

Forced settlement of Vlach Roma in Žatec and Louny in the late 1950s¹

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The author of the study presents a micro-historical study of a family of Vlach Roma (Lovára) of western Slovakian origin, who were one of the few Romani groups still on the move in the mid-1950s and who in the late 1950s were forced to settle in the towns of Louny and Žatec in north-western Bohemia. Against this background the author focuses on some aspects of the Czechoslovak assimilation policy of the 1950s regarding ‘itinerant Gypsies’, designed to limit their mobility, which is represented mainly by the implementation of the Law on the Permanent Settlement of Itinerant Persons (No. 74/1958 Coll.). Using a combination of oral history methods involving Vlach Romani narrators and of archival research, the author clarifies some aspects of the local process of the implementation of the above-mentioned law and of selected impacts of the registration of travelling and semi-travelling people in February 1959. The forced sedentarization which occurred in the two localities under study is presented in the context of the regime of state socialism and the policies of central as well as local authorities towards so-called ‘travelling Gypsies’ in the late 1950s.

Keywords: Vlach Roma, forced settlement, itinerancy ban, assimilation policy

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INTRODUCTION

In this study I focus on the process of the itinerancy ban and its aftermath on the Roma and other groups in the late 1950s on a local level. It represents a micro-historical study focusing on an extended Vlach Roma family with its roots in south-western Slovakia, which

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migrated to the Czech lands after the Second World War and was on the move until the late 1950s, when it was forced to settle in the towns of Louny and Žatec. Although there are several existing studies on the topic (Donert, 2017; Jurová, 2009; Pavelčíková, 1999; Pavelčíková, 2009; Pivoň, 2018; Sommer, 1996; Slačka, 2014; Zapletal, 2012), the subject is still insufficiently explored on a local level.

In the first, theoretical part I introduce the theoretical background, the methodology used and the historical context, describing policies towards the Roma, especially itinerant Roma, in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. The second part, based on my own research, represents the core part of the microstudy. After characterizing the forms of previous spatial mobility and migration trajectories of the extended family that is the object of my study, I offer deeper insight into the course of implementation of Law No. 74/1958 Coll. and the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons in the towns of Louny and Žatec. Using oral historical sources combined with official records made by National Committees and other state organs, I try to reconstruct the course of the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons and its impact on the registered person, as well as the process of their later removal from the register in the mid 1960s. Using the example of the extended Stojka family, I focus on the assimilation policies of the state towards the Roma and on the efforts to limit their mobility. The last part is dedicated to the conclusions, where I summarize the impact of Law No. 74/1958 Coll. and assimilation efforts on the Roma studied here and discuss the active role of the Roma in the process of solving their insufficient socio-economic situation.

Theoretical background

The history of the Roma in many European countries, including the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is marked by continuous restrictive measures against the travelling way of life (Kabachnik & Ryder, 2010: 112). As van Baar states, the Roma have been at least since the 19th century considered in terms of nomadism as a 'public order' or 'security problem'. It has allowed authorities to use anti-Roma policies and officials to take radical steps against the Roma, such as deportations, displacement and other forms of forced mobility, and also eviction, detention, raids or ethnic profiling and surveillance (van Baar, 2015). The Roma have been conceived by politicians and media within a discourse of anti-social behaviour, with a direct link between nomadism, ethnicity, criminality and antisocial behaviour (Clark & Taylor, 2014). Van Baar's view on Roma as a subject of securitization and their problematization as a 'public emergency' can be easily applied when describing the policies of the regime of state socialism in the 1950s. In the former Czechoslovakia, itinerant Roma, as well as migrating Romani workers or non-Romani travellers, faced anti-nomadic policies. Although the number of *wandering Gypsies*,² as they were called by state authorities, was small, the Roma had been long stigmatized for their allegedly intractable mobility and were repeatedly objects of state efforts to sedentarize them and to govern their mobility (Zahra, 2017: 2). As I will show, in Czechoslovakia the stigmatization of their mobility continued during the post-war period and resulted in the itinerancy ban.

2 In my work, I always use the autonym Rom/Roma. In the references to the documents and records from the 1950s, however, I sometimes use the original terms, to illustrate the language of these documents. I state such terms in quotation marks and in italics. Roma were always marked there as 'Gypsies'. The itinerant persons are called 'vagrant', 'wandering', 'nomad' or 'travelling Gypsies'. The Romani families or groups are often described with dehumanized terms as 'nomad hord' or other (Spurný, 2017: 3).

Methodology

In this study I combine a classic historical approach which focuses on the records of state practices toward the Roma, and an oral historical approach that looks at the history of the Roma through their eyes and memories. Oral history offers a new perspective on the stories of the heterogeneous individuals who negotiate and shape their situations and report on them. This approach has recently become an important strand in Romani studies (Sadílková, 2020b: 191) and also in research into Romani history.

The starting point in this research was an interview with a narrator, Milan Stojka, known as Berci (born in 1949), which I recorded in Louny in 2018. He recounted to me the intensely emotional story of the forced settlement of his itinerant family in an empty, run-down former brickworks in Louny in the second half of the 1950s. In order to complete the historical events described by my narrator, I undertook intensive archive research in 2019–2020 with the aim of finding official records that describe the circumstances and the course of the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons in the Louny and Žatec area and its aftermath.

Historical context

When writing about the implementation of Law No. 74/1958 Coll., we have to expand our attention to the whole of the 1950s, and to the approach to (itinerant) Roma on a central as well as on a regional / local level, although these aspects interact.

During the first years after the war, the newly-arriving Roma, mostly migrants from Slovakia, were not welcomed by either the Czech municipalities or by their inhabitants. The Roma were seen as a security risk, and the municipalities very often made visible efforts to reduce the so-called *influx of Gypsies* (Sadílková, 2018: 101).

Although the composition of the Roma population in the Bohemian lands had fundamentally changed due to the drastic events of the war, when almost all the original Czech and Moravian Roma and Sinti families were exterminated (Nečas, 1994, 1999; Sadílková, 2020a), the surrounding population in the post-war period continued to perceive the Roma as antisocial and problematic individuals. The roots of this negative attitude went back to the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic, when the legislation still in force in the post-war period was created: *Zákon o potulných cikánech* (Law No. 117/1927 on Wandering Gypsies).

The migration of Roma from Slovakia to the Bohemian lands started shortly after the war and continued over the next decades. It was caused by the precarious socioeconomic situation in which many Romani families in Slovakia found themselves after the war, and supported, among other factors, by work opportunities and possibilities to find their new home in the Czech lands.³ Helena Sadílková described the post-war Romani migration as “a constant movement of people (and goods) between the Bohemian lands and Slovakia, as well as inside the Bohemian lands” (Sadílková, 2020b: 202).

3 Based on data from a register called *Soupis všech potulných Cikánů a ostatních tuláků práce se štítících, žijících po cikánsku* (register of all the wandering Gypsies and other vagrants who shun work, living the Gypsy way of life) carried out on August 18–23, 1947, in the Bohemian lands there were a total of 16752 Gypsies (Pavelčíková, 2004: 29). Given that the number of surviving original Czech and Moravian Roma did not exceed a thousand people, we can estimate that more than fifteen thousand of the Roma were migrants from Slovakia. The exact number of Roma living in 1947 in the studied localities (Louny and Žatec) is unknown, only the number of Roma living in the time of the register in the region of Ústí nad Labem is known: 1166 persons (Ibid: 31). According to a police record, there were only two Romani families living in the town of Louny in October, 1947. Report: Věc: Výsledek soupisu cikánů. Zvýšení zdravotního dosoru. March 4, 1948. (SOA Louny, Okresní úřad Louny I, NAD 77, k. 509). In the report of the Regional National Committee from September 18, 1951, there were 82 persons identified as Gypsies in the Louny district, 73 of them living in the city of Louny, and 117 in the Žatec district (NA Praha, 850/0/3 MV II-D Ministerstvo vnitra II Praha, k.k. 1283.)

The communist coup in February 1948 resulted in a major turnaround in state policy towards the Roma. At the level of the central state apparatus, from the beginning of the 1950s the Roma started to be perceived as people on a low material and social level, who were the poorest victims of the previous capitalist and fascist regimes (Spurný, 2017: 4; Sadílková, 2018: 105). According to the ideological experts of the communist dictatorship the integration of the Roma into society ought to take place through their integration into the work process, if possible of their own free will. In connection with the growing demand for Roma workers, the working Roma ceased to be described as 'problematic' (Sadílková, 2018: 102).

Despite the fact that policy towards the Roma in general gradually changed during the 1950s (see Spurný, 2011: 237–285; Spurný, 2017; Sadílková, 2013: 73–74), policy towards so-called *travelling Gypsies* during this period was continuous. On the one hand efforts to eliminate their itinerancy were made, mainly by the central state authorities, but on the other hand, as I will show later, there were frequent occurrences of local authorities repeatedly expelling and resettling them outside the borders of the municipality, a practice that contributed to the persistence of Romani mobility.

Thousands of Roma in Czechoslovakia were on the move during the 1950s, but most of them could be described as labour migrants. Only a small minority of them were still professionally itinerant: the Vlach Roma⁴ (Donert, 2017: 115). However, neither the authorities nor the legislation were able to distinguish between different Romani sub-ethnic groups or between different forms of migrants. Instead, ambiguously-defined categories such as *kočující* (nomadic or travelling) or *polousedlý/polokočující*⁵ (semi-settled/ semi-travelling) and *usedlí* (settled) began to be used to distinguish between different sorts of Roma, with the aim being to express the degree of their adaptability.

During the whole decade the category of *travelling Gypsies* was perceived as the 'most problematic', 'asocial' and 'most backward' and became a target of anti-nomad campaigns with the aim being to criminalize travelling amongst Roma. The general duty of work made the situation of professionally-nomadic groups even more difficult and contributed to their criminalization. Under this pressure, many professional itinerant groups tried to settle down and find employment but encountered persistent antigypsyism in society.

Archival sources from this period provide numerous examples of the specific impacts of the above-described policies on itinerant Roma. I focused my attention on reports from the Interior Ministry archives from the beginning of the 1950s, entitled *Úprava poměrů osob cikánského původu* (Amendment of circumstances of persons of Gypsy origin), which contains reports submitted by the Regional National Committees.⁶ From various places around the country, reports were made to the Public Security service or to the Interior Ministry describing the problems caused to local residents above all by itinerant Roma. As Spurný notes, however, we have to approach these sources critically, since it is sometimes

4 According to Nina Pavelčíková, the Vlach Roma from southern and south-western Slovakia were one of the first Roma groups to come to the Czech lands and the depopulated Sudetenland. The arrival of Vlach Roma from Slovakia (especially from the vicinity of Nitra, and Topolčany) then continued in the following years, but their share in the total number of Roma immigrants probably never exceeded 5–10% (Pavelčíková, 2004: 36–37). However, it is important to mention that a certain number of Vlach Roma were no longer itinerant in the 1950s (Hajská, 2016). Also, instead of the Vlach Roma, a very small number of original Czech Roma and Sinti tried to renew their itinerant way of life in the post-war period.

5 For my further analysis of this category see Hajská, 2016.

6 NA, 850/0/3 MV II-D Ministerstvo vnitra II Praha, k.k. 1283. The file contains reports from various regions in the Czech lands with the title *Úprava poměrů osob cikánského původu*.

difficult to decipher to what extent the reports from various localities reflected the actual state of affairs and to what extent they might be a reflection of their authors' own mental representations of *Gypsies*, connected to an attempt to get rid of the undesirable neighbours (Spurný, 2011: 242, 265).

In these archive files from the beginning of the 1950s, throughout various regions of the Bohemian lands, highly negative references were made to the *expeditions of nomad bands* and notice was drawn to the threat they represented to the surrounding inhabitants.⁷ Local and regional state organs called for legislative measures allowing legal steps to be taken against itinerant persons, and they chose various approaches that were meant to limit the itinerant way of life. In particular, they tried to disperse itinerant groups and have them settle in various municipalities,⁸ to buy or take away their horses and wagons, and to find employment for those capable of working.⁹ Other practices included were managed transfers of such people beyond the borders of the district or their escorting back to Slovakia.¹⁰ Some National Committees¹¹ had already taken vigorous steps against itinerant persons several years before Law No. 74/1958 Coll. was passed. On February 28, 1952, for example, the KNV in Plzeň issued a directive for local National Committees, *Směrnice ve věci řešení cikánské otázky* (Directive regarding the solution of the Gypsy question) whereby National Committees in whose areas the Roma appeared were obliged to immediately ensure their permanent settlement within the boundaries of the community. It recommended that they "be accommodated in their own wagons, from which the wheels are to be taken off and the body of the wagon mounted on stumps in a suitable place, ideally in the vicinity of the Gypsies' future workplace".¹² A similar approach was taken in the Ústí nad Labem region,

7 For example, according to reports from KNV Karlovy Vary, a group of around 50 persons appeared in the Doupov area and in various municipalities went round houses and farms begging for food for themselves and their horses. The group got into a clash with the police, who wanted to check their identities. At the end of May 1951 a similar group appeared in the Kadaň district. The report states that "the arrival of a group of about 20 persons in three wagons drawn by 5 horses caused a commotion in the village, and the inhabitants left their work in the fields to protect their property. The Gypsies begged and caught poultry." Ibid: *Úprava poměrů cikánského původu* of KNV Karlovy Vary to Interior Ministry (September 18, 1951). The same report from the KNV České Budějovice to the Interior Ministry (July 17, 1953) cites a complaint made by a citizen against a *Gypsy* group that had settled in Budějovice in Dlouhá louka and states that "this group is making the surrounding area uneasy, laying waste to meadows, trampling fields and stealing from gardens and houses in the area." (Ibid).

8 Some of these attempts represented transfers of relatively large groups of 'travelling Gypsies'. In April 1953, for example, the managed resettlement of 180 itinerant persons in the abandoned village of Trčkov in the Žamberk district took place. The inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Orlické Zahoří wrote a petition against the move, and the group was consequently divided up among several districts. Ibid: *Úprava poměrů cikánského původu* of KNV Hradec Králové: Ubytování cikánů v Orlickém Zahoří – stížnost (May 13, 1953) or Report of ONV Žamberk: Ubytování cikánů v Orlickém Zahoří, okres Žamberk – hlášení (April 24, 1953).

9 Ibid: Report from KNV Praha addressed to the MV of August 22, 1951 and Report from JNV III České Budějovice (July 15, 1953).

10 Escort to Slovakia is described by, for example, Report of KNV section III. in Kroměříž of September 10, 1951 (ibid). Preparations were also made for the escorting of a group of around 65 persons whom the authorities were transferring from Prostějov, where their horses had been taken from them, to Přerov. Ibid: Report of ONV Přerov: Skupina cikánů, eskortování z Přerova (January 28, 1952).

11 Under Communism this was the state administration office at the regional level (i.e. the highest local hierarchical level). On the level of regions/counties were Regional National Committees (KNV; krajský národní výbor), and under it were the District National committees (ONV; okresní národní výbor). The lowest-placed were the local (MNV; místní národní výbor) and municipal (MěNV; městský národní výbor) National Committees, which had only local competence.

12 These directives were subsequently labelled by the Interior Ministry as too repressive and at variance with basic laws and the political line for nationalities policy, and of course also with the MV directives for dealing

where on the night preceding September 10th, 1951 the local authorities, in cooperation with police, took radical measures in the course of which they took away *travelling Gypsies means of transport* in order to prevent them from travelling further. Their horses were taken from them and the wheels taken off their wagons.¹³

Several important historical works have analyzed the approach of socialist Czechoslovakia to the Roma in the 1950s at the central level (Donert, 2017; Guy, 1998; Pavelčíková, 2004; Sadílková, 2013; Sadílková, 2018; Spurný, 2011; Spurný, 2017; Zapletal, 2012). Throughout the 1950s, the central state administration and security organs called for restrictive measures nationwide so they could gain control over the as-yet uncontrollable movement of various Romani (and Sinti) groups (Spurný, 2011: 14). During this period the Interior Ministry created all sorts of proposals, directives and other measures with the aim of ending the itinerant way of life (Zapletal 2012: 29–40).¹⁴ The Czechoslovak state's campaign to assimilate Roma and to criminalise travelling Roma must be seen in the wider context of the post-Stalin turn after 1956, which affected the whole Soviet bloc. Following a 1956 Soviet decree banning nomadism, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia led the way in East Central Europe, issuing a secret decree entitled *O práci mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem ČSR* (Work Amongst the Gypsy Population of the CSR), on 8 April, 1958 (Donert, 2017: 115–116). This then formed the basis for the new Law, *Zákon o trvalém usídlení kočujících osob* (Law on the permanent settlement of travelling persons, marked as Law No. 74 of 17 October 1958¹⁵ (ibid: 14). These two measures signalled the transition to a harsh assimilation policy with regard to 'inhabitants of Gypsy origin', as they were called in the late 1950s by the state organs (Jurová, 2009: 14).

Law No. 74/1958 marked a major change, providing legislative support for the criminalization of an itinerant way of life. However, analysis of local practice relating to itinerant Roma indicates that the realisation of the measures that stemmed from this law cannot be seen as a sudden turning point in the approach to itinerant groups, but more as a culmination and legislative underpinning of existing practices.

with the Gypsy question. Ibid: Reakce referátu vnitřních věcí MV adresovaná Gustavu Radovi, předsedovi KNV Plzeň, March 19, 1952.

13 Ibid: Report of KNV Ústí nad Labem: Cikánská otázka v kraji Ústeckém (August 23, 1951).

14 According to Zapletal there were two *proposals for dealing with the issue of homeless people and Gypsies* from 1953, drawn up by the Interior Ministry and HS VB, and a comprehensive document drawn up by VS MV, *Informace pro soudruha ministra vnitra k otázkám cikánského obyvatelstva* (Information for Comrade Interior Minister on issues relating to the Gypsy population) from the end of 1955, which, after reworking, was sent out to offices in spring 1956 under the title *Situační zpráva o trestné činnosti cikánského obyvatelstva* (A situation report on criminal activity by the Gypsy population). A further comprehensive document falling under the Interior Ministry was the *Orientační dopis* (Orientation letter), containing a range of measures that police members could use immediately to ensure the permanent settlement of itinerant persons (Zapletal, 2012).

15 It was approved by the National Assembly and issued publicly on November 11, 1958. On one hand it required the National Committees to provide aid to itinerant persons in the transition to a settled way of life, but on the other hand it banned, under threat of punishment, such persons from continuing with an itinerant way of life (Jurová, 2009: 14).



Pic.1: Anna Stojková, neé Lakatošová, born 1902 in Bánovce district. Anna was the natural authority of the whole extended family. However, the authorities considered her to be a problematic person, maintaining the 'old habits'. Local officials thus tried to prevent her influencing her family, so that it would be easier to assimilate them into socialist society. This unique picture was taken in the office of the National Committee in Lovosice in 1952 (SOA Litoměřice, fond Okresní národní výbor Lovosice. NAD: 328, č.p. 104, inv.č. 114, k. 100. Občané cikánské národnosti 1951–1959).

MICRO-HISTORY OF THE FORCIBLY SETTLED STOJKA FAMILY

My study focuses on the Vlach Roma,¹⁶ known as *Lovára*¹⁷ who at the end of the 1950s were forcibly settled in two towns in north-western Bohemia: Louny and Žatec. The people in question were two related families of horse traders. One was the family of the widowed Anna Stojková, neé Lakatošová, born in 1902 in Bánovce district; this family came to Louny (Pic. 1).

Anna was accompanied by her four adult sons and one daughter, three of them already

¹⁶ However, the ethnonym *Vlach Roma* was never used by members of the state administration in the period of my study. As I have mentioned, the officers did not distinguish between the different Romani sub-groups, and thus we can identify the members of the subethnic group only thanks to surnames that are typical of Vlach Roma (Stojka, Lakatoš) and thanks to a genealogical map based on the data from my narrators, supported by official personal records.

¹⁷ The term *Lovára* (pl.; sg. *Lováři*) is not very widespread among the Vlach Roma on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia. Roma from this group call themselves *Romane Rom* (Romani Roma), *čáče Rom* (proper Roma), or use a loanword of the majority language – *Olašská Rom* (from the Slovak/Czech adjective *olašský*).

with their own families, and also by the nuclear families of her brother and the siblings of her deceased husband Filo. The second family segment consisted of Anna's two sisters-in-law, sisters of the deceased Filo, Kuluša (born 1920) and Barbora (1914), who married two brothers, Antonín Horvát (1914) and Juraj Horvát (1912), with their children and also grandchildren. At the time of their arrival in Louny and Žatec, the two related families each consisted of approximately 30 persons.

At the time when Law No. 74/1958 Coll. was passed, these two families were also the only Vlach Roma living on the territory of the districts of Louny and Žatec.¹⁸

The two families, with roots in western Slovakia moved together around Moravia, Silesia and Bohemia in the 1930s,¹⁹ although their ways increasingly parted towards the end of the pre-war decade. During the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939 all of them returned to Slovakia, to the communities in which they were registered as having right of domicile. In the case of Anna's husband and his family this was the municipality of Trenčianska Teplá in the Trenčín district, and in the case of her sisters-in-laws it was the community of Bohdanovce in the Trnava district. The families who settled during the war in Bohdanovce had lived in temporary housing. However, this was razed to the ground, so immediately after the war they returned to itinerancy out of a need to make a living.²⁰ The Roma in Trenčianska Teplá remained there until spring 1947 when they were driven out of the municipality by the local National Committee;²¹ they then once again set out again in the direction of the Bohemian lands.

The move to the Bohemian lands

In the beginning of 1950s these families of former horse traders continued to try to earn a living by selling horses. The data regarding the birth dates and places of their children show the families in question were already in the north-western part of Bohemia (1949 in Žatec, Chomutov and Česká Lípa), but their trajectories went all over the Czech lands, as is shown by their other stay in 1951 in the Choceň district (Eastern Bohemia) or in Ostrava (Northern Moravia) in 1953. In spring and summer 1952 there is a well-documented stay by both families in Lovosice, in the *Gypsy camp* near the Labe River.²²

From Lovosice they turned towards central Bohemia, stopping in Říčany and Uhřetěves (August 1952)²³ and Kralupy nad Vltavou (December 1952), where they were divided up by local authorities with the assistance of the police and handed over to the neighbouring districts of Slaný and Mělník.²⁴ Another occurrence of the families I have found is in 1955 in Most and later in 1956 again in Žatec.

In the Czech and Slovak professional literature, it is customary to use the superior term Vlach Roma, mainly due to the fact that this term is generally widespread and also given the fact that there is no other group of Vlach Roma living on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia.

18 The Žatec district was an independent district until June 1, 1960, when it was merged with the Louny district.

19 In my further research I will examine in detail spatial mobility in both families during the First Republic and during the war.

20 Vojenský historický archiv. Archiv Ministerstva obrany ČR. Osobní spis žadatele o 255 č.j. 33495902.

21 ŠoA Trenčín, Obvodný národný výbor v Trenč. Teplej. Cigáni – neprístojné chovanie a nariadenie na ich vysťahovanie, i.č. 944/1947.

22 SOA Litoměřice, Okresní národní výbor Lovosice, NAD: 328, č.p. 104, inv.č. 114, k. 100. Občané cikánské národnosti 1951–1959.

23 SoKA Přemýšlení, ONV Říčany, I. no. 1440 Sg. 257, Report of the internal affairs section for KNV Praha XVI Order of the Interior Ministry zn. II/3-215, Úprava poměrů osob cikánského původu (January 6, 1953).

24 SoKA Mělník, ONV Kralupy nad Vltavou, sign. 967, inv. no. 215, k. 462, Přemístění cikánské tlupy – šetření (December 10, 1952).

The locations of the Stojka family changed quite frequently, especially because, as mentioned above, the arrival of itinerant Roma was not welcome anywhere. My narrator Berci, like other narrators,²⁵ remembers the early 1950s as having been very unfavourable for itinerant Roma. He described to me how his family had to face the practices of displacement and local expulsions and relocations, as well as constant police controls:

The time after the war was hard. We travelled around the Bohemian lands and the non-Roma drove us out. As soon as they saw us, they'd shout: 'Jews, Gypsies, get out! Leave! We'll send Hitler to get you again!' They drove us out. They'd say to us: 'Gypsies, get yourselves together and leave!' They didn't let us camp in one place for more than two weeks. The police came and said: 'The locals are afraid that you will rob them, kill them and eat their children. You have to get out of here!' But where were we supposed to go? We often had to sleep in the woods.²⁶

His statement must be placed in the context of the events that took place during the war, when the widespread deportation of all Jews and Roma took place. During the pre-war period several itinerant families of Czech Roma, most of them with the surname Růžička, were on the move in the area of Louny and Žatec. Most of them did not survive the war.²⁷ In addition, during the post-war years most of the German population was expelled from the former district of Žatec, annexed during the war to the German Empire as part of the *Sudetenland*. A few years after this, the Stojka families in horse-drawn caravans arrived in this ethnically-cleansed area, alongside other Romani migrants from Slovakia. They encountered considerable hatred on the part of the local population (Pavelčíková, 2004: 23–24; Nečas, 2005: 90). As I have mentioned above, racism and antigypsyism, strengthened by the several years of influence of Nazi ideology, still lived on in the society of the time. The post-war *influx* of Roma from Slovakia thus provoked terror, hatred, and xenophobia all over the Czech lands, as Roma who remember the period also describe. According to the testimony of Berci, in the mid-1950s the area covered by both families narrowed to the surroundings of Louny and Žatec. Even at that time the families tried to earn a living horse trading. He remembers travelling to the big horse fairs that took place near Žatec or in Český Brod:

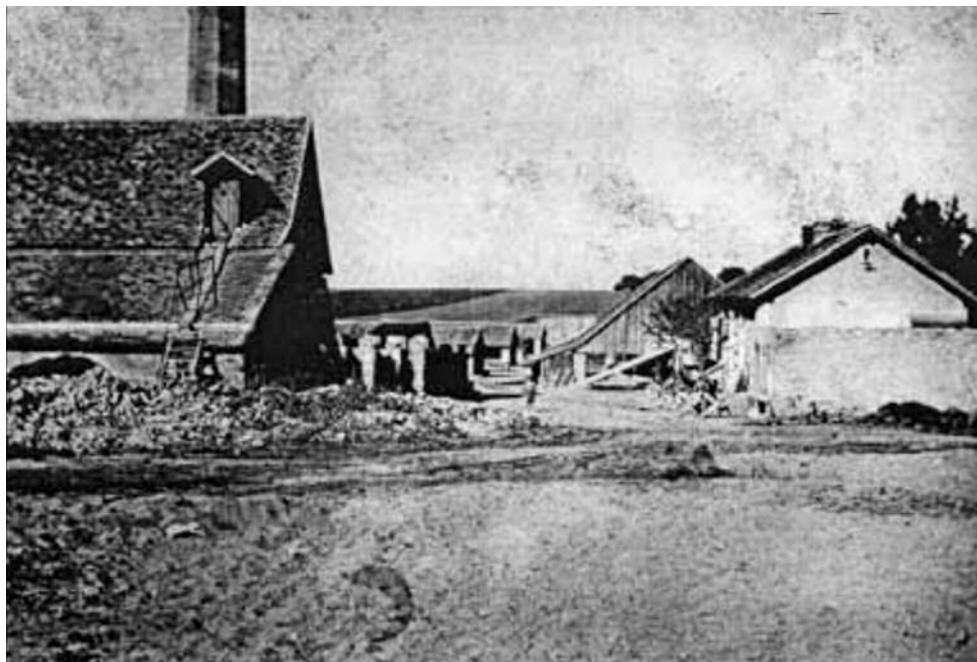
I remember that at one fair we camped by the river in Žatec, not far from the station, with our horses and wagons.²⁸ Moreover, we also traded in food stamps. At that time food, and also clothing, was rationed. The Roma made use of the fact that they were given these stamps in various municipalities, and they would then sell them or exchange

25 Štefan Stojka, born 1940 in Topolčany, Štefánia Stojková born 1936 in Prašice or Villo Bihári born 1946 in Nitra.

26 Stojka, M. 'Berci' (December 18, 2018), personal interview.

27 SOA Louny, Okresní úřad Louny I, NAD 77, k. 509: Opatření proti cikánům. In the archive file are documented cases of their forcible sedentarisation in winter and spring 1940 in several villages of Louny district and also their later deportation to the concentration camp in Lety u Písku. Of the names appearing in the archives from the beginning of the protectorate, none appear on the lists of the Romani population made in the late 1950s.

28 As Berci describes it, they had several types of wagon. On the one hand there were wagons for living in, small wooden caravans with beds and a stove, where they lived during winter. They also had a cart with a tarpaulin, in which they slept and rode in summer. Stojka, M. 'Berci' (December 18, 2018), personal interview.



Pic. 2: The brickworks in Louny, shot by an unknown photographer in the interwar period. The brickworks, owned by the Fanta family, was nationalized in 1950 and incorporated into the state enterprise Severočeské cihelny. It was modernized in 1962-1963 and then remained in operation until the end of the 20th century (Svobodný hlas, weekly of the Louny, Postoloprty, Žatec and Podbořany regions. April 6, 2011, p. 8).

them with non-Roma. They caught my mother doing it and she went to prison for six years. So, I was brought up by my grandmother.²⁹

Berci lived with his grandmother Anna Stojková until her death in 1963.

The arrival of the Vlach Roma in Louny and Žatec

In the second half of the 1950s both family segments were forced to settle. The families of the sisters Kuluša and Barbora and their husbands had to stay with their caravans in Žatec at a place called Ostrov on one side of the river Ohře, where the Roma had repeatedly camped during previous years. It was from here that Anna's family set out for Louny, where the family was subsequently placed in the gully of the old brickworks. There was a fundamental difference, in a certain sense, between the localities of Ostrov in Žatec and the old brickworks. While the site near the river in Žatec was a natural campsite, close to water and in a place where Roma were used to camping, the brickworks in Louny was an unused building in the industrial zone at the end of the town, where the extended family of Anna Stojková was placed by the authorities and which was, as I shall go on to show, utterly unsuitable for the life of these families. There were no other inhabitants living there, except Anna's extended family (Pic. 2).

It is not clear when exactly the involuntary settlement of Anna's family segment in Louny took place. Based on application forms for permanent residence in Louny of some members

²⁹ Ibid.

of this family, they were already registered at the brickworks in January 1958,³⁰ more than a year before the registration of itinerant and semi-itinerant persons.

According to the narrator Berci their settlement in the old brickworks was something that was definitely imposed from above, by the municipal or regional authorities:

They brought us here to Louny. They put us and our wagons in a kind of gulley next to the barracks. Beyond the town. There used to be brickworks there. Right next to us there were soldiers. They were always doing some kind of military exercises, shooting and running about with guns. To start with we were terribly afraid that they would shoot us, throw a bomb at us. We stayed in that place for several years. We were there five years at least.³¹

Berci describes what life was like in the brickworks:

In that gulley by the barracks there were eight wagons, eight families, but we were all related, one big family. There was no electricity in the beginning. There was no water there at all, not even a stream. They just left us there, no one looked after us. No one gave us anything, we had nothing. Luckily a kind man who lived nearby let us get water from the well in his garden. We carried it from there for cooking and washing. I went to school in Louny, every day we walked about five kilometres. My grandmother built a hen hut next to the wagon and kept hens in it so that we had eggs. We were very poor. In time the soldiers started to talk to us, some of them visited us and brought us food, tins. We were terribly hungry.³²

Persons designated for the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons

The family of Anna Stojková was one of those for whom managed settlement was planned. The archives of ONV Louny provide information on the preparation of a register of travelling and semi-travelling persons during 1958 and in January 1959 on a local level. During this period several efforts were made to create a register of the inhabitants designated for the register. The individual versions differed in terms of which categories of persons to include in the inventory. The last version before the register of January 1959 gives 294 persons for the district of Louny, of which 135 were *permanently settled*, a further 135 *semi-travelling* and 24 persons *travelling* (all of the *travelling persons* registered in the town of Louny).³³ This registration thus also included the category of *settled Roma*, which does not subsequently appear in the actual register in February 1959 (Pic. 3).

On 4 December 1958 the KNV Ústí nad Labem sent to subordinate National Committees *Instructions for the implementation of Law No. 74/1958*. The instructions stated that the 'most important issue' was *how to assess fairground people (světské osoby)*³⁴ and *how to assess Gypsy persons*, the latter being divided into the categories of *permanently settled*, *semi-travelling* and *travelling*. Despite this attempt to clearly distinguish different categories, the instructions

30 SOA Louny, MěNV Louny, NAD: 667, č.p. 338, k. 10. Evidence obyvatelstva cikánské národnosti v Lounech 1959–1969.

31 Stojka, M. 'Berci' (December 18, 2018), personal interview.

32 Ibid.

33 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Organizační opatření k provedení soupisu kočujících a polo-kočujících osob v okrese Louny in January 1959.

34 This category includes non-Roma operators of professionally itinerant trades and entertainment, who did not have permanent residence (or were resident only seasonally) and were on the move (Pavelčíková, 2004: 29). From the point of view showed in these Instructions, the state administration distinguished between those

Seznam osob polokočujících a kočujících v okrese Louny.

Obec	Počet osob		Osoby trvale usídlené		Osoby polokočující		Osoby kočující		Bez prac. poměru
	dospěl.	z toho	dospěl.	dětí	dospěl.	dětí	dospěl.	dětí	
		dětí							
Dobroměřice	29	18			11	18			
Kystrka	2		2						
Louny	188	94	62	71	27	10	11	13	5
Lenešice	26	10			16	10			3
Lisčany	13	9			4	5			
Obora	5	3			2	3			1
Vrbno n.A.	11	16			15	16			2
Celkem	294	150	64	71	69	66	11	13	11
	294		135		135		24		11

Pic. 3: The list of the number of persons prepared for the register of travelling and semi-travelling people in Louny district, made just before the realisation of the register (January 1959). This draft also includes the category of permanently settled Roma, which was later not included in the official register (SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Organizační opatření k provedení soupisu kočujících a polokočujících osob v okrese Louny in January 1959).

stressed that the approach should be individual and based on the experiences of the National Committees.³⁵ On the basis of this non-uniform interpretation, which could be seen in both the wording and the overall implementation of Law No. 74/1958 Coll., these categories were then interpreted and practically implemented in entirely different ways on a local level. The fact that the categories of *semi-travelling*, *travelling* and *settled* were questionably defined, which allowed the National Committees to take an eclectic approach to the inclusion of persons on the register, is an issue that several researchers have addressed (Pavelčíková, 2004: 74–75, Jurová, 2009: 14, Slačka, 2014). Based on § 2 of Law No. 74/1958 Coll., state organs put into the category of *travelling persons* not only Roma who were at that time mobile and were moving from region to region in caravans, but also those who had come to visit their families or who had set out from Slovakia in search of better housing, work or at the invitation of recruiters arranging work in the Czech lands (see also Slačka, 2014: 59). Law

who owned a license for the performed trades and those who performed crafts, entertainment attractions and other activities without any license. Under the category known in Czech as *světští* various categories of nomadic crafts and entertainment services are usually included, and the matter of who was included in this category or identified themselves as *‘světský’* is one for future research.

35 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Report of KNV Ústí nad Labem Provedení zákona č. 74/1958 Sb. o trvalém usídlení kočujících a polokočujících osob (December 4, 1958).

No. 74/1958 Coll. thus forcibly settled not only itinerant groups of Roma, but affected far greater numbers of Romani migrant workers (Donert, 2017: 141) and also a significant number of travelling *fairground people*.³⁶

Using the example of the two districts of Žatec and Louny, which in 1959 were still independent, it is possible to observe different approaches to the registration of persons designated for the register. While in the district of Žatec the authorities followed the ethnic principle and in their overall total of 372 persons³⁷ included essentially all those labelled *Gypsies*, regardless of the degree to which they were settled/itinerant, in Louny another approach was chosen in the end: the only people included on the register were the (until recently) itinerant families of Vlach Roma, plus fairground people (most of whom also engaged in itinerant professions). In the town of Louny, moreover, there were no other Roma except for Vlach Roma on the register, i.e. no one from the earlier working category of *settled*, who in January 1959 had been entered into the preparatory lists. This process may be explained by the approach of the local authorities to the settled Roma that they had declared during the planning of the realisation of the itinerancy ban: "Persons of Gypsy origin are in part housed permanently in the district town, and have already adapted well. However, newcomers are housed in only temporary accommodation, for example in the brickworks. In the district town it is impossible to count on the possibility of a flat of even the worst standard, given that there are over 600 applicants for a flat".³⁸ Some smaller municipalities in the Louny district chose another approach and also included on the list Romani seasonal workers employed on state farms or in other enterprises (Pic. 4).

In the Louny district a high number of *fairground people* found their way on to the register, with 113 out of a total of 192 people on the list (58%) having a travelling showman background, compared to only 79 *Gypsies* (42%). Vlach Roma (Anna's family members) represented around 13% of all those evidenced. Whether someone was labelled by the authorities as *Gypsy* or *fairground people* was again carefully recorded by hand (the note 'svět' (i.e. fair.) or 'cik' (i.e. Gyp.) in the upper corner of the sheets of the list).

Register of travelling and semi-travelling persons (3 February 1959)

I consider it of great interest to look in more detail at the course of 3 February 1959, when the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons in Louny was realized. In addition to the official version, we also have the subjective account of a man who was a ten-year-old boy at the time and whose family was affected by the register. His testimony is at direct variance with the ONV's official record of the whole event.

According to the official version, "in the district of Louny from 3 to 6 February 1959 a register of travelling and semi-travelling persons was made in accordance with the organisational plan. During the creation of the register no trouble occurred, all those

36 Of the total number of 46,500 persons who were taken into the register of travelling and travelling persons in Czechoslovakia in February 1959, 3,034 of them were 'fairground people'. Most of them, 2,620 persons, were registered in the Bohemian lands. Of the total number of 18,564 registered people in Bohemian Lands, 15,529 were of 'Gypsy origin' (Pavelčíková, 2004: 71–72).

37 SOA Louny, ONV Žatec, kt. 66, Minutes of the 11th regular meeting of the ONV council in Žatec of 3. 3. 1959. According to the minutes of a meeting of the bureau of the KSČ of 27 August 1958, 5 itinerant families (28 persons) lived in Žatec, which represents around 8 % of the registered persons. SOA Louny, KSČ – okresní výbor Žatec, č.p. 247, inv. č. 270, kt. 15.

38 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Vnitř. 038/58 Přehled pracovních a ubytovacích možností u kočujících osob (July 10, 1958).

č.	obec	počet osob celkem :	cizinci :		světáci :	
			dosp.	děti	dosp.	děti
1.	Louny	39	11	16	8	4
2.	Lenešice	67	5	11	25	26
3.	Dobruška	16	-	-	6	10
4.	Vrbno nad Lesy	29	-	-	14	15
5.	Obora	5	-	-	2	3
6.	Raná	13	6	7	-	-
7.	Osoby vstě do soupisu pro jiné MNV	23	6	17	-	-
	Celkem	192	28	51	55	58

Pic. 4: Official record from the register of travelling and semi-travelling people in Louny district. Unlike the previous draft, it does not contain a category of permanently settled, nor does it distinguish between travelling and semi-travelling persons, but it does distinguish between persons of Gypsy origin and fairground people. (SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Vnitř. Provádění soupisu osob kočujících a polokočujících; February 10, 1959).

summoned reported to the various registration centres. No one was brought forward by organs of Public Security”.³⁹

According to the memories of Berci, the registration process was a relatively brutal intervention:

When they took us to the brickworks, in the beginning we had horses so my uncles could travel to horse fairs and to do other business. But then the ban on itinerancy came and they took our horses from us. Policemen came, soldiers and civilians, from the social services office or the national committee. About a hundred people. That was the worst thing that could have happened to us. We couldn't travel any more. I remember how we all cried. Grown up, old Roma, crying, shouting. Children crying. My grandmother was crying, roaring with sadness. We couldn't do anything. They came armed, with guns. We were afraid that if we tried to protect the horses, they would shoot us and the horses. The Roma preferred to take refuge in the wagons. We children hid under the wagons, we were afraid they'd take us too. My grandmother called to me: 'Berci, run, hide!' She was afraid they'd take me to a children's home, because my mother was in prison and she was looking after me. I ran inside and hid under the bed. The policemen took our horses, eight horses in all, and put them on the wagons. Then they said: 'Off to the knackers with them.' They took all our horses, even my little horse Fricek. He'd grown up with me, since he was a foal.⁴⁰

39 Ibid. Report of ONV Louny: Provádění soupisu osob kočujících a polokočujících (February 10, 1959).

40 Stojka, M. 'Berci' (December 18, 2018), personal interview.

It is evident that the narrator does not describe the registration as a problem-free summoning of persons before the authorities but as an essentially violent event with the assistance of the armed forces.

According to the available register sheets for the community of Vlach Roma settled in Louny, in the case of four nuclear families there is a note stating that they owned a *dwelling wagon – caravan* and in the case of two families, that they owned a truck. Only in the case of one family is it stated that they owned a horse: “one Wallachian horse, white, 12 years”.

As far as the question of the number of horses was concerned and the way in which they were subsequently handled, the official evidence is clearly at odds with the narrator account: his family apparently owned eight horses at the time, and the man can even remember their names. For the Vlach Roma, the taking away of the horses was the key and most tragic event of the whole registration. Although the existing instructions issued by the Interior Ministry also included the treatment of horses or motorised draught vehicles ascertained during the taking of the register, the archive sources do not mention this question at all. Neither in the statement accompanying the register nor in any other reports in the archive files mentioned is there any other information about the handling of the horses of the Vlach Roma, and it has to be asked what happened to the seized horses, with no proper official documentation of the whole process. The issue is raised of the possible defraudation or the destruction of the Romas’ property. This discrepancy in the number of horses is remarkable when we look at the register of 1959 on the level of the Bohemian lands, which is something that no researcher has as yet done in detail. According to the official register statistics, a total of 61 horses were recorded as being in the ownership of itinerant persons in the Czech and Moravian regions, and 11 were apparently taken away.⁴¹ This number seems to be far too low, and is entirely at odds with what Vlach Roma narrators say. In Louny alone, 8 horses were said by the narrator Berci to have been taken away (and put down), but the taking away (and putting down) of horses during the register is also described by further Vlach Roma in other localities.⁴²

Horses had an extremely high value among these Roma, not only in a financial sense or as a status symbol. When they were taken away and put down, it was seen by Vlach Roma as a fatal incursion into their life. Vlach Roma express greater sadness at the loss and death of their horses than at forced settlement, which tells us much about the environmental error and insensitivity of the state administration (see Glassheim, 2016 and his reflection on the ecological dimension of the plundered Sudetenland).

Impact of the register for registered persons

According to §3 of Law 74/1958 Coll., persisting in an itinerant way of life was punishable by imprisonment for a period of six months to 3 years. In practice, this paragraph resulted in a prohibition on leaving the place or district where persons were registered.

When in 1959 the registration of Roma took place, it meant they wrote us all down. The adults got stamps in their identity cards that we lived in Louny. That meant for us a ban on leaving the district. If we had left the Louny district it would have been viewed as if we had tried to escape to the West. Anyone who wanted to leave had to get special

41 ABS, 8. schôdza kolégia MV – 23.3.1959. A 2/1, k. 306.

42 F.e. Ludmila Lakatošová born 1943, Mária Lakatošová born 1951, Štefan Stojka born 1940, Štefánia Stojková born 1936, Silvestr Lakatoš born 1930, Pavel Stojka born 1936.

permission, a special paper. In time we got used to Louny, however, and we didn't want to leave. Even if we'd wanted to, we wouldn't have been able to. We had to stay.⁴³

Law No. 74/1958 and the subsequent strict registration of persons had an undoubted impact on the group of Vlach Roma under study, which was included in the category of itinerant persons. Since both kinship groups, in Žatec and Louny, were among the groups assessed by the local authorities as “the most backward” and “the most problematic” within the local Romani population, increased attention was paid to them. They thus found themselves under the microscope of the ‘Gypsy commissions’, established within National Committees, and police and other local and district National Committee organs devoted themselves to them in detail in various reports and announcements. The authorities concerned themselves in detail with the issue of these people moving, in part outside the district, and they also tried to prevent further Roma on the register from moving into the Louny district, above all the relatives of the two families described, who tried to join their family members.⁴⁴

Roma from caravans under the scrutiny of local authorities

Although the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons by local authorities was assessed, immediately on its completion, as having been successfully implemented, one of the things that had admittedly not been dealt with successfully was the finding of accommodation for itinerant persons.⁴⁵ For the state administration, the thorniest issue was the accommodation of the extended Stojka family, who continued to live in their caravans on their camp sites, that is in the old brickworks in Louny and in Ostrov, part of Žatec.

From the beginning, the authorities tried to move some of the Roma who lived in the yard of the old brickworks into the inside of the run-down building. In a report from April 1959 the ONV stated: “With the exception of three families who live together, the Gypsy families are now housed.”⁴⁶ The remaining three families will, according to the municipal National Committee in Louny, be housed within the month.”⁴⁷ However, the report also states that “the standard of housing of persons of Gypsy origin, especially the Stojkas, is not good enough, because it is hard to break in them their habit of nomadic life and to adapt them to normal life” (ibid). As we can see, the authorities raised a somewhat absurd criticism of the nomadic life, which the state apparatus itself had ended in 1958 by settling formerly itinerant families in the brickworks, in utterly substandard conditions, with no electricity or access to water, and on a site that was spatially excluded and entirely unsuitable for families with children. Although the authorities were responsible for deepening the social marginalisation of this family, they repeatedly and obliquely attacked the ‘old habits’

43 Stojka, M. ‘Berci’ (December 18, 2018), personal interview. The narrator Josef Kudrik has a very similar account.

44 This statement is based on my analysis of archival files of SoA Louny, mainly ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 331. and ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332.

45 In the evaluation of the list by the ONV we find a number of critical comments on failure to observe Law 74/1958 Sb., above all on the part of state enterprises who employed, without declaring them, people who had been put on the list in other districts. Some National Committees also deregistered these persons without further investigation, as did Slovak National Committees, which “do not abide at all by Law 74/58 Sb. and without previous agreement deregister them from permanent residence”. SOA Louny, ONV Louny II 332: Soupis kočujících osob k 1. 6. 1961 (June 6, 1961).

46 Accommodating refers to the moving of nuclear families into the building of the brickworks. As I show below, families did not last long in these miserable conditions.

47 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. Report for internal affairs department of KNV Ústí nad Labem, Kočující a polokočující osoby (April 15, 1959).

from the period of itinerancy, which in their view were the reason for the unsuccessful integration of the Stojka family into local society. Such an approach once again shows the official reports to be untrustworthy and biased sources.

Assimilatory efforts to “rid the Gypsies of their old habits” can be found in several reports. According to these reports, the “old habits” also included growing criminality among members of the family. “The old habits, traditions and morals are continually being strengthened, and this group, by staying together, is continually looking for various ways of making an easy living.”⁴⁸ It seems, however, clear that behind the increase in crime indicated lay once again the spatial and social exclusion of the group, above all the exclusion on the economic level thus caused. The families under study were prevented from carrying on their previous economic activities, which consisted of trading in horses or other products. The *Gypsy commissions* set up by the state repeatedly declared that they were attempting to find employment for the Vlach Roma. However, the manual positions offered in factories or on state farms did not reflect in any way the competences, skills or other preferences of these former horse traders. This is something that Berci draws attention to in his account: “Our Roma had formerly lived by horse trading; they didn’t know how to do any other work. However, my family had never stolen. When the ban on itinerancy came, the Roma suffered tremendously from hunger. They had no way of making money. There was nothing to eat. Roma were forced to steal food, to beg. The manual work that the Roma were given they didn’t know how to do, people fired them everywhere or didn’t even want to take them on. All they knew how to do was trade; they didn’t know how to do that sort of work. And what they wanted to do required an apprentice certificate.”⁴⁹

The statements by various parts of the state apparatus repeatedly stated that it had not proven possible to integrate the Vlach Roma into the working process, something that was blamed on their ‘poor working habits’, ‘avoidance of work’ and ‘frequent fluctuation’, although also on the fact that some enterprises refused to employ them.⁵⁰ Over the course of a few years, however, individual Roma gradually found jobs that suited them (in a meat processing plant, for example) and so in the reports from the early 1960s there is also in individual cases praise for their good working habits. The members of the *Komise pro občany cikánské národnosti* (Commission for Citizens of Gypsy Nationality) at the ONV in Louny, as well as other officials, attempted to re-educate Vlach Roma on several fronts. With this aim they made repeated visits to check up, following and describing in detail the behaviour of the Roma and the cleanliness of their abodes. In the minutes of this Commission here are descriptions of attempts to find accommodation and work for Roma, to place their children in school and to take control over their state of health. The minutes also show attempts to negotiate with the street committees that neighboured the old brickworks and to take over from them supervision of the families’ behaviour. In the case of one nuclear family that was cooperating best with the authorities, they declared an attempt to ensure for them, as a matter of priority, “a suitable flat and to isolate them from the others.”⁵¹ They also repeatedly tried to effect a change in the way that Romani women dressed.⁵²

48 SOA Louny, Okresní prokuratura Louny r. 1960–1965, Inv. č. 26, k. 5. Zápis schůze komise pro občany cikánské národnosti na ONV Louny (February 24, 1960).

49 Stojka, M. ‘Berci’ (December 18, 2018). Personal interview.

50 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 33. Zápis ze schůze odboru pracovních sil, zdravotnictví a sociálního zabezpečení ONV Louny (February 20, 1960).

51 Ibid. This attempt was not realised, and the family later found housing itself.

52 The report states that “this change would also improve the relationship of our people towards them”. Ibid. Minutes of a meeting of the Commission for Dealing with the Gypsy Question of the ONV (May 19, 1959).

From the official documentation it is also possible to detect concrete steps leading to the assimilation of Roma. There is an interesting moment in the minutes of the meeting of the *Gypsy Commission* of September 3, 1959, which state: "All members of the Commission agreed that as long as Anna Stojková influenced the family, the re-education of the whole family would be difficult." Anna Stojková was an authority for her whole family, and she was thus perceived as something of a brake on the assimilation efforts of the authorities. Soon the commission took advantage of her hospitalization to influence her sons,⁵³ above all on the question of health care and employment.

A key task of this planned re-education effort was to be the finding of suitable accommodation for the former itinerants. That no great change in the housing situation of these families occurred can be seen in the archive records of the ONV, MěNV and district prosecutor's office in further years. In January 1960 the members of the *Commission* undertook an inspection and survey of the "housing of Gypsies in the brickworks behind the barracks."⁵⁴ The detailed report of this inspection states that "it was found on site that all the families had moved out of the former brickworks back into caravans. Those families who did not possess caravans bought older ones. There are now a total of 7 caravans on the site at present, and they are all the property of the Stojkas." We learn from the report also that "after lengthy talks, electric lighting was obtained for these families, which has considerably improved the situation of the accommodated citizens of Gypsy origin."⁵⁵ The issue of drinking water had still not been resolved, and neither had any sanitary facilities been built.

In another report from February 1960 of the state of persons included on the register it is once again stated that five families, living at present in caravans, still need to be housed. The MěNV in Louny is criticized by KNV Ústí nad Labem for not paying sufficient care to the housing of these families, although the *Commission for Citizens of Gypsy Nationality* at the ONV in Louny was urging that they be housed. "In a year and a half, not a single case of placement of individual families among other citizens has been resolved so far. Old customs, traditions and morals are also constantly being strengthened. Not even the measures taken by the council of the ONV have yet met with a result. The district prosecutor has been informed of the situation."⁵⁶

The unsatisfactory housing situation of the Louny and Žatec Roma still living in caravans also appeared in subsequent years in reports on work among the Gypsy population on a regional and nationwide level.⁵⁷ The problem returns periodically to the agenda of the MěNV and ONV,⁵⁸ and is repeatedly dealt with by the prosecutor and by the KNV, but nothing changes in further years either.

However, on the local level the urgency of solving the entirely unsatisfactory housing situation gradually stops being mentioned in the reports of these district and local National

53 Ibid. Minutes of a meeting of the Commission for Citizens of Gypsy Nationality (February 24, 1960).

54 SOA Louny. Okresní prokuratura Louny, 1960–1965, I. no. 26, k. 5. Zápis ze schůze cikánské komise při radě ONV v Lounech (January 21, 1960).

55 Ibid.

56 SOA Louny ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332, Zpráva o stavu evidence osob vzatých do soupisu podle zák. 74/1958 (February 24, 1960).

57 Fe.e. At the 177th meeting of the political bureau of the UV KSČ it is stated that "Those Gypsies who used to wander in caravans may today no longer be itinerant, but in many cases they are still living in their caravans: Nový Jičín, Přerov, Opava, Karviná město, Olomouc, Hořovice, Zdice, Žatec, Louny, in Pečky they are living in railway carriages although the relevant authorities have already been criticised many times, including by non-state organs." NA, SČ-KSČ Ústřední výbor KSČ 1945–1989 Praha, oddělení ideologické, zn. KSČ UV – 05/3, sv. 10, arch. j. 57, str. 147, Plnění usnesení UV KSČ o práci mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem (December 19, 1961).

58 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332.

Committees. The MěNV Louny repeatedly argued that it could not house the families of Vlach Roma because of a lack of available flats. However, from the report of the committee of the district prosecutor's office we know that at the same time, the MěNV had allotted other (i.e. non-Vlach) Roma "four flats already...and yet not a single case from the Stojkas has been dealt with."⁵⁹

The situation of the second Stojka family in Žatec by the river Ohře was quite similar. In the *Report on the current state among citizens of Gypsy origin in Žatec* (July 1962) it is mentioned that four families with 24 members live in caravans by the river, and that the MěNV Žatec has repeatedly tried to move them, but that according to the committee there was no housing free in Žatec.⁶⁰ For this reason, several attempts had been made to move the Roma to surrounding municipalities. One of these was a plan from June 1962 to move these families (by that time altogether 33 persons) into unoccupied houses in Kryry and Blatná, where they were supposed to undertake to work on a state farm.⁶¹ In 1963 two nuclear families had been moved to a house in the centre of Žatec. The other part of the family, consisting of more than twenty Vlach Roma, was still living in caravans in Žatec in 1966,⁶² though.

The Stojka family itself ended up solving the problem of its substandard accommodation in the old brickworks, probably at the start of 1963.⁶³ Several nuclear families of Anna Stojková's children got together and jointly bought a house with a large yard near the train station in Louny. Part of the family lived inside the house while two nuclear families brought their caravans to the house's yard and continued to live in them there. They did not stay long at this address, however. The catalyst to move out of Louny for the whole family was the death of Anna Stojková in June 1963.⁶⁴ After her death, individual members of the family started to make efforts to be taken off the register (see below) and to find work and accommodation outside Louny.

Removal from the register of itinerant persons

Persons put on the register in February 1959 were then kept in a special register at the National Committee. However, they were allowed to apply to be taken off the register, which meant that the measures ensuing from Law No. 74/1958 Coll. would cease to apply to them, and they were also able to move without permission. Many of them made use of this possibility, but the application was not always approved: statements by the heads of state enterprises, ONV and in some cases further parties were taken into account (see also Zapletal, 2012: 58). ONV Louny in maintaining its register of persons continued to

59 SOA Louny, Okresní prokuratura Louny r. 1960–1965, Inv. č. 26, Pd 460, k. 5. Zápis schůze komise pro občany cikánské národnosti na ONV Louny (February 24, 1960).

60 Ibid. Report with the same title from MěNV Žatec for ONV Louny (July 9, 1962).

61 SOA Louny, MNV Žatec, Aktiv pro řešení cikánské otázky. Dosídlené domky v Kryrech a Blatně obcí. cik. původu (June 5, 1962).

62 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 332. MěNV Žatec: Soupis osob tzv. cikánského původu a příbuzných rodin k 30. 4. 1966.

63 In the official evidence of persons put on the list, above all on the sheets of the list relating to the Stojka family, the original address of the brickworks is in several places crossed out and a new address added in pencil, but nowhere is a date given for the change of address. At a meeting of the "Gypsy commission" under the council of the ONV in Louny, of January 31, 1963 there is a statement that the municipal national committees in Louny and Žatec "had as yet not found accommodation for the Gypsies from caravans" (SOA Louny, Okresní prokuratura Louny 1960–1965 k. 28). However, this move by the Stojka family took place before June 1963, when Anna Stojková died at this address.

64 Stojka, M. 'Berci' (December 18, 2018), personal interview.

distinguish thoroughly between travelling people and persons of *Gypsy origin*: as mentioned above, the abbreviations *fair.* and *gyp.* appear continuously in personal files. Based on the data in the relevant archives I conclude that officials also approached the two groups differently in the question of removal from the register. Applications by *fairground people* to be taken off seem to have been, overall, approved more easily in terms of process than in the case of Romani applicants.

The following table shows the development of the register of persons put on the register in the (original) district of Louny in 1959,⁶⁵ 1960⁶⁶ and 1963.⁶⁷

Table 1

Date of registration	Number of <i>Gypsies</i>	Number of <i>světští/fairgrounds</i>
3 – 6 February 1959 (register)	79	113
25. 2. 1960	76	98
20. 5. 1963	94	50

It shows that while the number of *Gypsies* put on the register in the former district of Louny between 1959 and 1963 grew by almost a quarter (mostly natural growth), the number of *fairground people* during the same period fell by over a half.

As of February 1962 zero *Gypsies* and 38 *fairground people* had been taken off the register.⁶⁸ Of these, in the town of Louny from spring 1962 the only *Gypsies* who stayed on the register were from the Stojka family (as of May 20, 1963 there were 30 people). People put on the register could, of course, also stop being registered because they had moved to another district. For this, however, there had to be approval from the department of internal affairs of the ONV – and, as the documentation shows, this department always refused to grant permission for Romani families to move, with the exception of one case where a son was moving to his parents. The precise number of *fairground people* to whom permission was, on the contrary, granted, is not clear from the documentation, but it may nevertheless explain the major fall-off in the number of *fairground people* on the register.

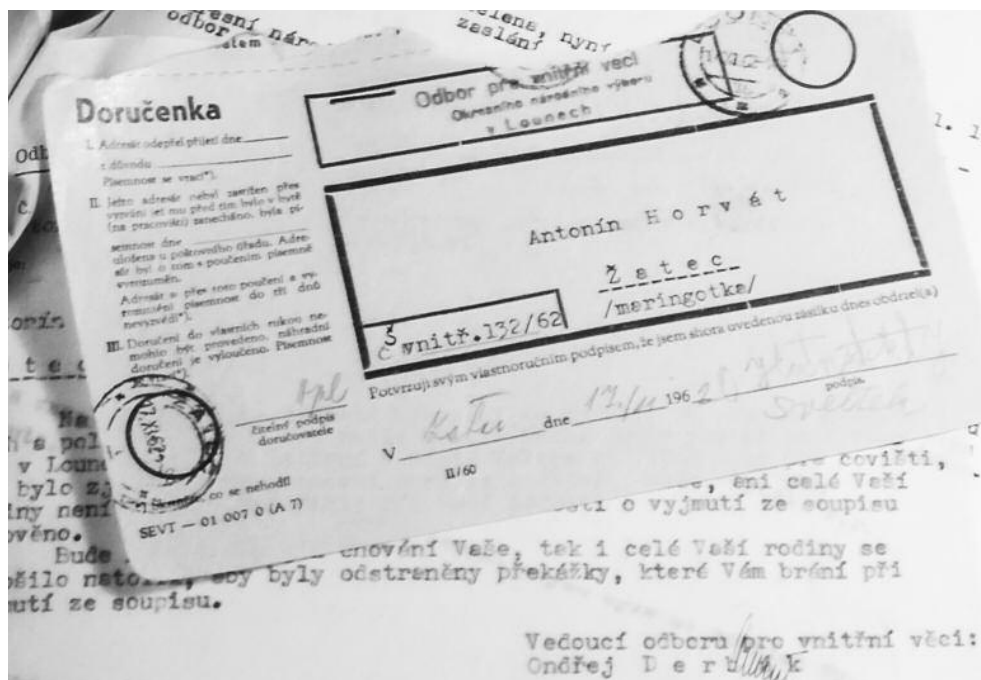
Until 1964 the ONV Louny did not allow the Vlach Roma to be taken off the register. Of the 33 members of the Stojka family to be found on the register, 25 were taken off it between April and August 1964, with the reason being that they were able to secure affordable housing and work in Louny. During that time, however, the fathers of the families were already looking for work outside the district. The authorities were aware of this, but the fact was not included in the argumentation when their possible removal was being assessed.

65 SOA Louny: ONV II Louny Vnitř 608 k. 332. Provádění soupisu osob kočujících a polokočujících (February 10, 1959).

66 Ibid. Zpráva o stavu evidence osob vzatých do soupisu podle zák. 74/1958 Sb. (February 24, 1960).

67 Ibid. Overview of state of evidence of persons put on the list according to Law 74/1958 Coll. as of May 20, 1963. Only communities in the former district of Louny are included.

68 Ibid. Stav soupisu kočujících a polokočujících osob podle zákona č. 74/1958 Sb. v evidenci ONV (February 23, 1962).



Pic. 5: Postal delivery note – a rejection of a request for removal from the register of travelling and semi-travelling people from Autumn 1962. The address is specified just as: the caravan, Žatec (SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 331).

Four people were given permission to be taken off the register as late as 1968. The last family (that of Anna Stojková's daughter) still on the register had given the old brickworks as its official address until January 1969, when it was finally taken off the register.

The situation in Žatec was similar. Of the 25 Vlach Roma for whom we have available the date on which they were taken off the register, three were taken off in 1963, a further eight in 1964 and 14 not until 1966.⁶⁹

The first of the Vlach Roma in Žatec to be taken off was the family of Juraj Horvát, who at that time had already been working for five years in the Konstruktiva national enterprise. The company stated he was a good worker with good working habits, living an upright life, and recommended that his application be approved. His three-member family was the first to move into a flat in the centre of the town. However, the family of his brother, Antonín Horvát, had its application to be taken off the register refused several times, because the family was “not yet sufficiently re-educated to meet all the conditions to be taken off. There is even a danger that after being taken off, it would return to an itinerant way of life.”⁷⁰ (Pic. 5)

Living in caravans was a major factor preventing people from being taken off the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons. Most Vlach Roma were taken off the register only once they moved into a normal building. Soon after being taken off the register, however, the great majority of them left their place of residence and started to look for work and accommodation outside the districts that had been allotted to them from above at the time

69 SOA Louny, ONV Louny II Vnitř 608 k. 331.

70 Ibid: rejection of October 2, 1963.

of the register. This paradoxically took the temporary form of a return to caravans, where they lived until they could find the sort of housing they were looking for.

Adult Roma started to work on land melioration and digging work, and then gradually moved to Odolená Voda, Valdice and other places, finally reaching Prague in the late 1960s. There, according to Berci, they bought a house in Hostivař for which the whole family took out a loan together. He remembers that at the time of the land melioration works they were still living in caravans, which they had towed to the place of work by tractors. They had three caravans taken to the new house in Hostivař, he remembers, but as soon as the house was ready to move into, they sold them.

CONCLUSIONS

In this micro-historical study I have shown that Law No. 74/1958 Coll. and the subsequent register of travelling and semi-travelling persons had an undoubted impact on the Vlach Roma group under study. I have followed the stories of two related families, whom the authorities ordered to settle in the period preceding the register. This meant that the measures ensuing from the Law continued from the practice of local authorities that was already underway. Both families were put on the register of travelling and semi-travelling persons, and for a period lasting individually from 5 to 10 years were forced to stay in Louny or Žatec. During this period, they were completely limited in their spatial mobility, and faced various assimilation tools and measures. There was also an intervention in their property, when their horses were taken from them without compensation. As I have shown, the under-reporting of numbers of horses taken away during the register also opens up the question of the possible defraudation or destruction of the property of itinerant people by the state authorities.

Even though the state authorities, before the implementation of the itinerancy ban, had aimed to raise the social mobility of the 'backward' and 'low-ranking travelling *Gypsies*', on the example of Louny and Žatec we can see that the social position of the Vlach Roma in the years that followed their forced sedentarization became even worse. The records of the National Committees or prosecutor's office repeatedly referred to their anti-social behaviour, unwillingness to cooperate and increasing criminal activity. The main culprit of this situation, however, was the policy of the communist state, implemented by biased local officials who prevented not only the spatial mobility of the Vlach Roma, but also an improvement in their social situation.

Against the background of the approach of the authorities thus described, the agency of the families of Vlach Roma themselves shines through. They managed to a considerable extent to resist the assimilation attempts. At the brickworks they preferred to carry on living in their own caravans rather than in the bare interior of the building into which the authorities tried to force them. They managed to deal with the lack of water by making friends with their neighbours and even with the soldiers from the barracks who brought them food. Four years after the register, the Roma gave up on the lax approach of the authorities in the field of housing policy and took matters into their own hands by buying a house and before that finding employment. Both these things helped them to be taken off the register, since they formally fulfilled the criteria of suitable accommodation and work. Immediately after being taken off, they found other employment in land improvement works, with an itinerant place of work. This activity allowed them to get away from Louny (and Žatec) and to live without endless checks from the authorities. They continued to use

their caravan to live in for several years, until they were able to take out a loan for their own house and to find work in keeping with their own ideas in Prague. The problem with *uncooperative itinerant Gypsies* that the towns of Louny and Žatec had created during their repressive approach was thus solved by those whom it affected.

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