

# Continuities and Discontinuities in a Transnational Social Field: The Case of the Margovany Roma

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## Abstract

This article is based on long-term field research in an Eastern Slovak Romani settlement and an English town to which Roma migrated from the settlement. The paper attempts to disrupt the bipolar approach toward the migration of Roma to England and, at the same time, to point out the transnational interconnectedness of the Romani community and the replication of inter-group boundary patterns. This dynamic approach to migration allows the authors to also consider a different phenomenon, namely, the religious conversion of Roma to Pentecostal churches. This leads to an observation of parallels in the narratives of conversion and migration, which are both based on a dichotomy of “new” and “old”, and inclusion of the phenomenon of religious conversion in the analysis of migration alongside the highlighting of transnational social networks, the acquiring of secondary social bonds, and the strengthening of local inter-group boundaries.

## Key words

Roma, Eastern Slovakia, England, migration, transnationalism, religious conversion

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## 1 Migration trajectories of Margovany Roma

In May 2004, Slovakia joined the European Union and Romani people from the eastern Slovak village of Margovany<sup>1</sup> became part of the wider phenomenon of labor migration to the countries of Western Europe (especially England; cf. Uherek 2007: 762–768); for some of them, this was not their first experience with transnational migration. Some of these Romani families had previously resettled within Czechoslovakia from Margovany to Moravia in the 1960s as part of the centralized policy of “controlled dispersion” that was part of longer-term efforts to “eliminate Gypsy concentrations”, or rather, to deal with their existence (see; Guy 1977: 249–342; Jurová 1993: 75–92; Pavelčíková 2004: 86–94). This action not only gave birth to a community of Margovany Roma in the Moravian city of Beránky (and also in some other cities of North Moravia), but also created a bridge for migration based on transnational networks, which were used and continued to be maintained. The Margovany Roma also migrated to Western Europe seeking asylum (Uherek 2007: 752–753) – at the beginning of the 1990s, Roma from Beránky started to apply for asylum in England, some of them successfully. Some Romani families from Margovany then joined the asylum migration in 1999 (specifically to the Benelux countries), but their applications were rejected, and many even returned to Margovany before their applications were processed (Dobruská 2018). The Margovany Romani residents’ success during the above-mentioned later labor migration to England largely depended, therefore, on their existing contacts with earlier successful asylum-seekers, namely, the Beránky Roma.

Dobruská (2018) describes several essential stages in the migration of Margovany Roma to England: 1) men migrating for work, 2) entire families migrating, 3) frequent movement between the sending location and the destination location, 4) settling in the destination location, 5) resettlement in Slovakia. It must be added, however, that not all families who migrated to England have been involved in all of these phases, and at the same time there is no clear separation between these phases in most cases, i.e., the individual phases should not be perceived as definitive. As we will show below, questions about the finality of Romani people settling in either a destination or a sending location are somewhat meaningless. Their individual migration trajectories did not reflect a movement from one locality to another on one-off basis, but rather the continuous movement of the Margovany Roma back and forth between each of these localities.

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1 In this article, the names of the municipalities and participants in this research are fictitious.

This movement was of a different intensity during different phases for each family or its individual members.

## 2 Methodology

The present study is based on field research conducted by Petra Dobruská in the years 2003–2017, which was done together with Jan Ort in the years 2015–2017.<sup>2</sup> Such long-term field research is valuable above all because it means Dobruská had visited the monitored village even before the events that triggered the dynamic process not just of the Romani community's transformation, but also the transformation of the village as a whole and the relationships within it (see Dobruská 2018). The study is based on an analysis of interviews and the authors' participant observations during ethnographic research in Slovakia and England. At this point we would like to emphasize the distinct nature of data obtained in this way. While we were able to record the specific actions and social interactions of the participants to this research during our observations, the recorded statements about such events must be perceived at the level of attitudes, declarations and reflections that are personal (cf. Jerolmack – Khan 2014). The parts of this study which are based on an analysis of the interviews are, therefore, chiefly focused on how the actors themselves reflected on the events associated with their migration and how they dealt with them in the form of a narrative. We use both types of data in dialogue with each other, whereby our observations are not just an opportunity to monitor the practices of specific transmigrants, but also provide a framework within which to read their statements.

The interviews with the Margovany Roma were conducted during different phases of research in both locations exclusively in Romani, as that is the main language of communication within the community of Roma being observed. We then marginally supplemented our own data with findings from field research that was conducted under the leadership of Jaroslav

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2 The intensive phase of this research transpired between 2003–2009. During that time, Dobruská regularly visited the Margovany Roma for periods ranging from several days to several weeks, in the beginning predominantly in Slovakia, but later in England too. From 2010–2014, Dobruská stayed in regular contact with the Margovany Roma through social media and Skype, and later together with Ort undertook a two-week research trip to Slovakia (2015) and analogous two-week research trips to England (2016, 2017). In addition to the authors, Zuzana Znamenáčková was significantly involved in the research (2003–2009), and during its initial phases others involved were Františka Dvorská, Kristína Dienstbierová, Martina Kolmanová, Kateřina Turková and Karin Morávková.

Šotola in the same community exclusively at the location in Slovakia (see Prokeš et al. 2016).<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Transnational societies

In the anthropological study of migration, in response to the bipolar concept that has chiefly followed the subject of individuals uprooting themselves from a sending locality and integrating into a destination locality (for more, e.g., Glick-Schiller et al. 1995), a *theory of transnational migration* began to develop that aimed to bridge this clear dichotomy (above all Basch et al. 1994; for more see Szaló 2007). In the spirit of postcolonial criticism, this theory sought to break away from viewing the Other as immigrants and their original homes as places of otherness (Szaló 2007: 9). The theory has made the shift from speaking of uprooted migrants to speaking of transmigrants (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995) whose social scope relates both to their new home and their original home, where both homes are thus interconnected in a single *transnational social field* (Szaló 2007: 105). This approach disrupts the presumption that cultures, identities and places are unified (cf. Gupta – Fergusson 1992), and rather than speaking of two communities in different places, it begins to conceive of one community straddling territory transnationally (Szaló 2007: 8, 36). In this context, attention has also been drawn to the pitfalls of methodological nationalism, which has tended to monopolize the role played by nation-state borders in the formation of boundaries between groups transnationally (Wimmer – Glick-Schiller 2002a; 2002b; 2003). With regard to the broader political context, the borders of states are recognized as having an important, but not an omnipotent, influence on movement transnationally: “changing nation-states influence the system of practices and their flows, but do not rule over it” (Szaló 2007: 60).

Transnational community identities are “mediated by shared memories, a sense of shared destiny, and a sense of shared presence” (Szaló 2007: 133) or sense of co-responsibility (Werbner 2002). The aspects of boundary construction by such groups that are important, according to Uherek, are: a) the permanent flow of information (social control), b) concern for other group members (at least on a declarative level), c) informing others about oneself (through different communication technologies, e.g., Skype), d) gifting and visiting (Uherek 2018: 100–102). Family ties in particular play

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3 The observed village is referred to by a pseudonym in this article. During a verbal consultation with Jaroslav Šotola, we verified that we had been researching the same village. Given previous publications on this village (Dobruská 2018) we are using our own pseudonym for it.

a role that is significant in transnational social networks (Szaló 2007: 113). Family networks and others that are personal are also one of the four categories that make up what are called *migration systems* (Fawcett 1989: 673) which, as a theoretical concept, is used by Uherek (2018: 87–88) when analyzing the migration of Roma from Slovakia (or from the Czech Republic) to the countries of Western Europe. The concept of *migration systems*, in the spirit of the *theory of transnational migration*, does not perceive sending and destination locations as discontinuous, but as places connected through their mutual relations, both at the level of decisions that are political and at the level of meanings and symbols (Zlotnik 1992).

The above description of the migration trajectories of the Margovany Roma suggests that transnational concepts (whether the theory of transnational migration or the concept of migration systems) are highly relevant in relation to the community being observed. Their transnational community, which became important in the 1960s through the migration (the “controlled transfer”) of Roma within Czechoslovakia from Margovany in Slovakia to Beránky in Moravia, built the basis for further two-way movements (especially labor migration to Bohemian lands in the short term) which showed signs of being an incomplete migration. At the same time, thanks to the asylum migration of the 1990s succeeding, the Beránky Roma also facilitated the labor migration of Margovany Roma to England (and in some cases on to Canada). The Roma originally from Margovany thus created a community transnationally that spread across three territories as demarcated by state borders. Actual barriers to movement between countries (or the impetus for such movement, should such barriers become weakened) were indeed represented by the borders of the states, which were not insignificant to this transnational community. At the same time, it was not the case that the Margovany Roma transnational community formed a community that was completely homogenous without its own boundaries internally – each place was not just associated with different social statuses and different economic opportunities (cf. Grill 2012: 1271), but also with the different characteristics shared within Romani sub-communities (e.g., the Beránky Roma were sometimes said to be selfish, those who remained in Margovany were said to be backward, etc.). Regarding the dynamics of boundaries within a group, it is necessary to recall that, within the transnational social field, the Margovany Roma generally identified with other Roma from Slovakia in some situations, but in other cases, on the contrary, with other Eastern Europeans, or other Slovaks, etc.

We perceive the concept of a transnational social field more broadly, one that admits “participation in transnational social fields as open not just to transmigrants, i.e., those who regularly travel between their new home

and their original one, but also to subjects who perform various political, economic and cultural transnational practices irregularly, or who are not even immigrants at all” (Szaló 2007: 10). Such social fields also included those Others who participate in shaping the identity of transmigrants in their new home, in their old home, and elsewhere (ibid.: 105). In the case of the Margovany Roma, such a social field can include members of the transnational community of Margovany Roma (in Slovakia [i.e., in Margovany itself], in the Czech Republic [i.e., in Beránky] and in England) as well as other persons who participate not just in shaping the meanings of these transmigrants’ actions, but also in forming their identities. This includes the non-Romani villagers in Margovany, other immigrants in England (non-Romani and Romani), the “indigenous” residents of the English town to which they moved, converts in the Pentecostal churches, colleagues at work, etc.

Similar to Uherek who, in his theoretical framework of transnationalism, observes what migrants are able to bring along with their bodies as they travel between places, we observe the continuities and discontinuities of the Margovany Roma’s transnational movements. We will attempt to disrupt the bipolar migration perception by accepting it in part, bearing in mind that the Margovany transmigrants themselves have built their stories by contrasting the “new” and the “old”.

To begin, we will show that the conception of these stories is accompanied by a narrative about the continuity of the respondent’s own attitudes and values (4.1.). In the subsequent section we will analyze not just how the Roma have related to “home” (*khere*) through the format of narration, but also how they have capitalized on their experience of migration in the context of their home village, and how their relationships to home have differed depending on which generation of transmigrants was testifying (4.2.).

Within this established logic, the rest of the study will focus primarily on the “country that is foreign” (*cudze štati*), specifically, the city in England where the environment was new to the Margovany Roma. We will show that narratives presenting an image that is mythical, that of a new environment of unlimited economic opportunities and ethnic equality, should be perceived primarily as a situationally (and locally) conditioned discursive practice and part of their capitalization of their experience of migration (4.3.). We will subsequently illustrate the mechanisms of (dis)continuities through the phenomenon of religious conversion, where we will first show how the social function of the Pentecostal congregation has partially replaced disrupted mechanisms of residential structures and social control, provided secondary social ties in a new environment, and also strengthened the transnational ties of the Margovany Roma community.

An auxiliary phenomenon to the latter phenomenon is that boundaries of ethnicity become hardened (4.4.). It is the replication of intergroup boundary patterns that we will deal with in the last part of the fourth section. In that section, we will also demonstrate how the very phenomena of transnational migration and religious conversion produce boundaries that are new, despite being embedded in a discourse of their transgression (4.5). We will close with the story of Ferko and Margita, on the basis of which we will problematize the very terminological definitions of “sending” and “destination” locations (5).

## 4 Continuities and discontinuities

### 4.1 (Dis)continuities in migration narratives

The Margovany Roma have spoken about their migration to England not just as a turning point in their families’ lives, but also in community life as a whole. This basic change has been supported by their conversion to the Romani Pentecostal church. Like conversions (cf. Ripka 2013), the character of migration is narrative, in part (cf. e.g., Gardner 1993), whereby both conversion and migration narratives tend to be built on the contrast of the new and the old – in this sense, one can consider them discontinuity narratives. This dichotomy was formulated at the macro- and micro-levels by the Margovany Roma themselves.

From the macro-level perspective, i.e., the context of politics in the wider sense, the Roma compared Slovakia as a state which failed to provide them with work, generally did not care for them, and let them live in miserable conditions, with England, or rather with the European Union, which in their eyes was able to not just provide them well-paid work, but also decent living conditions and high-quality education for their children. In the context of employment, the Roma also recalled the gender aspect, where in Slovakia only physically demanding, i.e., “male” jobs were available to them (in limited quantities), whereas in England, jobs were available that could also be performed by women.

*“The women? At home, where would they have hired [them] to work? Nowhere, nowhere. We women were meant to just sit at home, always in the household. Here? I can go [to work] wherever I want. Whatever work I choose, that’s what I do.”<sup>4</sup>*

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4 Recording no. 2007-02-17-03. The interview with this 42-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková on 17 February 2007 in England. Original: “*Kaj bi lenas andre buči khere. Ňikhaj, Ňikhaj. Ča te*”

The broad range of job opportunities in England was also demonstrated by the Roma on another level – the following statement refers to work in the food industry:

*“Here [in Slovakia] too there are factories like there are abroad. How is it that abroad, they hire us Roma to work? We work with meat, with [food] products. We do everything there by hand, normally. Here in Slovakia, Roma would never be hired for such a job.”<sup>5</sup>*

We know of references that are similar from the narratives of the Slovak Roma who had experience migrating to the Bohemian lands / Czech Republic. For example, Ort describes how a statement about the shared drinking of soda became a stable way to assess the equality of relations between non-Roma and Roma. The argument contained the implicit message that non-Romani neighbors in Slovakia would never drink from a soda bottle after a Romani person had (Ort 2017: 108–109). Sadílková adds that references to shared meals “are related to the meaning of commensality, clearly understood by the Roma as a reflection of the existing social hierarchies inside and outside the Roma community and the way mutual communication results from such hierarchies” (Sadílková 2016: 236). The Margovany Romani woman’s testimony puts forward a similar argument at the level of employment opportunities, and its message is similar: A declaration of the disruption of the inequalities that have been formulated in relation to Roma in the Slovak context.

From the perspective of daily social interactions, the Margovany Roma compared the authorities’ and their non-Romani neighbors’ humiliation of them and the omnipresent racism in Slovakia with the possibility of breaking free from this clearly ethnic stigma (the opportunity to anonymize their ethnic identity) in England, an environment that was new to them (cf. Grill 2018; Uherek 2018: 93) and later, with the acceptance of Roma as equals in the declared trans-ethnic discourse of the Pentecostal church (cf. Podolinská 2009), or rather, in the environment of the English town as a whole. However, by constructing the narrative this way, the Roma at the same time

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*bešel khere, furt andro khera, amen o džuvla. A adaj? Šaj džav, kaj kamav. Savi buči mange kidav avri, koja kerav.”*

- 5 Recording no. 2005-02-09-01. The interview with this 40-year-old woman was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 9 February 2005 in Margovany. Original: *“The kadaj kale fabriki hin, so andro cudze štati, soske amen le Romen andro cudze štati andro buča kiden? Paš o masa keras buči, paš o virobki. Odoj normalne sa le vastenca keras buči a adaj pre Slovensko Romes bi na lenas andre buči, na prijinenas pre kajsi buči.”*



defined themselves vis-a-vis existing prejudices about “gypsies” allegedly being lazy and unable to work (cf. Pavelčíková 2015). From their point of view, the change that has taken place did not result from their transforming themselves, but from an adjustment to their conditions that has allowed them to show their true face. One of the Romani women explained the alcohol consumption among Roma in their home location in Slovakia similarly:

*“Back home the gadje [non-Roma] say our Roma do nothing but drink, but that’s not true. Guys drank out of heartache because they had no work, even if they were getting welfare. They went to get work and then drank because they had nothing, they had no money, they lived miserably. They had no homes, they had nowhere to live, at home there were five, six, as many as 10 of them sleeping in the same bed. Now none of that is happening because there is England, England got us back on our feet.”<sup>6</sup>*

Alcohol consumption appeared in the Margovany Roma narratives as a symbol of moral decay – below we will show that it was used in this way, for example, in relation to English locals (section 4.5), and was also similarly used when defining their “old” life, regardless of whether it was framed through migration (“England put us on our feet”), or religious conversion (“We’re Christians now, we don’t know what brandy is”).<sup>7</sup> Using a similar argument, these Roma also condemned the superficiality of others’ faith (“People get baptized, but they no longer go to church, they drink, they play the slot machines”<sup>8</sup>).<sup>9</sup> However, the above-quoted state-

6 Recording no. 2007-02-17-03. This interview with a 42-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková, 17 February 2007 in England. Original: *“Kher den дума о gadže, hoj amare Roma ča pijen, oda nane oda. Oda murš hoc te chudelas oja podpora, pijelas andre žala, bo na has buči. Džalas andre karčma, pijelas, bo na has sostar, na has les love, bjedňes dživelas. Kher na has, na has kaj te bešel, andro kher pre jekh hadžos sovenas, po pandž, šov džene, až po deš džene. A akana imar kada na ekzistinel, bo hin Anglija, Anglija amen thodžas pro than.”*

7 Ibid. Original: *“Amen akana o krestana, amen na džanas s’oda palenka.”*

8 Recording no. 2007-10-10-03. This interview with a 33-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Františka Dvorská on 10 October 2007 in England. Original: *“O džene pes den te bolel, andre khangerik imar na phiren, pijen, automati bavinen.”*

9 It can be added that while alcohol consumption may have been narratively thematized (whether in the context of conversion or migration), that did not exclude its practice. Declared social norms allow alcohol consumption as long as it is controlled, not too public, and occasional (e.g., at birthday parties in the home). Alcohol consumption in a certain form in the environment that is new could also symbolize higher status (e.g., consuming draft beer in a restaurant).

ments are interesting precisely because while they admit that there were aspects of their lives before migration that were negatively perceived, the causes of those aspects are externalized, projected beyond the Roma actors themselves. Instead, they saw the causes as being their conditions for living, which were structurally-determined and unhappy, did not provide the possibility of work, and did not provide sufficient compensation in case of unemployment. These migration narratives, therefore, are not just able to demonstrate the discontinuities between the new and the old, but also can also serve to declare that one's own attitudes and values are and always have been consistent.

#### 4.2 Home

Describing the emigration to England by residents of Sylhet (Bangladesh), Katy Gardner has pointed to their dual understanding of “abroad” vs. “homeland” (Gardner 1993): Going abroad was associated with a rise in socio-economic status (and at the same time, a rise in socio-economic status was associated with being abroad) while the homeland was associated with socio-economic stagnation. Within this duality, however, the Bengali homeland was associated simultaneously with the roots of cultural identity, with real emotions, with spirituality, and with sources of healing elements in contrast to being abroad in Britain, which was associated with moral decay. In line with such notions, while the people of Sylhet aspired to go abroad, they had no desire to integrate into that foreign society.

Migrant Roma from Slovakia seem to be in a different situation: As we stated above, the duality between a country that is foreign, but rich and an economically stagnant homeland is compounded in their case by the everyday racism and structural exclusion faced at “home” by Roma in Slovakia. Instead of these immigrants experiencing new racism outside their homeland (Gardner 1993; for more, e.g., Glick-Shiller – Fouron 1990), the Roma have been able to experience a sense of acceptance abroad that is new (e.g., 2018), as well as an anonymizing of their ethnicity (Grill 2018), and possibly even to look back at the illusion of equality in their homeland (Kobes 2012: 24–25). Be that as it may, many Roma still show strong ties and self-identification with their still-existing homes in the Slovak villages (Scheffel 2015; Ort 2016; 2017).

Even after living more than ten years in England, the Margovany Roma associated being “at home” (*khere*) with Slovakia and continued their constant movement between the two places, not just the movement of people, but also of finances, information, meanings, statuses, things, etc. A highly visible sign of the interconnectedness of these two localities was not just

the fundamental transformation of the Romani dwellings in the settlement in Slovakia, but also the change to the overall residential structure of the village, whereby Roma transmigrants increasingly bought/built houses outside the settlement, i.e., in a part of the village symbolically perceived as non-Romani (for details, see Prokeš et al. 2016: 187–195). This investment into the construction of houses which were empty while their owners remained in England is commented on by Prokeš as follows: “[m]ost of them are under construction, with locked windows, because their owners live in Great Britain and their returns to [Margovany] have yet to be planned” (Prokeš et al. 2016: 193). However, we do not think it is appropriate to ask whether the Roma in England are going to return to Margovany or not. As Szaló writes about transmigrants, “these people are not leaving their homes, they are trying to build new ones, but both the new home and their original home are marked by potential temporality” (2007: 117). In our opinion, the construction of houses in Margovany (or their purchase outside the Romani settlement) can therefore be perceived rather as evidence of plans to return, as a sign of the transmigrants’ straddling two homes, and as a strategy to secure themselves in a situation where the economic and political situation in England was not perceived as clearly stable in the long run. In addition, these houses were never intended to fulfill just a function that is practical, but were also intended to represent status symbols that are visible, the materialization of the advancement, socio-economically speaking, of these successful transmigrants (cf. Gardner 1993). Despite the fundamental improvement in their living conditions, compared to their home location in Slovakia, the Roma in England had once again found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy (cf. Grill 2012; 2018) and in contrast to the Slovak village, they were in the anonymous environment, relatively speaking, of an urban area. The environment of the East Slovak village, therefore, remained a space where it was possible to capitalize much more on their experiences of migration in relation to their socio-economic mobility (cf. e.g., Grill 2008; 2012; 2015; Guy 1977: 485–486; Ort 2016; 2017).

Even the capitalization of these status symbols had no limitations in terms of territory: During our research in England in 2016, when we visited after a longer period of time,<sup>10</sup> some of the Roma started telling us about their

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10 The intensive phases of the research in Margovany took place in the years 2004–2009 and in England in the years 2006–2008. We remind you that in this phase the main researchers were Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková. After a longer break, during which Petra Dobruská remained in contact with some Margovany Roma via Facebook and Skype, the authors of this article continued their joint research in 2015 (Margovany) and 2016–2017 (England). In this regard, it is possible to reflect on the different positionality of Jan Ort

houses and the overall transformation of the Romani settlement and the residential structure of their municipality in Slovakia. One Romani man bragged about his construction project outside the settlement, in a village, and showed us photos on his phone, while a Romani woman described how their houses had been appreciated with surprise by non-Romani people from an English town who went to Margovany.<sup>11</sup> Such declarations complemented the dynamics of their capitalization on the experience of migration through narrative: During our research in England, where the Margovany Roma were living in immigrant neighborhoods which were partially stigmatized (cf. Grill 2018: 1144), they drew our attention to their newly-acquired social status in Slovakia. In contrast, during our research in Slovakia, the Roma told us mainly about the absence of ethnic stigmatization and the equality and economic opportunities in England.

Similarly to what Gardner describes, for the Margovany Roma, their home village in Slovakia was associated with the roots of their cultural identity. In this context, the Roma often spoke of the *phure Roma*, the “old Roma” (or *amare phure* “our elders”) and life *pretim* “before”, which was associated not just with a high level of poverty, but also with “true Roma values”, especially intracommunity solidarity. Similarly, they defined themselves in opposition to such a past (“we want to live like other people, not always like our elders”)<sup>12</sup> while also relating to it – “previously, the Roma stuck together more, they liked each other more than now.”<sup>13</sup> In accordance with their ambivalent perception of life “before”, the Margovany transmigrants also related to their home village ambivalently. Although they appreciated

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within the framework of the subsequent research. The research participants did not know him, assumed his ignorance of the environment, and thus tended to explain to him what things look like in England or Margovany, or how the situation has transformed under the influence of migration.

11 Grill writes about the context of these visits of non-Romani people from England to Slovakia (2018: 1149): “[S]ome British police officers, social workers and ‘research experts’ were given the opportunity to travel to other European countries to gain first-hand experience abroad and to exchange knowledge about their work with ‘Roma’ in Britain with their Eastern European counterparts. These encounters usually consisted of workshops where local political representatives, state workers and NGOs presented their work with ‘Roma/Gypsies’. Additionally, the visitors were taken on ‘field’ trips to see the ‘Roma’.”

12 Recording no. 2005-02-09-01. The interview with a 40-year-old woman was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 9 February 2005 in Margovany. Original: “*Avka kamas te dživel sar aver dženo, na furt pal amare phure.*”

13 Recording no. 2005-02-12-01. The interview with a 30-year-old man was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 12 February 2005 in Margovany. Original: “*Avka pes varekana o Roma likernas, hoj feder, raderer pes dikhenas sar hoj akana.*”

the environment of multiculturalism in their new place in England (*všelijako narodos* “all kinds of nationalities”), especially in the first years of migration, in that context they also spoke of cultural insecurity and concerns about personal safety (especially with regard to their children). Similarly, the Roma valued their dignified treatment by the English authorities, the quality health care there and their equal access to institutional education. On the other hand, one Romani woman stated that one of her sick children was only cured after returning to Slovakia, where the child was treated in the “old Roma” way. Although their equal access was appreciated at the English schools, the Roma also pointed to an environment that was foreign to them, one in which children from different countries fought with each other at school. As another Romani woman testified, there was better education in England, but there was a “better culture” in Slovakia (*feder kultura*).<sup>14</sup> Similarly to what Gardner (1993) states, and as Uherek (2018: 93–94) also describes the migration of Roma, from the perspective of practices, their tendency to bury their deceased “at home” in Slovakia also strengthened their ties to home, and the Margovany Roma also returned to Slovakia for the purpose of the baptism (Roman Catholic) of newborn children.

It must be emphasized, however, that among the Margovany Roma, their relationship to their Slovak home was not naturally uniform. Some Roma (usually with their entire families) returned to Margovany for a greater or lesser part of the summer, including for the purpose of maintaining their houses, whether newly-built or still under construction, while other Roma returned to Slovakia only in case of necessity (identity card registration, one-off family events) and did not invest in real estate there either. Ties to Slovakia understandably also differed between generations within individual families. The generation of working age, whose representatives were

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14 Full testimony: “*There are problems with the school. Our children attend, they walk there in the morning, and when they come home we hear about how the children fight each other. Well, our children don’t do that, though, because our children are afraid, there are people from different countries there. [...] It’s not that here [in Slovakia] there would be a better school, but there is a better culture in Slovakia than there [in England]. There, if you tell an educator or the headmaster, then they won’t do anything about it. I’ve already had my own experience with that, because they beat my child up at school.*” Recording no. 2008-02-03-01. The interview with a 33-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková on 3 February 2008 in Margovany. Original: “*La škola ha problemi hin, po jon phiren andre škola amare čhave, džan tosara, aven khere, imar šunas hoj maren pes. No ale amare čhavore kada na keren, po amare čhavore daran, odoj všelijako narodos hin. [...] Ta na hoj adaj hin feder škola, ale feder hin kultura adaj pre Slovensko sar odoj. Po odoj te pheneha le učiteliske lebo le rjaditeliske, tak jov peske na kerla nič. Me imar som andre kada zkušimen, bo marde mire čhavores andre škola.*”

the most important actors of the initial migration and the community's most important economic force in England, represented transmigrants who were the most straddled within the transnational social field between Slovakia and England. The representatives of the youngest generation had already grown up in England, no longer spoke Slovak, and had a minimal relationship with Slovakia. The difference intergenerationally, in terms of belonging to sub-localities, could be observed precisely on the basis of language competence: In the households of Margovany transmigrants in England, during the day the overwhelming majority watched broadcasts by Slovak television stations (including television news), i.e., broadcasts in Slovak (or in Czech, marginally). While for the generation in the middle such broadcasts meant the creation of a continuum of the linguistic environment with Slovakia, the children's generation who grew up in England were unable to understand those broadcasts, for all practical purposes. Those children who had still time to acquire Slovak and subsequently acquired English quickly in England thanks to their continued schooling, due to their competences in these languages, functioned for their parents (adult transmigrants who often acquired just a limited amount of English) as a necessary linguistic support when communicating with the English authorities. In a situation where their competences differed linguistically in these non-Romani language codes, the Romani language served not just as an important marker of group identity, but also as a common communication code across the generations (and the only such code).

Finally, the generation of those who were the oldest, who were already economically inactive, often stayed in Margovany and received financial support from their relatives in England (remittances, see e.g., Szaló 2007: 25). If they were couples, then should one die from this generation, the other usually left to live with descendants in England. We must add that it was not just financing, people, or status symbols which travelled back to Slovakia from England, but also cultural phenomena. For example, a hamburger shop, or one called "chicken" (i.e., an English loanword in Romani), have been opened in the Margovany settlement (Prokeš et al. 2016: 194). At the same time, migration to England has brought job opportunities (limited, but new) to Margovany. One Romani man, a trained builder who has never been to England, became economically stable thanks to contracts for the construction of houses from the Roma in England. He also involved other community members in this work. In a similar way, non-Roma from Margovany were also employed for skilled work (connection of electricity, gas) which, according to the reflections of the Roma, symbolized a reversal of power positions in Margovany (cf. Grill 2015).

### 4.3 Living abroad

Gardner describes living abroad (which, in the case of her research, also happens in England) as involving a locality that the inhabitants of Sylhet have mythologized and perceived as a place of unlimited opportunities. It is significant that the greatest mythicization was received by those who never lived in England and who encountered it only in the form of the narratives of returning transmigrants. These narratives fueled the mythical image while obscuring the discrimination and marginalization that awaited these transmigrants alongside their desired economic earnings in England.

Among the Roma in Slovakia, going abroad (to the Bohemian lands) had already been depicted among them mythically, as has already been described about the migration in the postwar period (Hübschmannová 1993: 30–31; Synková 2006). In that context, their acceptance as equals by their non-Roma neighbors was the basis of the narrative. As we described above, a similar motif also appeared in stories about the modern migration to England, both among Roma from Margovany and from other places in Slovakia (Grill 2018). However, the replication of an established pattern in different places, with other groups, and at different times, suggests that such narratives cannot be perceived as a picture of everyday social interactions in the destination locality. If we return to the example of the statement quoted at the beginning of this study, where a Romani woman claims that she “does the kind of work she chooses”, it must be added that such choice was limited to low-skilled jobs, mostly, often in conditions that were disadvantageous (especially in the initial phase). England was far from being a place of ethnic equality and economic opportunities that were unlimited for the Margovany Roma. It was also a place of economic marginalization and, as we will show below, of the replication of intergroup boundaries, ethnic isolation, and insecurity overall. Uherek (2018: 87) points out that the use of kinship and other personal networks in migration reinforces ethnic boundaries in the destination locality (Light – Bhachu – Karageorgis 1989; Vertovec – Cohen 1999; Vertovec 2009); Gardner also points out the effect of an environment that is new on strengthening boundaries based on ethnicity (1993). To analyze such a phenomenon among the Roma, it is appropriate to focus on the neighbourhood structure itself, both in the destination locality and in the sending locality. For example, Uherek points to the reproduction of structures from Slovak villages when Roma from certain villages have left for specific new places in England.<sup>15</sup> For the

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15 It should be noted that in the case of the Margovany Roma, from the beginning of their migration, there were at least two destination localities between which families moved. However, our research focused exclusively on just one

Margovany Roma such migration was not just a movement to a different cultural and linguistic environment lacking social ties outside of one's own kinship networks. It was also a movement out of a Romani settlement or village into an urban environment. In a Romani settlement in Slovakia, social life was characterized by households which were interconnected within broader family units (*fajta*<sup>16</sup>), and between these households there was a frequent flow of information, people, and things, typically kitchen utensils, or food (salt, flour, oil, coffee), as well as tobacco. However, this exchange of information, which was a pillar of social control within the community, took place primarily on the premises of the settlement – in shared backyards, near the well, in front of the dwellings, etc. The Roma used to call such places *po placi*, “on the patch”. This residential structure was disrupted, largely, in the new urban environment, but even so there continued to be a flow of people between households in a natural way. In the initial migration phase of the summer of 2004, when many Romani families did not have their housing secured, several families lived in one apartment together, temporarily. In the later stages, when each housing unit was occupied by one nuclear family, usually, (or sometimes by three generations), the units would be scattered throughout an immigrant neighborhood, predominantly, and this disrupted the community's social control to a certain extent. However, the flow of people between these units continued. In an environment that was new, these were entirely spontaneous, unplanned (unannounced) visits, sometimes to borrow things, other times with no purpose that was specific. What changed, though, was the absence of a clear space *po placi*. Such a joint meeting space, albeit no longer one of daily social control, was partially replaced by Pentecostal church services serving this social function.

#### 4.4 From adaptation to isolation

Since it began in 2004, the migration of the Margovany Roma to England has been accompanied by another important transformation, namely, the phenomenon of conversion to Pentecostal churches. In Slovakia, this

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of these localities because an extended family unit key to our research lived there.

16 To define the term *fajta*, one can refer to Hübschmannová: “While *famelija* ‘extends in width’ – it has a horizontal dimension in the first place – another central kinship term *fajta* (ancestry) emphasizes the vertical line: *fajta pal o dad*, or *fajta pal e daj*: paternal line, maternal line.” (1999: 27, emphasis in the original) For more see Kobes (2010).



conversion has involved the Pentecostal movement of *Křesťanská misie Maranatha (KMM)*, the *Maranatha Christian Mission*, while in England it involved the Pentecostal movement called the *Jesus Army*.

In connection with the conversion of Roma to new religious movements, *social deprivation theory* has been discussed in the literature (Podolinská 2014), whereby through conversion, marginalized Roma acquire the secondary social networks they lack (Podolinská – Hrustič 2010). The community of Pentecostal churches and its social function can be illustrated through the example of the Margovany transmigrants. After their arrival in England, Pentecostal church services served as a common meeting place for the Roma in a situation where the city environment was new to them and no other common space was available. This social function was highlighted by the fact that even Roma who rejected this “new” faith still attended such services. The situation at the beginning of her stay in the English city was described by one Romani woman who attended these religious services, even though she refused to be baptized in the church itself:<sup>17</sup>

*“We’ve been here two years and we know this pastor. We attend church, everybody else has already been baptized [there], we’re the only ones who haven’t. [...] My Dad came here and we brought him to church. I said: ‘Come to church, Dad, what will you do all alone at home, we’re all going.’ We went there, he was standing there, watching, and he didn’t say anything to us. Later on, once he was a little drunk, he said: ‘Listen, go to that church, but do not get baptized.’ I said, ‘It’s good you told me that, Dad. No, I won’t get baptized, don’t be afraid.’”<sup>18</sup>*

As Ripka points out, referencing Peter Gow (Gow 2006), “[w]hether somebody has actually converted is not a question for an ethnographer, but for a missionary” (Ripka 2013: 159). Likewise, it is neither our aim nor is it

17 Baptisms by other denominations are not recognized by Pentecostal churches, in this case, the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia (for more on the movement of Pentecostalism, see e.g., Anderson 2004).

18 Recording no. 2006-12-01-03. The interview with a 45-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková on 1 December 2006 in England. Original: *“Imar amen duj berš so sam adaj a prindžaras kale pastoris. Andre khangerik phiras, ale imar savore pes te bolel dine, ča amen na. [...] Ehas adaj o dad a lilam les andre khangerik. Phenav: ‘Av, dado, tuke andre khangerik, so kereha khere, džas amenge savore.’ Gejlam, na, jov ča terdžol, dikhel, nič na phendža amenge. Imar sar kavka matoro has, phenel: ‘Šun, andre khangerik phir, ale te bolel tut ma de.’ Phenav: ‘Lačhes, dado, hoj mange phendžal. Na, me man na dava te bolel, ma dara.’”*

within our power to decide whether the Margovany Romani attendees at these Pentecostal services in England “really believed” or were “just” using the services as a meeting place. However, the above-mentioned testimony shows that the Margovany Roma themselves thematized the social function of these church services, or of the Pentecostal congregation as such – the author of the testimony invited her father to participate so that “he wouldn’t be all alone at home” and testified about regular participation in church services even though she and her siblings, unlike many other Roma, refused to accept a new baptism. At the same time, it is worth noting that she complements her rejection with a reference to the continuity of her family values, here represented by the authority of her father.

Meeting at Pentecostal church services secured the strengthening of social ties within one’s own community and also ensured the acquisition of new social ties. This was important to the Margovany Roma for their orientation in the environment of an English town that was new to them; through their contacts from the Pentecostal congregation (mainly thanks to the pastor), they received opportunities to look for work, but at the same time, the Pentecostal congregation became a micro-world through which they experienced acceptance in the new environment, a micro-world within which there was a shift from a strategy of ethnic anonymity to one of ethnic pride. The story of their acquisition of ethnic pride became a legend among the Margovany Roma to which they repeatedly returned. Here is a brief version of it:

*“All England knows we are Roma and it doesn’t bother them. That’s because we had such a group, of more than 1,000 people, who honor God in this way. We went up to the microphone, my uncle said: ‘Well, I just want to say that we are Roma from Slovakia,’ and the English started applauding us for acknowledging that, it doesn’t matter to them what ethnicity we are. After we said that, we left the podium, and everybody hugged us, they felt badly for what had been done to us in Slovakia. We’re glad we joined, we feel better.”<sup>19</sup>*

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19 Recording no. 2005-10-26-05. The interview with a 22-year-old man was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 26 October 2005 in Margovany. Original: “*Čalo Anglicko džanel, hoj Roma sam a na vadzinel lenge. Bo has amen ajsi skupina, so pal o tišic džene, so avka uctivinas le Devoles. Amen gejlam andro mikrofonos, miro bačis: ‘No chcel by som povedať, že sme zo Slovenska a my sme Rómovia,’ a o Angličana chudle te klapkinel, hoj priznajindžam amen, hoj lenge na vadzinel, hoj save sam. Sar imar phendžam kada, avlam pal o javiskos tele, ale savore amen chudenas, lutinenas amen, hoj so kernas amenge pre Slovensko. A mek barikane sam, hoj gejlam andre kada. Feder amen čujinas.*”

Constructed in this way, the story corresponds to what has been described as the trans-ethnic discourse of new religious movements, i.e., their declaration of equal acceptance regardless of ethnicity (for the context of the Roma in Slovakia, e.g., Hrustič 2010; Podolinská 2009). At the same time, it can be seen from the above statement that such a discourse was extended in the narratives of these transmigrants to the entire English environment, which sets it in significant opposition to the Slovak environment. In this context, it can be specified that the acquisition of ethnic pride within the Pentecostal church can be seen as a contextual matter rather than a one-time turning point. In other words, if, thanks to their experience of the Pentecostal congregation, the Margovany Roma began to proudly declare themselves “Roma”, this did not necessarily mean they declared their ethnicity in all other social contexts (e.g., at work).

For the Margovany transmigrants, the Pentecostal church also had another dimension that was socially significant. The Roma travelling between England and Slovakia were aware of the significant similarities of the Pentecostal congregations that operated in both places:

*“I went to the House of Culture [in Margovany] and it was similar to what it’s like in England. Absolutely everything is the same. They baptize people, they lay hands on you, they pray over you.”<sup>20</sup>*

The Pentecostal congregation, therefore, did not just mediate ties within an environment that was new, but also emphasized the connectedness of the transnational field – Romani transmigrants could visit an environment that would be familiar, that of the Pentecostal church, even when returning to Slovakia. However, there the KMM served as a church exclusively for Roma, while in England the *Jesus Army* fulfilled the above-mentioned trans-ethnic discourse requirements (not necessarily with regard to real equality, but rather with regard to the presence of representatives of different ethnic groups) and thus developed ties with the outside world for the Margovany Roma. That changed gradually; the Roma began to leave the *Jesus Army* church after their first years in England, and the KMM church (which was originally Czech) expanded into some English cities with Romani communities at the same time. Some Margovany Roma also became church pastors and began to lead purely Romani congregations in

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20 Recording no. 2005-10-24-02. The interview with a 23-year-old man was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 24 October 2005 in Margovany. Original: “*Andro kulturakos somas a me phenav, no oda tiž kajsi podobno so andre Anglija. Tiž kajso stejno, sa, sa, sa. Bolen, thoven upre o vasta, chuden pes pre tu te modlinel.*”

the respective English cities (in addition, with religious services partly in the Romani language; in the case of the city we are following, this happened in 2009). What had first mediated their social ties in an environment that was new gradually contributed to the Roma closing themselves off from the outside world (ethnic isolation) and highlighted their ties to their home location in Slovakia.

#### 4.5 Boundary (dis)continuities

We have described how the Margovany Roma have pointed to their acceptance as equals in this English town and in the Pentecostal church. We will now endeavor to focus in more detail on the nature of intergroup boundaries under the influence of their experience of migration (or religious conversion). What lies behind this equality narrative? However we define “other” groups, how have these Roma spoken about them? Conditions in England were described by one Margovany Romani man as follows:

*“There are different nations there, right? However, if you’re decent, if you don’t do anything wrong, they leave you alone. It doesn’t matter if I’m Romani or Pakistani or some other race, because they perceive us all as brothers.”*<sup>21</sup>

The discourse of “racial” equality is evident here, where the category of “race” is covered by the general category of “brotherhood”. However, the discourse formulated in this way paradoxically involves a condition of a certain degree of isolation, i.e., “not doing anything wrong”. The Margovany Roma explicitly spoke of such isolation at the beginning of their migration:

*“Our families, who know each other well, have good relations. We never encounter the foreigners, what would we want from them? [...] Where is there for us to go? We go to the doctor, we still have relatives from the Czech Republic, we go to church. We just know [the pastor] and his children. We don’t go anywhere, otherwise. We go to the stock market! [laughter]”*<sup>22</sup>

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21 Recording no. 2005-02-09-01. This interview with a 40-year-old man was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková on 9 February 2005 in Margovany. Original: *“Všetelijako narodos odoj, na? No ale pokud aveha lačo, na kereha nič, dena tut pokoj. Oda či som Rom abo Pakistanos abo aver rasa, b’oda kavka pes považinel furt sar te bi phrala.”*

22 Recording no. 2007-10-10-03. This interview with a 32-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Františka Dvorská on 10 October 2007

One of the strategies to not appear deviant was to anonymize one's ethnicity. Compared to the dichotomy of ethnicities in their East Slovak village, where the Roma were visible as different, in this city in England they got the opportunity to work more dynamically with their group identity. They could appear to be anonymous immigrants, more or less, in this city, and could bring to the fore their identity as Slovak nationals, which in a Slovak context would have been impossible. Alliances that were new and unexpected were spoken of by the Roma in this regard. The Roma say they also aided some non-Romani neighbors from Margovany with moving to England and let them live in their homes at the beginning of their time in the environment that was new and uncertain to them. Through such narratives, they demonstrated the reversal of their positions, whereby the *gadje* (non-Roma) were living temporarily with people whom, in the context of a Slovak village, "they would never even visit". Those already-established boundaries, however, were then replicated, according to the Roma. They drew attention to the fact that after a while, the Margovany non-Roma to whom they had given this aid stopped greeting them in the English town. Moreover, it was not possible for the Roma to maintain anonymity in terms of ethnicity during social interactions with ethnic Slovaks, which is how the Roma explained their discrimination in employment:

*"There are gadje [non-Roma] there, I have a boss who has a kind of office. He gives me work. He's Slovak, from Snina, and there's another Slovak woman from Poprad. They've been working there for two months. Before them, it was an Englishwoman, she was very good to us, but the Slovak woman is discriminating against us now. That girl, the Slovak. [...] She knows we're Romani."*<sup>23</sup>

These established patterns and their replication are also mentioned in other Romani people's testimonies. In this city in England, the need to

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in England. Original: "Amare fajti so amen lačes prindžaras, tak amen amen lačes likerás, podavinas amen. Ta kajse cudzenca amen na likerás, so amen ehin pal lende? [...] Ta kaj phiraha? Ča ko doktora džas, pal o Čechi amen ehine inke predki, andre khangerik džas, okrem ča le [pastoris] prindžaras, leskere čhaven. Buter nihkaj na phiras. Po burzi phiras!"

23 Recording no. 2005-12-20-04. This interview with a 21-year-old man was conducted by Zuzana Znamenáčková and Petra Dobruská on 20 December 2005 in Margovany. Original: "Hin odoj gadže, man hin pre miro ofis pre kancelarija miro šefos, so man jov thovel andre buči, jov hin Slovakos Sšinatar a jekh Slovačka Popradnatar. Keren odoj duj čhon. Predtim kerlas odoj Angličanka, has amenge fejs lačes, ale akana joj amen diskrimiňinel. Koja rakli, koja Slovačka. [...] Bo džanel, kaj sam Roma."

differentiate oneself increased as the immigration of Roma from Slovakia increased. This was felt most strongly in relation to Roma who relocated to England not from Margovany, but from a neighboring Slovak village. Before the beginning of their emigration to England, in the context of inter-village relations, the Margovany Roma had considered these other Roma from the neighboring village to be *degeša*, i.e., “dirty” Roma, and differentiated themselves from them. A chief discussion topic during our research trips to the English town in 2016 and 2017 was how the Margovany Roma defined themselves vis-a-vis the Roma from that village. According to the Margovany Roma, things had been calm for them in England until these other Roma moved in, mostly sharing the same neighborhood with the Margovany Roma on the city outskirts. Even when these other Roma went into the city center, they were said by the Margovany Roma to walk around in a dirty state wearing conspicuously long skirts. One Margovany Romani man complained that nobody had ever associated the Margovany Roma in the public space with Roma until these others moved there.<sup>24</sup>

The Margovany Roma also adopted an image of English Roma that was stereotypical, and used it to explain why the English were in general hostile towards Roma:

*“Well, because there are English Roma here, they [local non-Roma] told us that they [the Roma] fight and steal. Those are the English Roma, they live in caravans, they don’t have houses. Well, that’s why some English don’t like Roma.”*<sup>25</sup>

This is also because, despite their equality narrative, the Margovany Roma still internalize the group stigmatization of Roma, so it makes sense for them to hide their ethnicity situationally. However, they have also attributed such a strategy to another group, the Pakistanis, with whom they come into contact frequently. In the English town, the Pakistanis lived in the same neighbourhood with the Roma, often owning their housing, providing

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24 In this context, we also noticed a differentiation in terminology – while in the context of the English city the Margovany Roma called the Roma from a neighboring Slovak village “gypsies”, they referred to themselves as Roma. However, from our interviews and observations, it appears that this distinction is more unique to that context than accepted generally.

25 Recording no. 2006-12-01-03. This interview with a 45-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková on 1 December 2006 in England. Original: “*Ta bo adaj so hine anglicke Roma, ta adaj denas amenge kavka duma, hoj adaj čoren, maren pes, ale oda kole anglicke Roma, so bešen andro sar karavana, nane len khera. No, ta vaš kada na kamen le Romen, poňektore Angličana.*”

taxi services, and running local shops. Especially at the beginning of their English stay, Roma used to perform “odd jobs” for the Pakistanis, aiding them with gardening and housework, etc. According to the Margovany Roma, these Pakistanis were also ethnic Roma who hid their identities – allegedly because they were trying to escape ethnic stigmatization. Two basic signs, according to the Margovany Roma, indicate their common identity with the Pakistanis: The color of their skin, and their language (the Margovany Roma noticed basic similarities between the Romani and Urdu vocabularies, especially pointing out body part terminology). Because their contact was so frequent, many local Pakistanis actually learned Romani, albeit in limited linguistic domains (we witnessed this, for example, in an interaction with a Pakistani salesperson in a local store).<sup>26</sup> Despite this belief in a common group identity (or perhaps because of it), and despite the fact that some Roma recalled friendly relations with Pakistanis, we recorded mainly negative statements from the Margovany Roma towards the Pakistanis. According to one of the Roma, the Pakistanis “*live even worse than the Roma, they don’t eat during the day, only at night, and they walk around dirty.*”<sup>27</sup> Such a statement disrupts the equality narrative in two ways – on the one hand, by defining themselves in opposition to another group, and on the other hand, through a type of argumentation (“worse than the Roma”) in which the speaker again demonstrates internalization of the group stigmatization of the Roma.<sup>28</sup> The arguments used and the boundaries between groups are patterns that are replicated, as shown by some of the Roma statements about the English:

*“However, the gadje [non-Roma] say that the Gypsies, once they have money, they drink, they go boozing and so forth. They should come take a look at England. On Monday the English go to work, on Friday they drink up all their money, over and over again.”*<sup>29</sup>

26 In this context, a statement by one Romani person is interesting from a socio-linguistic point of view, who claimed that in the presence of the Pakistanis, the Margovany Roma sometimes deliberately switched to Slovak, which they used as a secret language code (*kaj te na rozuminen* “so that they would not understand”).

27 This interview with a 41-year-old man was conducted by Jan Ort on 1 November 2016 in England. Original: “*Jon mek goreder dživen sar Roma. Jon na chan dživese, ča rači. Melales pen uren.*”

28 This same type of argumentation is described by Ort in his work on Roma in Slovakia (2017: 43).

29 Recording no. 2007-02-17-03. This interview with a 40-year-old man was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Zuzana Znamenáčková on 17 February 2007 in England. The interview was in Romani but the speaker partially switched into Slovak, a fact we will not analyze here.

When considering boundaries between groups, their replication, and the principles governing their creation, it is necessary to take into account that new forms of intragroup and intergroup differentiation have arisen through the very phenomena of transnational migration and religious conversion. The community in Margovany had naturally showed signs of the hierarchization of its internal social structure already at the beginning of our research, i.e., in the period “before migration” and “before conversion”. In the language of the locals, one level of such hierarchization was expressed by their division into *uprune Roma* (“the higher Roma”) and *telune Roma* (“the lower Roma”). Although this division did copy, to a large extent, the delimitation of the Margovany settlement’s territory (as the names suggest, the *uprune Roma* inhabited its upper part and the *telune Roma* its lower part), the boundary was defined far more by one’s membership in the *fajta*, i.e., a broader family unit.<sup>30</sup> Within this division, the category of *uprune Roma* was associated with higher social status, and it was the *uprune Roma* who, in the local context, became the driving force behind the observed phenomena (Dobruská 2018).

The boundary between converts and non-converts has prompted strong emotions since its inception. Aspects of the Margovany Romani people’s spiritual world and their concepts of important rituals have been redefined by their new Pentecostal faith. Such changes, as well as the newly-defined relationships they entail, became not just central discussion topics for a time, but also sources of conflict within the group. Although the conversions copied the boundaries between the *uprune* and *telune* somewhat, whereby the *uprune* were the main converts, in some cases these conversions also led to nuclear families partially splitting. The burden in emotional terms and the conflict caused by these boundaries decreased over time, but the categories that were created remained valid, although belonging to them could be an ambiguous, dynamic, situational matter (cf. in England, the Pentecostal services’ social function). Such category validity did not just apply to the community of the Margovany Roma, but also to the entire field of our monitoring in the transnational sense. Such categories could, therefore, be applied to define relationships within the English environment, relationships with non-Romani villagers in Slovakia, and also communities of Roma and their relationships with each other in the region’s sub-villages.

Boundaries that were new were created by migration, which also intensified pre-existing ones. Chiefly within the community of Margovany Roma, a distinction was drawn between the Roma in England and the Roma in Slovakia as a spatial matter, even though movement between these places

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30 It must be specified that these were not static categories, but dynamic ones that could be handled in different ways in different situations.



remained quite dynamic. However, given the general interconnectedness of these places, this was not a matter of delineating those who had migrated and those who did not, but rather separating those who had profited from this movement of money and people from those for whom such movement never yielded any profit. Again, at the beginning of the research, this migration mainly concerned the *uprune Roma*, and later lower-status Roma also became involved in it. Even so, when it came to participating in this transnational movement, increasing inequalities surfaced within the community of Margovany Roma in Slovakia. As with the cases of conversion, boundaries were established involving inter-community relations in this eastern region of Slovakia and its villages.

## 5 A destination locality?

Using an example from the Margovany Roma's transnational migration, or rather, of one family in particular, we will analyze briefly and problematize the concept of a "destination locality of migration". We have seen that theories of transnational migration are defined in contrast to the bipolar concept in which migrants are "uprooted" from one place and integrated into another. In a context of migration that is transnational, the "destination" and the "sending" localities can be contextually perceived, rather than as expressing a finality to such movement. It is dynamic, and the destination locality, in the eyes of the Margovany Roma, need not have been a city in England; as many as 900 of them were living in England in 2015 (Prokeš at al 2016: 207).

We can cite the story of Ferko, born in Beránky, a Moravian town, to Margovany Romani parents, to illustrate these dynamics. He and his parents had to leave Beránky due to housing loss and returned to their home village to live with relatives in Slovakia shortly after the turn of the millennium. Ferko found his life partner Margita there, they had three children, and they emigrated to England as a family.

In July 2015, we met them in Margovany, where they had arrived back from England and were preparing to apply for asylum in Canada. During our interview, Margita summed up their motivation as follows:

*"It doesn't matter if we're far away or near. Wherever there is a better life is where we will go. Here [in Slovakia] nothing works... We'd like to remain here, because home is home, but nothing works here..."*<sup>31</sup>

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31 Recording no. 2015-07-03-01. This interview with a 31-year-old woman was conducted by Petra Dobruská and Jan Ort on 13 July 2015 in Margovany. Original: "*Tá oda jekh, či hin dur či paše, ta kaj hin feder dživipen odoj džaha.*"

The bonds to home that they expressed were also confirmed by their investments into real estate – Ferko and Margita built a house in the Margovany settlement:

*“This is security, right, if something were to happen there, then back home we have a house. I won’t be dependent on anybody.”<sup>32</sup>*

During our visit to England in November 2016, we encountered this family once more. Once in Canada, they spent exactly one year there before returning to the English town. Margita cited their distance from their families as their reason for returning to England:

*“Dad kept calling me to come home because we were so far away. If anything were to happen there, we wouldn’t get home in time.”<sup>33</sup>*

Given that Margita’s parents (and also Ferko’s) lived in Margovany at the time and were not in contact physically on a regular basis with their descendants during their English stays, the difference was not as much about a distance that was physical as it was about a distance that was symbolic. Asylum-seekers had a different status, the border was of a different nature, and the different economic capital needed to travel “home” to Slovakia made Canada more distant than England in a significantly symbolic sense. In addition to being too far from her own family, Margita mentioned the disruption of other social ties, namely, those provided by their Pentecostal congregations in England (and in Slovakia). In Canada there had been a Pentecostal church, but the character of its pastor hadn’t suited them. In the context of adaptation to an environment that was new, the Pentecostal congregation holds an important place in the argumentation of these migration narratives, as demonstrated by the following statement:

*“He [the pastor] is a kind of, how can I explain it to you – I didn’t feel from him that he’s a pastor. About God, he spoke well, everybody knows how to speak about God, but I didn’t feel what you’re meant to [feel].*

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*A adaj pes na del ňisoha... bi kamas adaj te ačhol, bo khere hin khere, na, aľe adaj pes na del ňisoha...”*

32 Ibid. Original: “*Kavka hin istota, na, te vareso pes ačhol odaj, khere hin kher. Hoj na som pre varekaste zavislo.*”

33 Recording no. 2016-11-03-01. This interview with a 32-year-old woman was conducted by Jan Ort on 3 November 2016 in England. Original: “*Furt vičnlas o dad mange, hoj te džav khere, bo hoj dur sam, hoj či ačhel pes vareso abo so najši khere te dochudes.*”

*We'd accustomed ourselves already to congregations that are different, you understand, we fit in there [in those congregations]. However, there [in the Canadian congregations] we – I didn't fit in there, not at all.*”<sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup>

In December 2017, during another of our visits to England, Margita confided her plans to leave the town and move elsewhere within England. In her own words, her aim was to go somewhere where there would not be so many Roma. Her position shows that, despite the anonymity in ethnic terms that had been formulated originally as an opportunity, and despite the equality, an association with other Roma in the context of that city had begun to be perceived as an increasingly obvious stigma, one that it was difficult to extricate oneself from locally.

This development can be contextualized in a circumstance where the ethnic boundaries were hardening, and it can be illustrated by the aforementioned introduction of an ethnically-homogenous Pentecostal congregation; by the increase in the number of Roma in the city (and not just Margovany Roma); and also by the overall sociopolitical context, whereby in connection with what was called the migration crisis in England (and not just there), there was an increase in sentiment that was xenophobic and anti-immigrant, irrespective of how long immigrants had been living in the country. The Brexit referendum took place in such a situation, and the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union was voted for on 23 June 2016. The situation around Brexit increased the Margovany Romani community's uncertainty, as they did not know whether and under what circumstances they would be able to stay in England.

## 6 Conclusion

In this study, with regard to contemporary migration theories, we have attempted to disrupt bipolar migration perception through the example of the transnational community of the Margovany Roma. We have shown that such a community maintains a group identity that is transnational and exhibits the features described by Uherek for the construction of boundaries within a group in the context of their migration: a) the constant flow of information, b) concern

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34 Ibid. Original: “*Jov ajso hino sar te bi, sar tuke phenava, me lestar na čujinavas avka pasteris, sar pasteris, Proste lačhes delas дума pal o Del, a oda sako džanel pal o Del дума te del, ale na čujinavas koda, so majines. Amen pre aver varesave sbori sam sikhade, rozumines, hoj te pasinel amenge kodoj, no ale kodoj mange na pasinlas, nič.*”

35 This can certainly be seen as a rationalization of an unsuccessful migration. However, we are dealing here with the type of argument used irrespective of its basis in reality.

for other group members, c) informing others about oneself, d) gifting and visiting (Uherek 2018; see above). At the same time, the importance of such transnational ties must be perceived with regard to the social context as well as in relation to different generations of Margovany Roma. We pointed out that the generation who were the youngest, who had already grown up in England, had a different relationship to the “home” Slovak village than the generations who were older, including with regard to their competence or incompetence in different languages. It is highly likely that such an intergenerational movement in relation to such transnational ties could also be observed in Beránky in Moravia, but we did not carry out further research there.

Although we want to disrupt the bipolarity of the perception of “the old Slovakia” vs. “the new England”, it is necessary to recall that the Margovany Romani people’s statements were often based on such a dichotomy. The migration narratives set up in this way demonstrated many of the features that appeared in the migration narratives about the postwar time in Czechoslovakia when Roma relocated from Slovakia to Bohemia (racism vs. acceptance as equals; socioeconomic stagnation vs. upward socioeconomic mobility). At this point, we are not concerned with denying the opportunities which an environment that is new provides, but rather with pointing out the replication of the narrative patterns used within the framework of capitalizing on one’s experience of migration. We have demonstrated the replication of these narrative patterns and the conditioning, situationally, of their use, regardless of their connection to a specific place, through the story of Ferko and Margita, who associated the environment of the English town, gradually, with socio-economic stagnation. In their case we also problematized the dichotomy of a “destination” vs. a “sending” locality. On the contrary, what would usually be called the “sending” locality was often perceived by the Margovany Roma as the “target” of their capitalization of their experience of migration, whether that takes a format that is material or that is narrative. Just as the boundary becomes blurred between what is “foreign” and what is “home”, the boundary of religious conversion was also context-dependent and dynamic to a great extent. As we have demonstrated, Pentecostal congregations played a role that was significant in gaining social ties in the environment that was new to the Roma, as well as later in the community’s interdependence transnationally, or when ethnic boundaries hardened. However, many Roma did become part of the Pentecostal church even though they differed from this “new faith” and at first, for example, would return to Slovakia for the purpose of the Roman Catholic baptism of their own newborn children.

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