

Cinematic Representation of the Roma's Social Position and Mobility: A Comparative Analysis of Two Czech and Slovak Feature Films

DANIEL ŠKOBLA



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Daniel Škobla, Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 813 64, Bratislava, Slovak Republic; e-mail: daniel.skobla@savba.sk

The focus of this article is on two Czech and Slovak films, *My Friend Fabián* (Můj přítel Fabián, 1955) and *Gypsy* (Cigán, 2011). While the former emerged in the 1950s, in the period of socialist industrialisation, the latter was released in the period of post-socialist consolidation of capitalism. Theoretically this article relies on a mix of approaches from film studies, social anthropology, post-colonial studies and archival research. The central research question is how cinematic representation of Roma were approached in the past and how they have changed over time. The film *My Friend Fabián* is replete with colonial tropes of uninhibited dancing, singing and exotica stereotypes and depicts imaginary Roma as incompetent individuals who are subject to the paternalistic care of the White socialist functionaries. At the same time this film presents a viable model for Roma integration and social advancement via education and full-fledged integration into the working class. In contrast, the film *Gypsy* is much more respectful towards Roma, contemporary performers and characters are real Roma and their film destinies are realistic. But the world that surrounds film characters is the world of total racial exclusion, which offers no hope and no prospects whatsoever for Roma and their social advance.

Key words: cinema/film, Roma/Gypsy, post-colonialism, socialist industrialisation, inclusion/exclusion, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia

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INTRODUCTION

This article is a comparative study of two films, *My Friend Fabián* (Můj přítel Fabián, directed by Jiří Weiss, 1953) and *Gypsy* (Cigán, directed by Martin Šulík, 2011), which are brought together by the shared subject matter of the life of the Roma in modern Czech and Slovak society. In other ways, however, including the periods when they appeared, they are

radically distinct works.¹ The production of the former coincides with a time of ideological and economical ferment during the early phases of socialism in Czechoslovakia; the latter was released in the period of structural solidification of neoliberal capitalism. In the following text, I attempt to analyse how cinematic representation of Roma² and ideas about their integration and place in society were approached in the past and how they have changed over time.

My central assumption is that cinematographic works can serve to uncover a period's ideas about the social order, hierarchies, and how social integration and social advancement of minorities are conceptualised. I see the motion picture as an idealised reflection of social reality which functions in a certain framework, in which symbols and meanings are arranged in such a way that they are the bearers of a certain set of beliefs. Films thus are carriers of the social imaginary as a condensed network of collectively shared significations, which can tell us about the ways in which dominant society conceptualises minorities. Therefore, it is important to understand that coded film representations of Roma often reflect the structures and hierarchies in society at large.

There are several reasons for subjecting these two films to a critical analysis. Both are rather remarkable pieces in their own right: *My Friend Fabián* represents the possibilities of social advancement that socialist industrialisation in Czechoslovakia offered to the Roma, while *Gypsy* portrays the various life situations which the protagonist experiences under the restored capitalism and bourgeois democracy in the post-socialist Slovak Republic.

Theoretically and methodologically this article relies on a mix of approaches from film studies, social anthropology, post-colonial studies and archival research. The interdisciplinarity of this approach is important, since films cannot be analysed as singular acontextual fragments. Films do not emerge in an ideological vacuum; they are produced within a social, political and economic setting that informs the film authors and spectators.

Important point of departure for analysis is the discourse on coloniality and post-coloniality. As Herza (2020) convincingly argues, in the Czech and Slovak context there is a substantial lack of theoretical insight and the discussions on post-coloniality due to the phenomenon of Czechoslovak 'colonial exceptionalism' based on the conviction that the Czech and Slovaks never been colonial masters. In Czechoslovakia and in other presumably non-colonial countries of Eastern Europe, race remained an under-explored attribute of the ideological universe and it was not seriously deployed as an analytical category. According to Herza, this was so despite the fact that colonialism and racism laid the foundation for the projects of modernity also in Eastern European countries, which developed specific colonial cultures without colonies. From the historiographic perspective, these countries played an active integral part in various colonial enterprises, such as 'discovery expeditions' trading with the Orient etc. In addition to Herza's insightful account of Czechoslovak colonialism I would like to underline the role that colonial racism played internally in the Czech and Slovak societies in the treatment of their own ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma population. Thus, without employing the concepts and categories of colonial and post-colonial studies, we cannot fully understand the historical and contemporary situation of the Roma. Without using race as an analytical category or as a category of difference, which helps us to conceptualise the distribution of power between differently racialised actors (Herza, 2020), a researcher inevitably may slip into a superficial exoticisation of the Roma. This exoticisation,

1 *My Friend Fabián* premiered on 7 January 1955, while *Gypsy* premiered on 7 July 2011.

2 Throughout the text I use the term *Gypsy* only in relation to the title of the films or period, as this is derogatory terminology. Otherwise I use the ethnonym *Roma*.

as I argue elsewhere, is a form of anthropological escapism, which means that we are focusing on phenomena visible on the surface instead of dissecting economic and political configurations and power hierarchies (Šotola, Rodríguez Polo, Škobla, 2018). In this context I was guided by key works of post-colonial theory, examining the manner in which western cultures investigate other cultures (Spivak, 1988). Of the utmost importance for me was the literature on post-colonialism influenced by Marxism, which draws on political-economy approaches to explore how dominant groups came to exercise the power and authority over less powerful and subjugated groups (Blunt and Wills, 2000). Herza's article (2020) in particular inspired me to introduced a radically different framework for exploring the situation and cinematic representations of the Roma in the Czech and Slovak societies.

This text also pays attention to a strain in contemporary critical thinking about ethnicity, namely the category of Whiteness. While in the past it was regarded as a neutral point in relation to other racial identities, White can also be conceptualised as a racial category. Whiteness studies have prompted a reinvestigation of many cultural phenomena, including key elements of film stylistics. In the text *White*, Dyer (1997) uncovers hierarchical racial politics in the stylistic elements of films we see on screen. Thus, it is important to understand how Whites are described in films and what the meaning of this description is.

Although scientific studies thematising the Roma in the Czechoslovak cinematic context are rare, some useful sources of information are Bernard and Lužica's study (Bernard, 2012; Lužica, 2012) and the inventory of Roma-themed films by Dvorská (2008), as well as Mojžišová's article (2014). The publications by Ferenčuhová (2012) and Palúch (2015), although they were not primarily focused on the representation of Roma or films about Roma, were also informative.

This study is also based on my insights and findings from my long-term research on the social exclusion of Roma in Slovakia, the results of which were published elsewhere (Škobla and Filčák, 2016; Škobla, Grill, Hurrle, 2016; Filčák, Szilvasi, Škobla, 2018).³ The archival data on policies regarding the Roma question which I utilise in this study was compiled by Jurová (2008). However, I also made use of some archival data which I collected myself, while I was researching the housing and working conditions of the Roma in the socialist period. Naturally my main focus is the films, which I watched repeatedly and closely in order to analyse visual codes and dialogues.⁴

MY FRIEND FABIÁN

Since every view and every speech act must come from somewhere, in relation to film it is important to delineate the position of writers and directors. As the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard reminds us: "in every image, we must ask who speaks" (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003: 23). The positions and positionality of the authors may influence some aspects of the film, such as the cinematic representation of the imaginary Roma or the way in which visual symbols are unwound to support a plot. With regard to the creative personalities behind the film, the director Jiří Weiss and the screenwriter Ludvík Aškenazy had unique personal experiences and destinies that shaped their life and professional trajectories. Both Weiss

3 In the context of this article I am deeply grateful to Mario Rodríguez Polo for inspiration, discussions and his help to formulate ideas into words.

4 My Friend Fabián is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ4ClYROpKs&ab_channel=MDDunka. Film *Gypsy*, I watched on the DVD released by Bontonfilm.

and Aškenazy had radical left-wing views and, due to this, sensitively perceived the racial persecutions of the 1930s and the 1940s. This specific sensitivity and awareness of the Holocaust was also echoed in the profile of the main characters in *My Friend Fabián*. The main protagonist Roma Fabián and the White foreman Trojan are both concentration camp survivors. This alliance also served as a symbolic link that connected communists and persecuted ethnic minorities such as Jews and Gypsies in the postwar period.⁵

The writer Aškenazy was born into a Czech-Jewish family in Český Těšín in 1921. During the Second World War he entered the Czechoslovak military battalion, formed under the Red Army by General Svoboda, and fought with him at Sokolov, receiving Soviet and Czech awards for bravery. He worked as a reporter and foreign political commentator at Czechoslovak Radio Prague; he published in culturally-oriented journals and as a foreign reporter he travelled widely. At the end of the 1950s, he became a professional writer, creating prose and poetry, reportage, radio and theatre play. In 1968, after the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops, Aškenazy emigrated to West Germany and died in Bolzano, Italy (ČSFDa).

The director Weiss was born in 1913 in Prague into a wealthy industrialist Jewish family. Since his youth Weiss had been a communist, which created conflicts with his capitalist parents. He befriended many leftists and communist intellectuals, including the director, screenwriter and writer Vladislav Vančura (ČSFDb). Due to his Jewish background Weiss experienced anti-Semitic persecutions after Munich and in 1939 he managed to flee through Germany to England. After returning to post-war Czechoslovakia he became head of one of the creative groups of the socialised Czechoslovak State Film. After the 1968 invasion, he resorted to the second emigration, first in West Berlin and then in the United States (ČSFDb).

The film *My Friend Fabián*, according to official production notes, “tells the story of the Gypsy Fabián and his son, who came to work in Kunčice. On the great building of socialism, their lives change fundamentally. The film shows how socialist society gives Gypsies full equality and is filled with a deep love for man.” (ČSFDc). The title character, Fabián, is one of the Roma who survived internment in concentration camps and in the early 1950s came to work in Kunčice, a part of the city of Ostrava, in the Moravian-Silesian Region. During this period, for the first time the Roma were participating in the general labour force on a mass scale. The Kunčice Iron Works, ‘the great construction of socialism’, was supposed to change the life of Roma Fabián from the bottom up and advance him socially, and as part of this process Fabián and his teenage son learn to read and write. While Fabián becomes a skilled welder, his son (Fabiánek) is accepted into a pioneer organisation. As the film attempts to show, it is a long and winding road, and is not free of some failures and disappointments. Many of Fabián’s co-workers, including the administrators at the Iron Works, have not yet overcome racial prejudices. At the end of the film, however, the dividing line between the backward Roma worker and the conscious socialist worker has been overcome since, as the film indicates, socialism provides the Roma with an authentic platform for social advancement and achievement of equality.

On the Roma and industrialisation

The story of Fabián is firmly anchored in the setting of the extensive industrial development of Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s and the 1950s. It might have been in this period that, for the first time, the Roma were participating in the industrial development on a mass scale

⁵ It is never explicitly indicated in the film that the character of Trojan is a Communist Party member, but from the context, and from the fact that he was interned during the war, we can infer this link.

(Jurová, 2008).⁶ Given the extensive need for the labour force, architects of industrialisation were interested in those (small number of) Roma who survived internment in camps in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as the greater numbers of Roma living in Slovakia. The mass migration of impoverished Roma and their families from rural settlements of Slovakia to the Czech lands started in 1946. Slovak Roma were settled mainly in the industrial hubs in the north of Moravia and Bohemia, in towns and the rural areas, from which the Sudeten Germans had been expelled (see e.g. Guy, 1998; Jurová, 2008).

Official documents from the post-war 1940s hold that the Roma had proven to be a good workforce under properly strict supervision. They could be used in labour groups under the supervision of the Local National Committee (*Místní národní výbor*) and the National Security Corps (*Sbor národní bezpečnosti*) wherever there was a shortage of manpower (Jurová, 2010: 6). The inclusion of the Roma in the labour process by somewhat authoritative methods became the main pillar of the background of designing the policies towards them in this period. The Roma were to be included in labour in regions with the need for agricultural labourers, at brickyards and quarries where there was a need for surface mining, or in construction work to remove war debris from large cities such as Prague, Brno, Pilsen, Kralupy nad Vltavou, etc. (Jurová, 2010: 7).⁷

The early 1950s, which are both the moment of production and the setting for *My Friend Fabián*,⁸ might be viewed as a time of transition from repressive methods of integrating the Roma to the fundamentally less coercive forms of assimilation policies (Jurová, 2008) and the moderate approach of integrating the Roma through inclusion in the process of industrialisation. According to Jurová, the 1950s, with its inconsistencies and contradictions, represents a temporary, experimental period of resolving the Roma social problems. It was an era of constant searching for policies in order to find the best and most efficient ways to integrate Roma from the perspective of socialism. In general, the state representatives accepted that the issue of Roma integration and social advancement was to be solved via labour migration into big constructions of socialism, mostly in the Czech lands. The Roma labour migration was supposed to supply manpower, but at the same time it was supposed to be an integration vehicle for the poverty-stricken and backward Gypsies. Roma migration to cities and the configuration of ethnic enclaves occurred at the same time as a duality in the development of certain disadvantaged rural areas and the growing cities. This might be a crucial factor when it comes to understanding the phenomenon of Roma urban ghettos and rural settlements, which are still present in both countries.⁹

6 The background context for this inclusion was the Constitution of May 9, 1948, formally equalising Roma with the non-Roma population. Head 1 par. 1 states that: "All citizens are equal before the law"; in par. 16: "Everyone has the right to profess privately or publicly any religion or to be without religion"; and in par. 37: "In particular, it is forbidden to spread Nazism and fascism, racial and religious intolerance and national chauvinism in any way and in any form" (Constitution).

7 Jurová, however, also emphasises the coercive aspect of work integration in the 1940s and early 1950s, specifically that the placement of Roma in work was still subject to the regulations of Act No. 117/1927 Coll. on the Wandering Gypsies and the Government No. 68/1928 Coll. to implement said Act, as well as Presidential Decree No. 88/1945 Coll. on general employment duties. Within this legislative scope, the still itinerant Roma were subject to legal records, equipped with Gypsy ID cards, special health regulations and, finally, specific procedures in relation to Roma children and the possibilities of their removal from their parents' upbringing.

8 It might be of some significance that, according to the production data, film shooting was finished in 1953, but it premiered almost 2 years later on 7 January 1955.

9 The labour migration, however, was viewed by officials with mixed feelings. On the one hand, labour migration from Slovakia to the Czech lands was acknowledged as an inevitable reality in the socialist era (Rada MsNV Levoča, 1979). On the other hand, there were also fears that a concentration of Roma in towns would perpetuate

On Romani backwardness

The film mirrors the social world, in which the Roma were historically constructed as a socially backward group. In fact, the character of Fabián, who often acts in an infantile way during the film, is represented more as a caricature than a real person of flesh and bone. To make it explicit for the film spectator how backward Fabián is (meaning how backward the Gypsies are as a group), Aškenazy and Weiss inserted a scene which leaves no room for ambivalence in describing Romani civilisational incompetence, when Trojan, on a construction site, warns Fabián, who is attempting to mend an electric generator, not to touch the machine.

Trojan: "Watch out! There is electricity in that!"

Fabián: "What is electricity?"

Trojan: "How should I explain to you – electricity it is great power. Today it gives a light in electrode and tomorrow it will fly you to the stars!"

[Trojan: „Pozor, je v tom elektřina.“

Fabián: „A co je to elektřina?“

Trojan: „Jak bych ti to řekl – elektřina, to je velká síla. Dnes nám svítí v elektrodě a zítra s ní poletíš ke hvězdám.“].

Upon watching this scene, a spectator should ask how it is possible that Fabián had not noticed electricity before in his life. This story reveals more about the colonial attitudes of the dominant population in Czechoslovakia (Blunt and Wills, 2000) towards the Roma and less about the Roma themselves, or only about their oppression. It also tells of the deep ignorance of Whites when it comes to the Roma and negates the fact that they have been coexisting in the same societies for hundreds of years. Roma backwardness is also pointed to in a more abstract or evolutionist way, showing that they did not follow the path of progress and civilisation as successfully as Whites did.

My Friend Fabián is loaded with Roma stereotypes and tropes on their irresponsibility, preference of immediate benefits over long-term gains, and their proclivity to sing – rather than speak – and to dance and drink. They also have a proclivity to deceive and bluff the Whites. Official documents from the 1950s frequently referred to the Gypsy way of life as a mixture of undesirable remnants of previous social orders, including such elements as nomadism, tribalism, and animism (Guy, 1998). According to this perspective, which is also reproduced in the Czech and Slovak scientific productions, the Roma as an ethnic group have a different, pre-modern value system, as well as different customs and institutions as a majority (Radičová, 2002: 79; Jakoubek and Hirt, 2008: 694; Džambazovič and Jurásková, 2002). Other 'typical' traits attributed to Roma are distrust of state institutions, life strategies focused only on the present, depositing items with pawnbrokers as security for moneylending at high interest rates, a tendency for (and high tolerance of) social pathologies, early sexual experience, and high birth rates. This imaginary value system is then considered to be the cause of Roma's incongruity with modern society leading them to exclusion and poverty (Škobla, 2011). But this characterisation of the Roma as a backward and incongruous group serves its own function in the society and in the film. By projecting less desired characteristics onto Gypsies, the ethnic Czechs and Slovaks could

the backward Gypsy way of life. It was not expected that Slovak Roma would permanently settle in Bohemia. In the document of the normalisation period (the 1970s), vicissitudes of the 1950s are depicted as "the period when our society begins to deal with the Gypsy question in a fundamental way, albeit not systematically, and it is becoming increasingly clear that it is a serious societal problem." (Kára et al., 1976: 112).

be juxtaposed as genuine and progressive builders of socialism. Even more importantly, the imaginary of Roma cultural backwardness functions as a 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1984) and an automatic justification of the prejudices against them.

On the exoticisation of the Roma

The exoticisation of the Roma in *My Friend Fabián* works as a particular kind of emotional experience. Scenes of celebration in the pub and uninhibited dancing and singing essentialise the notion of freedom, which is encoded as an irrational part of Gypsy nature, and is ascribed to the genetic make-up of Gypsies. These and similar scenes with colonial tropes of uninhibited dancing, singing and exotica, in which Roma are physically expressing themselves (Bonsu, 2009), are juxtaposed with the discipline and norms of the White workers, which are necessary for successful socialism building. At the same time, they enable the emotional discharge of suppressed desires, and a temporary release from oppressive norms, thus effectively bringing about psychological stability to the mundane socialism narrative told by the White, politically engaged artists.

It must be noted that the Roma character Fabián is played by a non-Roma Slovak actor, Otto Lackovič, and his young son Fabiánek by the Czech-Jewish actor Dušan Klein. The imaginary Romani physiognomy of both Fabiáns was, in the film, depicted via the dark facial make-up of the actors. This treatment of ethnic characteristics reminds us of the theatrical practice called 'blackface' as a form of theatrical make-up used predominantly by non-black performers to represent a caricature of a black person. In the United States this practice gained popularity from the middle of the 19th century, and so-called minstrel shows had become a distinctive American artform, contributing to the spread of racial stereotypes in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century (Frankenberg, 1997). Lackovič's dark make-up can also be taken as an instance corroborating Dyer's theory that the cinematic practice of taking White faces as the norm is a result of a heightened luminescence that prompts the spectator to endow them with heightened moral status relative to other races (1997).

On paternalism

The negative side of the opportunity for social integration offered to the Roma in the film is that they are not seen as equals but as having the option to become equals through their effort and acceptance of dominance. This type of social integration, in many of its aspects, could be considered paternalistic and colonial. The idealised character of the foreman Trojan (Ladislav Chudík) is an unselfish and compassionate person who approaches the Roma with empathy. He immediately recognises in Fabián a promising socialist worker and believes that the certain 'infirmity' in his performance and attitudes (indeed, Fabián embodies a member of a 'problematic' ethnic group) can be overcome by smooth-talk, empathy and recognition. However, Trojan's behaviour is extremely paternalistic and, as I explain later, not entirely sincere. Engineer Krása, the Iron Works construction manager is, on the other hand, an official who has not yet rid himself of racial prejudice. Krása is among those who do not hesitate to openly condemn the Roma as a group, or express scepticism about Fabián's working morale, his honesty, and truthfulness. In contrast, his wife, a teacher Vlasta, is a sensitive and empathetic person who treats adult Roma and Roma children with understanding, albeit rather paternalistically, and teaches them literacy and how to appreciate education in general. On her mission, however, she is not firm in her persuasion, and sometimes expresses her doubts about the Roma.

An important line in the plot serves to prove the connection between communists and persecuted ethnic minorities. It works with the social imaginary of the Holocaust and

concentration camps. In one scene from the beginning of the film, Fabián somewhat mistrustfully asks foreman Trojan: "Why do you take care about Gypsies?" [„Proč se staráte o Cikány?“]. Trojan hesitantly replies: "I don't know...": [„A co já vím...?“] A close-up camera shot then reveals the identification numbers tattooed on Trojan's and Fabián's forearms, as was practiced in concentration camps. Trojan decidedly declares: "Perhaps for this, so it never happens again!" [„Třeba proto, aby to už nikdy nebylo!“]

The Holocaust, as the connecting line between communists and Roma, is made even more explicit later on in the film. While furnishing Fabián's apartment, Trojan is closely examining a framed picture that is to be hung on the wall, portraying Fabián, an unknown young woman, and two children.

Trojan: "Is that your wife? You never talked about her... and... is it Gejza?"

Fabián: "No, this is his older brother, he went to the gas in Auschwitz, with his mother. Now we're alone, Gejza and me."

Trojan then reassuringly tapping Fabián's shoulder, says: "Perhaps not quite so alone."

[Trojan: „To je Tvoje žena? Nikdy si o ní nemluvil... a ... to je Gejza?“]

Fabián: „Ne, to je jeho starší bratr, šel do plynu v Osvětimi, i s maminkou. Teď jsme sami, Gejza a já.“

Trojan povzbudzujúco potľapká Fabiána po pleci a hovorí: „Tak docela sami snad ne.“]

The allocation of an apartment for Fabián, and its furnishings represent a significant motif in the story. The question of accommodation arose as an urgent condition, and one of the crucial problems in relation to the issue of successful integration of the Roma into productive roles in the process of industrialisation. In the idealised world of *My Friend Fabián*, the main protagonist, soon after starting his job at the Iron Works in Kunčice, moves with his son into the old town apartment that was provided for them, at the intervention of Trojan. It was clear in the 1950s for Trojan, and for all functionaries, that standard housing was a necessary prerequisite for all in order to live, work, and study normally. Trojan puts it in the following way:

"Here we got something for Fabián that you can live in humanly, at least for now. If Fabián lives better, he will work better."

[„Tady sme pro Fabiána získali něco, v čem se dá lidsky bydlet, aspoň prozatím. Když bude Fabián líp bydlet, bude líp pracovat.“]

There is a clear assumption that the previous housing for Fabián was worse and that the apartment also means a rupture for Fabián with his past. Archive period documents have made it known to us, however, that in reality the situation on 'great' construction sites of socialism was much more dismal. Plans for the development of an extensive economy with a high need of manpower, and associated with the transfer of Roma from eastern Slovakia, were often pursued without securing adequate accommodation (Petráš, 2009), which was generally a weak element in the concept of integration into the labour force. A team of journalists completing two weeks of voluntary work at Vítkovice Iron and Steel Works, during the summer of 1950, noticed the bad living conditions of the Roma. They wrote to the Minister of Labour, stating: "The Gypsies complain very bitterly about their accommodation conditions, especially since they can't even wash after work" (List novinářův, cited in Jurová, 2008). Since the Whites were not complaining, there was clearly an inequality in the relations, and this certainly points to a somehow idealised integration in the past.

In the idealised world of *My Friend Fabián*, Roma workers in Kunčice attend school in the evenings and work hard during the day. Fabián's son is invited on a trip by the pioneers and becomes a member of the organisation. However, there are unfortunate events that pull Fabián back. When he is unjustly accused of breaking an electric generator, Fabián loses his faith in people, gets drunk, leaves work, and pours out all his pain and disappointment in front of empty school desks. But Trojan, as a conscious and learned socialist, knows that it is not an individual who is to blame, but rather the underlying conditions, unfortunate circumstances and insufficient personal work with Roma. He clearly articulates his views in a conversation with a teacher, Vlasta, who tends to blame Fabián:

Trojan: "I have the impression that our staff policy has not worked out for us."

Vlasta: "In short, Fabián didn't do well for us."

Trojan: "And that's it! It's called by many names, but these are skills to deal with people, and every one of us, comrade, should master this, from minister to welder."

[Trojan: „Já mám takový dojem, že se nám naše kádrová politika nevyvedla.“

Vlasta: „Zkrátka nevyvedl se nám Fabián.“

Trojan: „A to je to! Ono se tomu říká všelijak, ale je to umění zacházet s lidmi, a měl by to vědět každý z nás, soudružno, od ministra po svářeče.“].

In *My Friend Fabián*, it is the collective that is interested in Roma individually and in the Roma as a group. Vlasta understands the irreplaceable role of the collective and disagrees with the condemnatory remarks of the senior foreman Tereba, who sees attempts to transform Roma into honest workers as naïve idealism:

Tereba: "I've been working on the construction site for 30 years and I'll tell you something, it is romanticism, I know."

Vlasta: "In contrast, I think they will be what we make of them."

Tereba: "Come on, you got that from the newspapers."

[Tereba: „Já už dělám na stavbě 30 let a řeknu Vám jedno, to je romantika to já znám.“

Vlasta: „Já si zase myslím, že z nich bude to, co z nich uděláme.“

Tereba: „Prosím Vás, to je z novin.“].

Although this short dialogue and sentence produced by Vlasta is supposed to be positive towards the Roma, it nevertheless acknowledges the difference between 'we' and 'they', and locates agency in the Whites as the only subjects. Roma are objects to be shaped by the Whites, which indicates a very colonial logic. But Fabián is making it step-by-step, with his effort and skills: he succeeds in becoming an independent welder – a builder of socialism. Fabián is thus on his way from being Romani to being a builder of socialism, rather than both Romani and a builder of socialism. In his transformation, Fabián stops being Roma. It is true that the Roma will earn respect, as they will now be considered humans, but only if they follow the rules of the socialist existence and ignore its manifestations of inequality:

Trojan: "Fabián, he started working independently, himself today."

Tereba: "Wow ... [impressed] a welder... [offering Fabián a cigarette], maybe one day you'll have your name displayed on the board [of honour]."

[Trojan: „Fabián, dneska začal dělat sám.“

Tereba: „Vida...[ohůřený] tak teda svářeč...[ponúka Fabiánovi cigaretu] možná, že jednou budeš mít jméno na tabuli [cti].“].

Engineer Krása, the Iron Works construction manager, represents a technocratic functionary. He is not a straightforwardly bad person, but has lost physical contact with 'real' people, and as a technocrat he can see only production indicators, numbers and performance outputs. He also has some prejudice and distrust towards the Roma. There is a scene in which Krása tries to get welders to work over Christmas. It is an important scene in the film because it is meant to make obvious that engineer Krása, so far only hard-pressed into his production numbers, has finally realised that behind every digit there is a human being. Vlasta reproaches her husband Krása:

"You only see hands on people, as if there was nothing else on them. As if each of them did not have their own life. What do you actually know about the people around you, what do you know about me, your wife, for example? Fabián, he won't save us... it's being told... but what did the man experience before he ran away from the building... it didn't occur to you, did it? But it should have occurred to you, it is your duty!"

[„Ty vidíš na lidech jenom ruce, jakoby na nich vůbec nic jiné nebylo. Jakoby každý z nich neměl svůj vlastní život. Co ty vlastně víš o lidech kolem sebe, co ty například víš o mě, o své ženě? Fabián, ten nás nespasí ... to se ti to povídá... ale co ten člověk prožil, než utekl ze stavby... to tě náhodou nenapadlo, vid? Ale Tebe to mělo napadnout, Honzo, to je Tvoje povinnost.“].

It might be noticed that the teacher character of Vlasta is also a kind of exoticisation. She is constructed as a woman with care and emotions, and in this way complements the rational man. Řepka, a former barber, is another paradigmatic character who is supposed to symbolise unreliable petty bourgeoisie – for communists of the 1950s the most distrustful social class, inclined to retain old (bourgeoisie) vices. Indeed, he is the embodiment of a dishonest worker. It is he who exposes the racial prejudice towards the Roma, while he is also the one who burns out the electric generator and falsely blames Fabián. At the end the film, however, the plot brings historical justice. Řepka is dismissed from the Iron Works and meets Fabián at the railway station, mistakenly assuming that Fabián is also leaving Kunčice:

Řepka: "Let's sit in one compartment, it doesn't matter now. Gypsy or not Gypsy, my friend, we're actually brothers." [„Sedneme si spolu do jednoho kupé, dnes už na tom nezáleží, Cikán, necikán, přáteli, vždyť jsme vlastně bratři.“].

To this fake offer of friendship from a dishonest man, Fabián responds: "We are not brothers, Mr. Řepka, because I am a welder. Do you know what a welder is?" [„My nejsme bratři pane Řepko, protože já jsem svářeč. Víte co to je svářeč?“].

Besides some emancipatory flavour, Fabián's repost might be viewed as a further negation of Roma identity and individuality, which is typical of this integration concept. Fabián as a 'new socialist person' is an integral piece of the socialist machinery – but being a welder is not what someone is, instead it is what someone does as his/her job.

One of the most revealing subplots from the perspective of integration which we focus on is Fabián's disillusionment regarding his equal stance with his non-Roma comrades. Fabián, who wants to throw a party to celebrate the new apartment, invites significant non-Roma others to his private space: Trojan, as well as engineer Krása and his wife Vlasta, as friends to attend the party. Despite the fact that all invitees accept, due to various circumstances, they do not appear. The reasons for their failure to attend are varied, but

are in fact not so important, and would not have prevented them had they really wanted to attend. Trojan is going to the cinema with his girlfriend, who suddenly, out of the blue, appears in the plot. It is this moment, specifically the sudden appearance of a rather mysterious White woman, Trojan's girlfriend, which represents the twist in the story. It is also this moment when Fabián suddenly realises that the equality with the Whites he aspired to achieve is only illusory. This moment in the plot clearly shows the limits of the subaltern and the real face of the friendship between Fabián and Trojan. The social life of the Whites is a no-go area for the Roma Fabián. He wants to be socially equal, but those significant others (Woelfel and Haller, 1971) do not allow him to consume that social equality.

In one of the last scenes of the film, Fabián is standing alone at the railway station, and a voiceover by the film narrator makes the following rather sentimental assertion:

"So he stood here thinking about his life. What it was like in the past, and what it is like now. And suddenly he felt terribly sorry for the new people he had come to know and was about to leave. And he asked himself, where does he belong... [upon hearing a siren from the factory] ... and that's when Fabián's heart decided, because it was already the heart of a new man."

[„Tak tu stál a myslel na svůj život. Jaký byl a jaký je. A najednou mu bylo strašně líto, těch nových lidí, které poznal a které teď měl opustit. A ptal se sám sebe, kam patřím [počouva zvuk fabrickej sirény]... a tu Fabiánovo srdce rozhodlo, protože to už bylo srdce nového člověka“].

Thus the integration of ethnic Roma into general society through the transformation of Fabián into the universalistic working class man is concluded. Regardless of the paradigmatic reading of Fabián, if we give it a second, we see that all of the integration thrust is in his individual effort as a worker – it is not in his essentialised abilities, nor in the structural possibilities given by socialism. Thus, this transformation, somewhat paradoxically, can be read as not a project for the whole Roma population as such, but as a project each individual Roma (male) must undertake himself.

Finally, there is powerful message that can be recognised in the film from a contemporary perspective. There is a clear recognition of inequality between the Whites and Roma in the story, and the film does not stay away from it. It is thought-provoking, however, this inequality is not a negation of this particular type of integration. Moreover, the Roma themselves are not to blame for not achieving this equality, as is common in the present time.

GYPSY

The film *Gypsy* (*Cigán*) introduces fictitious Roma characters in more complex structural conditions. It was written, conceived and realised by two authors from the generation, which has a transient experience with the late socialist period in Czechoslovakia: the director Martin Šulík was born in 1962, and the screenwriter Marek Leščák in 1971. *Gypsy* tells the story of Adam (personified by an ethnic Roma, non-professional actor, Ján Mižigár), a teenage boy from the segregated Roma settlement, whose father died tragically in a car accident. No one witnessed the accident, and Adam has a suspicion that his father was killed. Adam's mother, in an effort to provide for her children, married her brother-in-law Žiga. The film is visually divided into individual stories, chapters and subchapters with transitions composed of static

close-ups of the main character. The unifying plot line is provided by the Hamlet motif: the father's death (murder) and the brother-in-law character, which takes the father's position and marries the mother of the title character. Inspiration from Shakespeare's motives was openly admitted by director Šulík, who states that he originally approached the film with the idea of: "Filming something like Roma Hamlet that would be an archetypal theme, because Hamlet's problem is the problem of a teenage boy who for the first time sorts out his life experiences, experiences love, finds out that people around him are deceptive, and feels that the structure of the Roma settlement creates an intriguing opportunity" (Šulík, 2012). In symbolic terms, the use of the universal story with the motif of the Shakespearean father as a ghost (but also the choice of the first name for the protagonist), in my opinion, elevates the cinematic representation of Roma to the level of general humanity, and probably for the first time in the history of cultural renditions of Roma in the Czech and Slovak contexts.

In the film we meet several elements of Šulík's cinematic idiom. The introductory sequences immediately show how the director works with the rhythm of storytelling; he disrupts the flow, changes the tempo, and builds tension by visual means. Consider the initial scenes of the film: first is the extreme close-up of Adam's eyes, followed by an impressive, disturbing sequence of Adam running through the forest captured by a long lens – we do not know where he is going or who he is running from and why, but regardless, the sequence evokes the escape of a tormented animal. Following this there is an establishing shot of the valley and the Roma settlement, and then a series of medium shots that follow the running Adam and his brother. We see a dilapidated house and a group of people in front of the house; we also see a police car and we already know that something worrying is waiting for us. The camera follows Adam as he enters the house; we see a crying mother and as Adam enters the other room, we see the dead body of Adam's father.

Adam has just finished the ninth grade and is undertaking a lot of precarious work to help his mother financially (the camera captures him working hard in the stone quarry). The local pastor organises various activities for children from the settlement; he is coaching at the boxing club, and tries to motivate and somehow help Adam on his life path. A group of ethnomusicologists who occasionally visit the settlement to collect indigenous music also sympathise with Adam and suggest that he, with their assistance, apply for a high school scholarship. Adam, however, hesitates: he does not want to leave his mother alone; on the other hand, he needs to get out of the world of the settlement and as far away from his stepfather as possible. In the meantime, Adam's mother attends a maternity hospital where she experiences sloppy treatment and even aversion from the medical staff. At this point, the stepfather, Žiga, manipulates Adam and his brother into his suspicious business activities. Adam gradually loses his sympathetic ally; the priest throws him out of the parish and Adam and his brother get into an open conflict with Žiga. The plot of the film thus depicts Adam trapped in structural and social conditions, which are out of his agency and will. In comparison to *My Friend Fabián*, the Roma universe in the film *Gypsy* is clearly more complex and also shaped by the Roma themselves, rather than only by the Whites.

The cinematography is in the range of medium shots; we often see the settlement from a distance zoomed in on with a long lens, which optically provides an illusion of proximity, while the camera operator is standing at a safe distance. Regardless of the aesthetic qualities, such shooting techniques also have their associated photographic conventions in depicting Roma settlements and the visual perspective, which are commonly practised by non-Roma observers. Scenes from inside the settlement, however, have a realistic *mise-en-scène*; they mostly consist of medium shots, often tracking the characters, while sometimes camera shots are taken from a subjective point of view (e.g. from the interior of the car), and the action

often takes place indoors. The melancholic tone is omnipresent in the poetics of the film; it can be perceived as a feeling of loneliness, exclusion, determination, and hopelessness. These emotions, in contrast, are not articulated in the film *My Friend Fabián*, with the exception of the folkloric stereotypical pictures of Roma performing, dancing and drinking.¹⁰ The gloomy melancholy is underlined by the music, which penetrates the shots in accordance with the stories that the film tells.

Despite one mystical and magical storyline (the father's ghost appears to Adam), the film can be understood, in terms of genre, as a social drama. The *mise-en-scène* of the film is undoubtedly realistic. It is somewhat reminiscent of Italian neorealism, not only because it is a story depicting people from the lower classes in difficult living conditions, but also because it uses non-professional actors, the story divided into small stories and certain style elements (interior lighting).

On social isolation of the Roma

The non-Roma character in the story who seems sincerely involved in Adam's fate is a priest who takes care of the children from the settlement in a somewhat bizarre manner, as a choirmaster and boxing coach. However, his involvement is, in a way, problematic; he is an authoritative personality and the fabric of his expectations for the children, and especially for Adam, is set high – it is no wonder that, as happens in life, his expectations are not met. After the priest resigns, we understand that his behaviour is essentially crueller than that of those who are not involved. The role and failure of the priest could also be seen as a paradigmatic and slightly subverting view on the role of the church towards Roma. The Catholic church clearly failed with the Roma, and the fact that the church has often turned its back on the Roma, is understood as the naturalisation of their social exclusion. Moreover, the boxing priest is a slightly ridiculous representation of classic Slovak priests living in remote villages.

Social isolation, whereby Roma boys are trapped, is also illustrated by a scene from the boxing training. Upon seeing one of the boys obviously intoxicated, the priest/instructor simply expels him from the gym. There is no attempt to help him, and no appeal to the collective to assist him. From the priest's perspective, the drug addiction in which this boy is trapped is solely a matter of individual responsibility.

Priest: "Get out, I said get out, I'm not training junkies. Look at him, toluene has eaten a hole in his brain."

[„Vypadni, povedal som vypadni, feťákov netrénujem. Pozrite sa na neho, toluén mu vyžral dieru do mozgu.“]

Another group of people that is somewhat interested in Adam is a group of ethnomusicologists ("We do a kind of research here, we record Gypsy songs and stuff." [„Robíme tu taký výskum, nahrávame cigánske piesne a tak.“]) Although they have some interest in Adam's existence, they lack a deeper empathy and understanding.

Ethnologist: "Do you go to school?"

Adam: "I'm not going, I finished ninth last year."

E: "And where next did you want to go?"

¹⁰ To be fair: the film *Gypsy* also contains some typical examples of exoticisation of the Roma existence. For example, there are two relatively long scenes of the wedding celebration and the recording session set up by ethnomusicologists. In my opinion, however, these do not have the function of a basic building blocks in the construction of plot, in comparison to similar sequences in *My Friend Fabián*.

Adam: "What do I know? I have to earn money, mom is alone in everything."

E: "If you want, I could help you, some schools give scholarships."

Adam: "And how much?"

[Etnológ: „Do školy chodíš?“

Adam: „Nechodím, minulý rok som skončil deviatku.“

E: „A čo ďalej si ísť nechcel?“

Adam: „Čo ja viem? Musím zarábať, mama je na všetko sama.“

E: „Ak chceš, mohla by som ti pomôcť, na niektorých školách dávajú štipendiá.“

A: „Koľko?“].

The girl of the group is somewhat empathic and one of the guys is an idiot who tells a racist joke at lunch, apparently lacking any respect for Adam, who is present. This time Adam is a real person living in real social interactions facing omnipresent, everyday racism, not like the imaginary Roma Fabián. But the ethnomusicologists' attention is focused on old Roma songs and not on the problems that Adam has. Clearly, Adam does not have any collective of people nearby who would feel an obligation and moral imperative to help him, as Fabián had. In his world he is trapped, encircled and captured by a segregated and poverty-stricken settlement. All the girl of ethnographers could do was to put down her mobile number, handing it to Adam with the remark: "If you need anything, get in touch" [„Keby si niečo potreboval, ozvi sa.“].

On material deprivation

There is a great deal of difference when comparing the Adam's situation from the model of integration to that which was offered to Fabián by incorporating him into the working class. Adam works precarious jobs, which are inappropriate given his young age. It is stupefying, precarious and racially structured work, which he must do against the background of the neoliberal restructuring of the Slovak economy. In a scene from the quarry, when Adam is taking his humble pay, the accountant jokes: "Don't come tomorrow, we don't even have work for the Whites." [„Zajtra nechod', nemáme robotu ani pre bielych.“].

In this scene, however, we clearly see that poverty in post-socialist Slovakia is not only a social issue. Since the Roma are racially defined in Slovakia, the ethnic category of being Roma in practice affects their social position and the inequalities they face. Thus, ethnicity is not an abstract concept for the Roma, as it may be for the group of ethnomusicologists, but a practical category that determines Adam's everyday experience.

Adam must strive hard to obtain even basic commodities, such as fuel for heating in winter, by cutting left-over wood in the surrounding forest. He must hide in from the police, who are ubiquitous and ready to victimise the poor. Fabián is provided an old town apartment because foreman Trojan knows that "when Fabián lives better, he works better"; Adam does not have the chance to move from the shack in which he lives. There is no way to obtain better housing by being incorporated into the working class, and no foreman or socialistic collective at the construction site will assist him in getting the apartment. Moreover, if there were such a chance, Adam does not have any money to buy furniture and pay the rent. While Fabián has decent and regular monthly remuneration to pay his rent, the only chances that are offered to Adam come in the form of low-paid, seasonal jobs. As the local priest explains to Adam: "I have a friend who dropped out of the seminary, got married and has children, now he works on the railway, maybe he could find you a part-time job." [„Mám kamaráta, ktorý ušiel zo seminára, oženil sa a má deti, teraz robí na železnici, možno by ti vedel nájsť nejakú brigádu.“].

Everyday life, as characters experience it in the film, is frustrating. While in the 1950s paternalistic dealing with Roma was led by a genuine interest in integrating them into the idealised cutting-edge of society (the industrial socialist worker), the reality of post-communism, as represented in the film *Gypsy*, offers hopelessness for the young Roma man, who from time to time is subject to the often selfish interests of urban intelligentsia or the church. The only prospects that are ahead of Roma boys are unstable part-time jobs and the inescapable reality of the harsh existence in segregated Roma settlements, which will incarcerate them for life.

Unlike a large portion of intellectuals, researchers and experts who frequently talk about the cultural specifics and differences of the Roma, which often obscures and ignores the social and political causes of inequality, Šulík and Leščák do not essentialise culture and do not exoticise the existence of the Roma. Rather, they draw attention to the social conditions of their being. However, Šulík and Leščák do not idealise the Roma; they present to the spectator a relatively colourful picture of the various regrettable situations, in which the characters of the film are situated (usury, theft, and human trafficking). However, they do not suggest that the cause of these phenomena is *a priori* a kind of moral decay or the result of a culture of poverty, which forms a distinctive system of attitudes, and in which poor Roma are caught. On the contrary, a sociologist would say that the plot and the means of expression throughout the film lead spectators to recognise that the determining factors of Roma marginalisation are the discriminatory practices that are seemingly hard-to-see with the naked-eye, but are deeply rooted in the oppressive social order. By this means, the film subtly draws attention to the structural determinants of Roma marginalisation.

CONCLUSION

In this article I wanted to suggest that cinema can serve to uncover ideas about the social position, inclusion, mobility and social advancement of the Roma in different periods. Films are often an idealised reflection of social reality, although they function in the framework in which symbols and meanings are arranged in such a way that they are the bearers of a set of certain beliefs. At the same time, the films are carriers of social imaginary as a condensed network of significations which are collectively shared, and which can tell us about the ways in which dominant society conceptualises minorities.

My aim was to analyse how the concept of Roma integration and the ideas about their place within the social order have remained inert or have changed over time. In the early days of socialism in Czechoslovakia, the dominant notion was that the Roma individually were to be integrated into society through their incorporation into the working class. This was supposed to be a way of securing their equal standing with the White population, and at the same time a way of promoting their social advancement. As we observed, in *My Friend Fabián*, this social leap by which illiterate and uneducated Roma become conscious builders of socialism on par with the others was to be realised under the auspices and with the assistance of the collective – a socialist collective consisting of foremen in the Kunčice Iron Works, fellow workers, and teachers.

Socialism, however, played with nations or identities in some different ways than we do today. Even recognising ethnic minorities or different cultures was inevitably accompanied by their folklorisation or exoticisation. But the new socialist man was a project to be achieved and engineered. The ethnicities, races and nations were supposed to unify in their

friendship and strive for a better world. This is likely why Fabián's background as a Gypsy is not as important in his story as his potential to become a socialist man. In reality, as evidenced by archival documentation, and in contrast with the idealised story of Fabián, struggle for 'better world' encountered many obstacles of an institutional-structural nature (e. g. lack of standard accommodation). Regardless, it represented for Roma, the likely chance for the individual emancipation and the genuine possibility of upward social mobility.

Neither the integration concept nor real chances for social advancement are available for young Romani Adam. He is trapped in the dismal, hopeless environment of a segregated settlement of shacks and cabins, without running water and sanitation, and spattered with mud. There is no collective and no foreman who are ready to assist Adam in finishing school or in finding a steady job and better housing. On the contrary, Adam pushes himself as hard as he can, taking difficult jobs, but he cannot afford to go on to school, and structural conditions force him to break the law.

The only tangible chance that pops up for Adam is the prospect of receiving a high school scholarship, which can be set up for him by a girl from a group of ethnomusicologists. Despite the fact that this opportunity looks good, the question arises: what chance does Adam have even if he graduates secondary school? He may well remember what the salary accountant in the quarry told him, that there are no jobs even for the preferred White employees. What chance does Adam have of becoming self-sufficient and starting to live outside the Romani ghetto? The most probable future for him is one where he returns to the settlement, undertaking temporary seasonal work, or being forced to migrate for work abroad, like many of his contemporaries and friends.

Despite the fact that in post-socialist Slovakia all people are formally equal before the law, there are omnipresent inequalities between Roma groups and the non-Roma population. Žižek draws attention to the dichotomy between formal equality and substantive equality (2004). Formal equality presupposes that equality is achieved if the law treats everyone equally. The problem, however, is that not all individuals or groups have the same starting position and, in this situation, formal equality only exacerbates discrimination and inequality because it does not address all structural circumstances. Thus "formal freedom is the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the existing power relations, while actual freedom designates the site of an intervention which undermines these very coordinates" (2004). As such, real equality can only be achieved by changing the broader context of social forces and relationships that would undermine the entrenched status quo.

In *My Friend Fabián*, the dominant notion was that the Roma were to be integrated into society through their individual integration into the working class. In contrast, *Gypsy* shows no viable integration concept and no real integration opportunities available for the Roma. It might seem a paradox: *My Friend Fabián* is replete with colonial tropes of uninhibited dancing and singing and exotica and depicts imaginary Roma characters (played by non-Roma actors) as infantile, incompetent individuals who are subject to the paternalistic care of the White functionaries. At the same time the film is presenting a viable model for Roma integration and social advancement. In contrast, *Gypsy* is much more respectful towards Roma; the characters and performers are real Roma and not caricatures, and their film destinies are real and realistic. But the world of the film *Gypsy* is the world of total exclusion, which offers no hope and no prospects whatsoever for Roma to overcome the ordeal. Institutional-structural conditions that were shaped by neoliberal restructuring of the of the economy made poverty and race two central determinants for Roma marginalisation. These determinants also shape Adam's fate.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANIEL ŠKOBLA – is a research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. He obtained a PhD from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. He worked with the United Nations Development Program and provided technical assistance for the Slovak government regarding the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. His research primarily focuses on issues of ethnicity (Roma), inequalities, social integration, discrimination. He has also been involved in Roma advocacy on an international level and cooperated with international NGOs such as the European Roma Rights Centre, Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth. He has published articles in scientific journals (*Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Polish Sociological Review*) as well as chapters in books (Routledge, Policy Press). Further information at: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6326-1094>.