leo Lucassen/Wim Willems/Annemarie Cottaar, Introduction, in: Leo Lucassen/Wim Willems/Annemarie Cottaar (ed.), *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups. A Socio-Historical Approach*, New York 1998, 1-13. As Jennifer Illuzzi pointed out, Roma and Sinti tended to be much more sedentary than we imagine: Jennifer Illuzzi, *Gypsies in Germany and Italy, 1861–1914. Lives Outside the Law*, Basingstoke 2014, 18-19. This holds true even for the context of the Czech Lands in the interwar period.

3 NA, Zemský úřad v Praze – policejní a bezpečnostní záležitosti [Provincial Office, Prague Records – Matters Related to the Police and Security] (ZÚ-pbz), k. 853-854.

4 Juliane Tatarinov, *Kriminalisierung des ambulanten Gewerbes. Zigeuner- und Wandergewerbepolitik im späten Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt am Main 2015; Sigrid Wadauer, *Asking for the Privilege to Work. Applications for a Peddling Licence (Austria in the 1920s and 1930s)*, in: Andreas Gestrich/Elisabeth Hurren/Steven King (ed.), *Poverty and Sickness in Modern Europe. Narratives of the Sick Poor, 1780–1938*, New York 2012, 225-246; Sigrid Wadauer, *Mobility and Irregularities. Itinerant Sales in Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s*, in: Thomas Buchner/Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz (ed.), *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe (16<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, New York 2011, 197-216.

5 *Kotva. První odborový časopis Celostátní organizace majitelů cestovních zábavních podniků* [The Anchor. The First Union Journal of the National Association of Travelling Entertainment Business Owners], 1920–1941.

6 Peter Widman, *The Campaign against the Restless. Criminal Biology and the Stigmatization of the Gypsies 1890–1960*, in: Roni Stauber/Raphael Vago (ed.), *The Roma. A Minority in Europe. Historical, Political and Social Perspectives*, Budapest 2007, 19-29; Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy. From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, London 1997. On the context of interwar Czechoslovakia, see: Pavel Baloun, *Von der “Landplage” zur “fremden Rasse”. Die Repräsentation der Zigeuner in der tschechoslowakischen Kriminalistik (1918–1939)*, in: *Bohemia* 59 (2019) 1, 50-76.

## Czechoslovak Anti-Gypsy Measures and the Bill on Itinerant Trades

The complaints about the “Gypsy scourge” made by local Czechoslovak authorities between 1921 and 1923 led to long-term ministerial and administrative debates.<sup>7</sup> High-ranking officers of the Czechoslovak gendarmerie, state officials from different ministries, and provincial offices across the state sought to formulate a solution to the so-called ‘Gypsy question’ which would fit the image of Czechoslovakia as modern, civilised, and Western liberal democratic nation state.<sup>8</sup> They differentiated between repressive and preventive measures. Apart from tightening existing police measures against vagrancy and begging, in other words the whole complex of anti-Gypsy measures inherited from the Habsburg Monarchy,<sup>9</sup> the first measures were also supposed to restrict licences issued to itinerant traders. In the image of the newly established state being constructed in contrast to the alleged ‘outdated’ and ‘oppressive’ Austria-Hungary, the participants placed a strong emphasis on the latter measures. A special police register based on dactyloscopy, labour camps or colonies, and special education for children who were supposed to be taken away from their parents constituted the most frequently mentioned preventive measures.

The ongoing debate, however, ended with a statement by the Ministry of the Interior in 1924 that the desired bill would violate the Czechoslovak Constitution as well as the international treaties, which had Czechoslovakia signed after the First World War.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the concerns about damaging the image of the state outweighed the demands of local authorities, which were articulated in terms of public security. The Ministry of the Interior, further, referred to the lack of state finances needed especially for the preventive measures.<sup>11</sup>

The situation changed rapidly in 1927 when the gendarmerie discovered a so-called Gypsy criminal band from Moldava nad Bodvou, a village near Košice in eastern Slovakia, which attracted the attention of the Czechoslovak as well as other European media because of a sensational accusation of cannibalism.<sup>12</sup> The trial legitimised the creation of a new bill entitled *On Wandering Gypsies* by the centre-right Czechoslovak government, which was passed by parliament on 14 July 1927. The Czechoslovak Act No. 117/1927 *On Wandering Gypsies*, which followed anti-Gypsy

7 The analysis of the administrative debate on the ‘Gypsy question’ is based on the following archival sources: NA, Ministerstvo spravedlnosti [Ministry of Justice Records] (MSpr.), k. 562; NA, MV-SR, k. 1; NA, Zemské četnické velitelství v Praze [Records of the Headquarters of the Provincial Gendarmerie] (ZČV), k. 100.

8 Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle. The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe (1914–1948)*, New York 2009.

9 Tara Zahra, “Condemned to Rootlessness and Unable to Budge”. Roma, Migration Panics and Internment in the Habsburg Empire, in: *American Historical Review* 122 (2017) 3, 702-726; Susan Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide, and Rule. An Integrative History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy*, Budapest 2011; Marius Weigl, *Armutspolitik, Antiziganismus und Wohlfahrt in Cisleithanien zwischen 1900 und 1914*, in: Olga Fejtová/Milan Hlavačka/Václava Horčáková/Veronika Knotková (ed.), *Poverty, Charity and Social Welfare in Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2017, 389-408.

10 On the international context, see for example: Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe’s Twentieth Century*, New York 1999, 40-76. On the context of interwar Czechoslovakia, see: René Petráš, *Menšiny v meziválečném Československu. Právní postavení národnostních menšin v první Československé republice a jejich mezinárodněprávní ochrana [Minorities in Interwar Czechoslovakia. The Legal Status of National Minorities in the First Czechoslovak Republic and their International Legal Protection]*, Prague 2009.

11 NA, MV-SR, k. 1, opis odpovědi ministerstva vnitra na interpelaci poslance F. Matznera o vzmáhajícím se sužování cikány (11. června 1924) [Copy of the Ministry of the Interior’s Response to F. Matzner’s Questioning of the Wandering Gypsies] (11 June 1924).

12 NA, Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí – výstřížkový archiv [Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Clippings Archive], k. 2328.

measures taken in France in 1912<sup>13</sup> and Bavaria in 1926,<sup>14</sup> enabled the state authorities to strip a group of inhabitants of their civil rights granted by the constitution. “Wandering Gypsies” were fingerprinted and their body measurements were recorded by the local gendarmerie. This information, together with further personal data, was sent to a centralised police register, the so-called Gypsy register, part of the register of habitual criminals of the Czechoslovak gendarmerie. “Wandering Gypsies” received special “Gypsy passports” and “wandering permits” and were obliged to have these documents with them at all time.<sup>15</sup> The main intention of the creators was clearly articulated in the official administrative journal of the Ministry of Interior in 1928, namely to “fight against an ancient evil which lies in the fact that among us lives an element which is foreign, even dangerous to our culture and our social order”.<sup>16</sup> Instead of prohibiting the movement of wandering Gypsies and similar vagrants entirely, the law thus aimed at regulating it by means of putting this heterogeneous group of inhabitants under permanent police surveillance and by means of various locally enforced restrictions regarding camping sites, the number of people travelling together, and so forth.

From the very beginning, the creators of the bill *On Wandering Gypsies* relied on the fact that additional legislative norms would be prepared to extend the complex of anti-Gypsy measures in different ways. However, their preparations and hearings took much longer than expected. Almost two years later, in June 1929, the Czechoslovak parliament passed Act No. 102/1929 *On the Establishment of Forced Labour Colonies*,<sup>17</sup> which was supposed to complement the existing system of workhouses and unified legal differences between the Czech Lands, Slovakia, and Carpathian Ruthenia. However, various traders’ associations along with the Chamber of Commerce complained about creating new state competitors and emphasised the extraordinary economic conditions arising from the Great Depression. Hence, no forced labour colonies ended up being established in interwar Czechoslovakia.<sup>18</sup>

Another legislative norm upon which the creators of the law *On Wandering Gypsies* counted was the bill on itinerant trades which the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Trades had been preparing since 1927.<sup>19</sup> One of the main motivations behind this bill was the unification of existing legislation on itinerant trades in interwar Czechoslovakia, since different regulations – inherited from Cisleithania (the

13 Martine Kaluszynski, Republican Identity. Bertillonage as Government Technique, in: Jane Caplan/Jane Torpey (ed.), Documenting Individual Identity. The Development of State Practices in the Modern World, Oxford 2001, 123-138.

14 Volker Zimmermann, “Zigeuner” als “Landplage”. Diskriminierung und Kriminalisierung von Sinti und Roma in Bayern und den böhmischen Ländern (Ende 19. Jahrhundert bis 1939), in: Milan Hlavačka/Robert Luft/Ulrike Lunow (ed.), Tschechien und Bayern. Gegenüberstellungen und Vergleiche vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, Munich 2016, 207-223.

15 Celia Donert, The Rights of the Roma. The Struggle for Citizenship in Postwar Czechoslovakia, Cambridge 2017, 21-26.

16 Vratislav Kalousek, Zákon o potulných cikánech I. [The Law on Wandering Gypsies I], in: Věstník ministerstva vnitra ČSR [Journal of the Ministry of Interior] 9 (1927) 8, 217-224, here 223.

17 At the beginning of this norm lay a bill proposed by a group of republican representatives in the Czechoslovak parliament in 1921 and again in 1926. See: Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna [Joint Czech-Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library], Národní shromáždění 1920–1925 [National Assembly 1920–1925] (NS), tisk 2282, [http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t2282\\_00.htm](http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t2282_00.htm) (27 July 2019) and NS 1925–1929, tisk 631, [http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0631\\_00.htm](http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/tisky/t0631_00.htm) (27 July 2019).

18 See: NA, PMR, k. 1997, and NA, Ministerstvo vnitra – nová registratura [Ministry of Interior Records – New Registration] (MV-NR), k. 296.

19 NA, MSpr., k. 562, odpověď ministrů vnitra, spravedlnosti a průmyslu, obchodu a živností na interpelaci poslanců H. Bergmanna, Fr. Zeminové, Emila Špatného a spol. (4. 6. 1927) [Reply of the Ministers of the Interior, Justice and Industry, Trade and Trades to the Question of H. Bergmann, Fr. Zeminová, Emil Špatný et al. (4 June 1927)].

Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy) – applied in the Czech Lands than in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Moreover, some of these decrees were almost 100 years old.<sup>20</sup> Preparations of the bill took eight years because the ministry consulted various chambers of commerce located in different parts of the state as well as manifold associations of entrepreneurs, peddlers, stallholders, and itinerant traders concerning the draft. The long-lasting debates revealed that these actors represented very diverse economic interests which conflicted and overlapped across the lines of class, nationality, and regional ties.

The majority of the chambers of commerce, which represented mainly the interests of the upper middle class, preferred an abolition of itinerant trades in general or at least restrictions to such extent that itinerant trades would be significantly reduced.<sup>21</sup> Smaller entrepreneurs were divided not only into individual associations, which advocated on behalf of the interests of their specific professions, but also into national or regional camps. Small Czech entrepreneurs in particular complained long-term to the ministry about “wandering Slovaks”, who purportedly practiced itinerant glazier or tinker works in large numbers. The Czech association of glaziers repeatedly asked the ministry to order the local authorities to police “wandering Slovaks” and expel those who practiced the trade without legal permits.<sup>22</sup> Many other organisations were also concerned about the inclusion of their professions in the bill, which would allegedly lead to an expansion of itinerant traders coming from Slovakia, in other words promoting economic competition instead of reducing it.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, the ministry received several letters made by associations of itinerant traders themselves or by local authorities on their behalf, which in very similar ways emphasised the social neediness of these professions in relation to the social and economic conditions in the region. For example, sievers from northern Moravia buttressed their plea with the argument that their professions traditionally passed from father to son and were practiced mainly within the territory of one region. They thus shielded themselves from the negative image of a nomadic lifestyle. They were also able to underpin their plea with the support of the local sieve producers and thereby allayed any suspicions of living at the expense of sedentary (non-itinerant) workers.<sup>24</sup> In another letter, the local authority from Valaská Belá, a village in western Slovakia, conveyed a complaint by several local inhabitants who itinerantly practiced glazing work about their persecution by the Czech authorities. They argued that, just as with the many Czechs working in Slovakia, their profession should be at least tolerated with respect to the humane principles of the new state and added that under Hungarian rule “our glaziers in Budapest could practice their work without any obstacles”.<sup>25</sup>

The ministry officials managed to integrate both these conflicting demands into the bill by stressing differences in the social and economic development between the

20 NA, Ministerstvo obchodu, průmyslu a živností [Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Trades Records] (MPOŽ), k. 2002, důvodová zpráva k návrhu zákona o kočovných živnostech [Explanation to the Proposed Legislation on Nomadic Trades].

21 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, Ústředna čl. obchodních a živnostenských komor v Praze [Chambers of Commerce and Trade in Prague] (9 February 1933).

22 E.g. NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, Svaz závodů sklenářských v Československu [Association of Glass Factories in Czechoslovakia] (24 March 1932).

23 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, Jednota mistrů klempířských [Union of Tinsmiths] (18 April 1932), Společenstvo soustružníků, deštníkářů, kovotlačitelů, dýmkařů, formařů a hřebenařů ve Velké Praze [The Association of Turneries, Umbrellas-makers, Metal-extruders, Pipe-makers, Forge-makers and Cresters in Great Prague] (15 February 1936).

24 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, Severomoravští sítaři pracující na licenci [Northmoravian Sieve-makers Working under License] (21 March 1937).

25 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, Notářský úřad vo Valaskej Belej [Notary Office in Valaská Bela] (31 October 1934).

Czech lands and the so-called ‘East of the Republic’<sup>26</sup> – Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia with their manifold folkloristic traditions were thus construed as backward peripheries of the modern state. Here, social neediness was supposed to be the major concern of the authorities. In the territory of the Czech Lands, which were understood primarily as the economic centre of the state, social neediness was by contrast supposed to only play a very marginal role, with the exception of a few peripheral regions with long-lasting traditions of practicing very specific itinerant trades.<sup>27</sup>

The category of social neediness to which the historical actors were so accustomed – as the before-mentioned pleas show – stemmed from the system of poor relief inherited from Austria-Hungary.<sup>28</sup> At the heart of both similar and locally administered frameworks stood the domicile (*Heimatrecht*), which on the one hand determined poor relief and on the other shaped policing of vagrancy, begging, and prostitution. Given the process of mass migration to industrial cities of the rural population, which nevertheless often preserved the legal ties (domicile) to rural areas, local municipalities shared the majority of the costs of industrialisation. In this context, local administrations very often issued licences to local paupers and people with disabilities for specific door-to-door services such as collecting bones, leather, and rags as well as knife-grinding, and busking as an alternative means of poor relief.<sup>29</sup> Thus, these manifold self-employed economic activities were practiced as regular jobs along with officially legitimised begging, which was otherwise prohibited.

The statistical data collected by the Czechoslovak central administration between 1927 and 1928 reflected the fact that the former Austrian-Hungarian practice was still used by local authorities in the new state. A significant majority of the licences issued or prolonged by the state authorities in the Czech lands related to the collection of bones, leather, and rags.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the intended regulation of itinerant trades was closely related to the plan to decrease poor relief and to replace it with more centrally organised social welfare such as unemployment insurance and the like. Given the attitude of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Trades, precisely these former self-employed practices, which represented an alternative form of poor relief, were to be targeted by the new legislation and reduced substantially in the Czech lands. But at the same time these practices were supposed to be tolerated in the context of the ‘undeveloped’ or ‘backward’ East.

The bill on itinerant trades was proposed to the Czechoslovak Parliament in 1935 but did not pass.<sup>31</sup> A major topic of disagreement was the question of which itinerant

26 Pavel Baloun, *Československá civilizační mise. asimilační praktiky vůči “cikánským” dětem v letech 1918–1943* [The Czechoslovak Civilizing Mission. Assimilation Practices towards Romani Children 1918–1943], in: *Dějiny-Teorie-Kritika* [History-Theory-Criticism] 15 (2018) 2, 175–202; Stanislav Holubec, “We Bring Order, Discipline, Western European Democracy, and Culture to this Land of Former Oriental Chaos and Disorder”. Czech Perceptions of Sub-Carpathian Rus and its Modernization in the 1920s, in: Stanislav Holubec/Joachim von Puttkamer (ed.), *Mastery and Lost Illusions. Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, Munich 2014, 223–250; Victoria Schmidt, *Public Health as an Agent of Internal Colonialism in Interwar Czechoslovakia. Shaping the Discourse about the Nation’s Children*, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 52 (2018) 4, 355–387.

27 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, *důvodová zpráva k návrhu zákona o potulných živnostech* [Explanation to the Draft Wandering Trade Act], 8–9.

28 Jakub Rákosník/Igor Tomeš, *Sociální stát v Československu. Právně-institucionální vývoj v letech 1918–1992* [The Welfare State in Czechoslovakia. Legal and Institutional Development 1918–1992], Prague 2012; Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide, and Rule*.

29 Wadauer, *Asking for the Privilege to Work*, 225–246.

30 See the reports compiled by district offices in Bohemia and Moravia NA, MPOŽ, k. 2003.

31 NA, MPOŽ, k. 2002, *poznámka MPOŽ* (28 November 1941).

trades were supposed to be included in the law and therefore which of them would have acquired a better status and which were to be significantly restricted.

The explicitly articulated relation between the new Czechoslovak anti-Gypsy measures and the proposed bill on itinerant trades was based on the state goal to firstly 'eliminate' those who allegedly committed illegal acts (such as vagrancy, begging, and theft) "under the pretence of professing itinerant trades"<sup>32</sup> and, second, to put these inhabitants under special, permanent police surveillance. Because professions which were most frequently associated with Roma and Sinti such as collecting bones, rags, and leather or busking, for example, were never included in the bill, state officials also specifically targeted the heterogenous group labelled as Gypsies. Limiting the space for self-employed mobile economic activities<sup>33</sup> went hand-in-hand with legalising the status of second-class citizens<sup>34</sup> under the term of "wandering Gypsies".

### In the Name of Professional Honour: Itinerant Traders' Struggle for Economic and Civic Recognition

On 15 September 1920, several itinerant traders, mainly from Bohemia, established the Association of Travelling Entertainment Business Owners, called Kotva (Anchor), and published the first issue of their monthly journal under the same title.<sup>35</sup> Kotva, which had around fifty members to start with, united itinerant puppeteers, individual performers, travelling cinematographers, owners of circuses and menageries, and others.<sup>36</sup> Some of them belonged to old and large families of famous travellers/travelling show people such as the Berousek, Kaiser, Kludský, Kočka, Kopecký, and Lagron families.<sup>37</sup> Although it was a very heterogeneous group of itinerant traders who did business in entertainment, they were all subject to the same originally Habsburg legislation.<sup>38</sup> Taking into account that at the beginning of the 1920s 12.3 per cent of the inhabitants who were labelled as Gypsies by the state authorities in the territory of Bohemia were denominated as "itinerant performers"

32 NA, MPOŽ, důvodová zpráva k návrhu zákona o potulných živnostech, 8-9.

33 In 1926, the Czechoslovak parliament passed Act No. 87/1926 On Peddling, according to which peddling licences were to be denied to those, who committed offences such as begging and vagrancy. See: Zákon č. 87/1926 Sb. z. a n. ze dne 4. května 1926 o podomním obchodě: Law No. 87/1926 Collection of Laws of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926 Concerning the Peddler-Business. <https://www.epravo.cz/vyhledavani-aspi/?Id=4161&Section=1&Id-Para=1&ParaC=2> (27 July 2019).

34 Donert, *The Rights of The Roma*, 45-47.

35 *Organisační almanach* [Organisational Almanach], in: *Kotva* 19 (1938) 7, 2.

36 See for example the list of subscribers at the end of the issues from the 1920s: *Adresář předplatitelů* [Address Directory of the Subscribers], in: *Kotva* 4 (1923) 6, 4.

37 The Czech word *světští* could be used either to denominate travellers in general or a community of travelling show people. Although they are commonly understood as non-Romani travellers, such a clear-cut ethnic distinction is misleading. The relation between these travelling show people families and Roma is much more intricate and ambiguous. They distanced themselves from any connection with Gypsies and yet, at the same time, their popularity had a lot to do with the romantic image of Gypsies and they shared many similar features. See: Markéta Skočovská, *Světští. Identita a základní kulturní rysy* [Světští. The Identity and its Basic Cultural Features], diploma thesis, Prague 2010, 93-95. Recent genealogical as well as historical research shows that these families had manifold family ties with Roma and Sinti from the Czech lands. Jana Horváthová, *Meziválečné zastavení mezi Romy v českých zemích* [Stopping by the Roma from the Czech Lands in the Interwar Period], in: *Romano Džaniben* 12 (2005) 3, 63-84; Hanka Tlamsová, *Loutkoherci, gymnasté, kramáři a šlejiři. Proměny životních strategií světských rodů od konce 18. do počátku 20. století* [Puppeteers, Gymnasts, Vendors, and Blade Sharpeners. Changes in the Life Strategies of Itinerant Lineages between the Late Eighteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries], diploma thesis, České Budějovice 2016, 52-142.

38 Ivan Klímeš, *Kinematograf, rakouský stát a České země 1895–1912* [Cinematography, the Austrian State, and the Czech Lands, 1895–1912], in: *Iluminace* 11 (2002) 1, 73-87.

by profession, they all had to deal with the label of ‘Gypsiness’ in their everyday lives.<sup>39</sup>

Kotva’s goal was to unite all ‘honest traders’ in order to achieve official state recognition as entrepreneurs instead of being reputed to be itinerant traders and associated with Gypsies or ‘roving bands’ and treated as such by various police authorities. Hence, they demanded such changes in legislation, which would make them subject to the trade regulations instead of various police measures targeting Gypsies. The improvement of their economic status was supposed to go hand-in-hand with the state recognition of their civic rights because municipalities often denied them domicile and consequently access to poor relief or suffrage in the same way they did to Gypsies.<sup>40</sup>

In this context, setting themselves apart from Gypsies and presenting themselves as ‘decent citizens’, i.e. part of the Czechoslovak nation, constituted a crucial agenda for Kotva. A strong emphasis was put on the notion of professional unity and professional honour, which was related to the intention of representing the interests of the whole profession.<sup>41</sup> Equally important to establishing the imagined professional community was the effort to portray this community as part of the Czechoslovak nation. In various articles published on the pages of the journal, the authors often stated that Kotva’s membership included many former Czechoslovak legionaries who had fought for national independence.<sup>42</sup> In the 1930s, these members even used to go to meetings with state authorities or to deliver official complaints on behalf of Kotva.<sup>43</sup> Itinerant puppeteers represented further proof of belonging to the nation, as they were portrayed as descendants of the so-called Czech revivalists who helped defend the language, culture, and traditions in times of Habsburg repression long before the Czechoslovak Republic was established.<sup>44</sup> In this way, Kotva tried to build its own image of honest, reliable, and loyal entrepreneurs who were mistreated by the authorities of the state that they had helped establish and who were denounced by the nation that they had helped revive as cultural workers.

This emphasis on professionalism as well as the advocacy of national interests also functioned as a shield against the possible symbolical contamination with ‘Gypsiness’. ‘Roving bands’ or ‘knife-grinders’ were supposed to represent those who took advantage of the state licences for itinerant traders and who purportedly lived on begging and theft under the pretence of practising itinerant trades. Their licences were depicted as “begging licences”<sup>45</sup> which on the one hand revealed their place within the system of poor relief but on the other highlighted the substantial difference. Whereas travelling entertainment business owners were itinerant because of economic needs, in other words for professional reasons, the Gypsies’ nomadic life-

39 A specific administrative register of Gypsies was created between 1922 and 1924, not long after the state census was conducted in the newly established Czechoslovakia in 1921. State authorities collected data on the total of 53,274 inhabitants that were – for various reasons – labelled as Gypsies. Ctibor Nečas, Evidence československých Cikánů z let 1922–1927 [Registers of Czechoslovak Gypsies 1922–1927], in: Český lid [The Czech People] 73 (1986) 2, 66-71.

40 Dostanou majitelé cestovních a zábav. podniků volební právo? [Will Travelling Entertainment Business Owners Receive the Right to Vote?], in: Kotva 15 (1934) 5, 1.

41 Pro stavovskou čest a hospodářské zabezpečení [For Professional Honour and Economic Protection], in: Kotva 15 (1934) 12, 4-5.

42 Referát přednesený před valnou hromadou místopředsedou kol. Měchurou [A Paper Presented by the Deputy Chairman Měchura at the General Meeting], in: Kotva 11 (1930) 11, 3.

43 Protokol ze sjezdu Prvního celostátního spolku majitelů cestovních zábavních podniků [The Proceedings from the First Statewide Meeting of Travelling Entertainment Business Owners], in: Kotva 19 (1938) 5, 1-2.

44 Tradice loutkařů a lidových umělců [The Tradition of Puppeteers and Folk Artists], in: Kotva 15 (1934) 4, 5.

45 Hausírka [Door-to-door Sale], in: Kotva 19 (1938) 3, 2.

style allegedly came from their close connection with nature and animalism. Kotva's members also contrasted their domesticity (neatness, normative gender roles, school education, and so forth) with the Gypsies, who allegedly embodied the reverse: filthiness, prostitution (concubinage), and illiteracy. Here, the urgent need to distance themselves from Gypsies reflected the fact that in reality they – as well as many other itinerant traders and peddlers in different parts of interwar Czechoslovakia – did share with them social and economic spaces such as camping sites, fairs, and market-places and often created bonds with them.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1920s, this close connection with Gypsies on the level of popular imagination as well as in everyday life led to amplified police surveillance. Given the professionalisation of police practices by means of new techniques of identification and classification,<sup>47</sup> Kotva had to face the threat of being included in the special police registers and, through their contamination with 'Gypsiness', of eventually being put on a par with so-called habitual criminals.<sup>48</sup> Hence, Kotva adopted several self-defence strategies. First, all members received special yearly renewed membership cards which they could produce when checked by police authorities.<sup>49</sup> They also received special membership badges, which they were supposed to attach to their wagons.<sup>50</sup> These were meant to distinguish them visually as honest entrepreneurs from other itinerant traders and at the same time prevent them from being included in the special police register as Gypsies. Second, in order to show their willingness to cooperate with police authorities and to underpin their status as honest traders, Kotva planned to create a register of their own.<sup>51</sup> Finally, they hired their own lawyer who was supposed to represent the members when dealing with the authorities and to help them file complaints.<sup>52</sup>

After the Law on Wandering Gypsies was passed in Czechoslovakia in 1927, Kotva feared the newly created police register and intensified its effort to negotiate with officials from the Ministry of Interior. Even though membership in the association was not explicitly mentioned, the ministry created a circular, which ordered the relevant police authorities not to target those travelling entertainment business owners who honestly practised their trade.<sup>53</sup> They were at least partially successful in this endeavour as Kotva members were not labelled as 'wandering Gypsies' nor included in the so-called Gypsy police register. Because of their lifestyle, however, as well as manifold close connections with Roma and Sinti and regional differences in the enforcement of the new anti-Gypsy measures, they had to distance themselves time and again from 'Gypsiness' in their contacts with the state authorities.<sup>54</sup>

The strengthening of anti-Gypsy measures impacted a growing number of members and led to renewed efforts by Kotva seeking state recognition during the 1930s. In 1934, Kotva became part of the Central Union of National Socialist Tradesmen's

46 Horváthová, *Meziválečné zastavení*, 68.

47 See: Baloun, *Von der "Landplage" zur "fremden Rasse"*.

48 Evidence a pohyb cikánů I [Register of Gypsies and their Movement I], in: *Bratrství [Brotherhood]* 8 (1925) 5, 19-20. See also: *Zlo venkova [Gypsy Scourge]*, in: *Kotva* 7 (1925) 2, 3.

49 *Těžký úkol [Difficult Task]*, in: *Kotva* 7 (1925) 2, 3.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Výborová schůze [Board Session]*, in: *Kotva* 22 (1941) 8, 1-2.

52 The lawyer regularly attended meetings of the board. *Protokol [Minutes]*, in: *Kotva* 11 (1930) 11, 1-3. For the official complaint, see: *Moravský zemský archiv [Moravian Provincial Archives]*, *Zemský úřad Brno [Provincial Office in Brno Records]*, k. 2541, *stížnost Sdružení cestovních a zábavních podniků se sídlem v Praze [Complaint of the Association of Travel and Entertainment Enterprises Based in Prague]* (13 April 1927).

53 *Ponižující soupis našich podniků zase straší [Humiliating Register of our Businesses Threatens Us Again]*, in: *Kotva* 15 (1934) 9, 3.

54 *Ibid.*

Associations (*Ústřední svaz jednot a spolků národně socialistického živnostnictva*) and, thus, the governing political party, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party.<sup>55</sup> This step was meant to prove their loyalty to the Czechoslovak state. At the same time, the political capital of the wider organisation was supposed to provide them with the desired economic status as well as civic rights (for example suffrage). Although they gained a better position in negotiations with the state authorities, these attempts failed to bring any legislative changes.

In the First Czechoslovak Republic, Kotva never managed to represent all travelling entertainment business owners<sup>56</sup> and therefore never became the only officially acknowledged organisation representing the united interests of the profession.<sup>57</sup> The lack of success in this field generated more concerns for the professional honour and reliability of the traders and members themselves. It is not an accident that the recurrent calls for purging the profession of “all dishonest elements” resembled the aim of the bill on itinerant trades.<sup>58</sup> By reshaping the popular image of Gypsies – in order not to include the travelling entertainment business owners – Kotva’s agency reproduced and amplified the state aim to eliminate ‘work-shies’ from among itinerant traders.

### Racialisation of the Category of Gypsies

The special central police register of ‘wandering Gypsies’ which was established on the basis of the Law *On Wandering Gypsies* in 1927 had a crucial impact on the old police’s administrative category of Gypsies. All the data, such as fingerprints, bodily measurements and descriptions, personal data, court and police files etc. collected from every corner of Czechoslovakia were put together in order to reconstruct Gypsies as a specific and dangerous population, including their birth and mortality rates.<sup>59</sup> Given that the central police authorities repeatedly instructed the lower organs of the state to target all ‘racial’ Gypsies,<sup>60</sup> the numbers from the register reflected the general shift in understanding of the category. For example, from around 37,000 inhabitants (including children) who were labelled as ‘wandering Gypsies’ until 1937, only 180 (far less than one per cent) were placed in the category of non-Gypsies, meaning vagrants who lived like Gypsies.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in contrast to the demands of the local authorities from the early 1920s, only a small fraction of peddlers, itinerant traders, and itinerant performers were included in the police register during the

55 Do nové práce [Towards New Work], in: Kotva (1934) 2, 3.

56 At least two other organisations which represented travelling entertainment business owners were founded on the territory of Czech Lands in the interwar period. One was located in Prague and the other – uniting German traders – in Most. Neupřímnost mosteckého spolku [Insincerity of the Association from Most], in: Kotva 12 (1931) 4, 2.

57 Pro pořádek mezi majiteli produkčních licencí. Licence jen lidem mravně bezúhonným a hospodářsky potřebným! Sdružení proti nadbytečnému počtu licencí! [For Order among the Travelling Entertainment Business Owners. Licences only for those Morally Irreproachable and in Need Economically! United against a Superfluous Number of Licences!], in: Kotva 15 (1934) 11, 3.

58 Ibid; Zlo venkova; Pro stavovskou čest a hospodářské zabezpečení [For Professional Honour and Economic Protection], in: Kotva 15 (1934) 12, 4-5.

59 Baloun, Von der “Landplage” zur “fremden Rasse”.

60 See the Czechoslovak gendarmerie’s instructions in: Potulní cikáni [Wandering Gypsies], in: Bezpečnostní služba 1 (1931) 7, 107; Rudolf Košťák, Učebnice pátrací taktiky [Textbook of Investigative Tactics], Prague 1935, 83.

61 NA, ZČV, k. 1076, Ústřední četnické pátrací oddělení, evidence cikánů, přehled činnosti za rok 1937 [Investigation Department of the Central Gendarmerie, Gypsies Register, Activities in 1937] (3 January 1938).

interwar period in Czechoslovakia. In practice, only those who had family ties with Roma and Sinti were usually targeted by the Czechoslovak gendarmerie.<sup>62</sup>

The racialising effect of the register shaped the state authorities' understanding of the category of Gypsies as well as of "work-shies" and itinerant traders, which reflected the modern nation state's norms of 'hard work', 'decent professions', and so forth. At the same time, however, these categories did not overlap entirely. Because the bill on itinerant trades did not pass in the Czechoslovak parliament, there was still some room left for tensions. The Roma and Sinti living in the Czech lands sought these spaces in order to escape from the register. Just like the members of the Association of Travelling Entertainment Business Owners, they presented themselves as non-Gypsy 'honest traders' with varying degrees of success.<sup>63</sup>

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62 Horváthová, *Meziválečné zastavení*, 68; Jana Horváthová, *Dílčí příspěvek k zamyšlení nad povahou a působením zákona č. 117/1927 Sbn. o potulných cikánech ze zorného úhlu současných znalostí v oblasti romistiky a sociální práce. (Na základě nepublikovaných písemných i ústních pramenů)* [Partial Contribution to a Reflection on the Nature and Practice of the Act No. 117/1927 on Wandering Gypsies from the Perspective of Current Knowledge in the Field of Romani Studies and Social Work (Based on Unpublished Written and Oral Sources)], in: *Milý Bore, profesor Ctiboru Nečasovi k jeho sedmdesátým narozeninám věnují přátelé, kolegové a žáci* [Dear Bor! To professor Ctibor Nečas, on his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday from his Friends, Colleagues and Students], Brno 2003, 311-319.

63 See MZA, ZÚ, k. 7026. Until 1938, only 156 inhabitants were removed from the register. See: NA, ZČV, k. 1076.

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