

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsnP42ljwCA>

The anti-roma march in Breclav was kind of anti, primarily against something. People mobilized themselves not on a basis of a positive statement or values. They mobilized against violence, against attack on one of them (never mind boy's Ukrainian origin) and mostly against Roma people, who were and are believed to be responsible for the violent attacks and criminal activities. This is one side of a coin. However, there is other one.

There were over 2000 people marching through the city. We don't know much about them. We have no statistics, no idea about their age, education, employment, income. But still, there is something about them. Never mind missing "objective" data and other identifiers, because people who marched left traces which we can still read and research. These traces contain information about themselves, their self-perception, and perception of their situation, values, needs and feelings. This is the other side of a coin. What do these people have in common, what brought them together against Roma, what do they share in terms of who they are?

We could speak in terms of in-group and out-group, which in their generality allows to capture wide picture of group self-perception. Out-group stands for such representation of a group or values, which are rejected and depicted as undesirable or even threatening. We will get back to the out-group and specifically an image of Roma later [*not present in this paper, perhaps later this year* 😊]. On the other hand, in-group stands for a representation of a group to which a person belongs or considers herself to belong. In-group may represent values, experience and worldview, which are shared by more or less imagined community. Well, was there a sense of an in-group related to the Breclav anti-Roma march?

The contexts and themes which frame person's feeling of group membership are surprisingly limited. References about "ourselves" and depictions of "us", usually paired with the anti-image of "them", Roma, are organized around three themes. Firstly, seeing ourselves as a "moderates" in contrast to fascists, radicals or extremists, secondly, feeling urge to unite ourselves against threat coming from Roma, and thirdly considering ourselves as a cornered victims not only of Roma violence, but of the media and state institutions as well.

Aim of this paper is to reconstruct a worldview which shaped Breclav anti-Roma march based on a false allegation in April 2012. Peter, then 15 years old injured himself during Sunday evening. While trying to impress his friends by "balcony gymnastics" he fell and hit a rail hard. He phoned for help to his mother and made an excuse that he was attacked by three because he couldn't have given them single cigarette they were demanding. Due to this "attack" he lost his kidney. One of the attackers, Peter told his mother, was of a dark skin. Peter's mother did not hesitate and publicly indicted Roma people being responsible for the "attack". The timeline below sums up affairs of one week during which the greatest mobilization of Breclav citizens ever happened.

15.4.2012	Sunday	Peter is found injured, allegedly attacked by three near Shopping Centre around 8.30 PM
16.4.2012	Monday	FB march event is created
17.4.2012	Tuesday	Municipality still didn't receive march announcement, media reports about the case
18.4.2012	Wednesday	Worker's Youth delivers a march announcement (in the morning), media reports
19.4.2012	Thursday	FB event is deleted, new one is founded
20.4.2012	Friday	
21.4.2012	Saturday	Mayor's meets Romas in church
22.4.2012	Sunday	March of 2000+ people against Roma violence

### **Being moderate**

Let's have a closer look at the meaning of being moderate. The origin of a need to assign ourselves on the axis of radicalism-moderateness can be traced to the involvement of radical right-wing Social Justice Worker's Party (Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti, DSSS), which predecessor Worker's Party (Dělnická strana, DS) was banned and outlawed by a court because of its political goals aimed to violate democracy and human rights. There was a clear personal continuity between two parties and the ban moved its members toward more sophisticated forms of political play and communication. Nevertheless, during a week preceding the Sunday anti-Roma march the people organizing the march via Facebook event were unable to notify local authorities about the march which is required by a law. The notification is a rather simple process and involve a filling a simple form which is then delivered to a local municipality. Due to inaction of the local march initiators the DSSS had sensed their opportunity to step in:

"There were over 2000 people "attending" [the march Facebook event] and number kept growing. She [Veronika, the march main initiator and Peter's friend] was unable to arrive to Breclav to legalize it, bunch of people said they will march no matter the legal status. She was still unable to get here so DSSS seized the opportunity to legalize the march. In the end Vandas [DSSS leader] used the march for his campaign [presidential elections]." [Misa interview]

Engagement of DSSS meant a frame-shift of Breclav's march. Firstly, the march was organized by Peter's teenage friends via Facebook event. The event extremely quickly gained strong momentum and its support rose rapidly. Until the DSSS involvement was the march initiative framed as an effort of Peter's friends aimed to promote more security for the town and its citizens. Nevertheless, the anti-Roma sentiment was present since beginning - when first Facebook event was created. The announcement of march by DSSS brought frame-shift and the march was since Wednesday labeled as organized by radical right wing extremists from Worker's Youth organization, which is closely tied to DSSS.

Involvement of DSSS and labeling the march as radical or extreme resulted in a new delimitation of people going to attend the march. Overnight were people re-labeled as extremists:

"One day there was 1000 people "attending" [FB event] and television reported about citizens planning a march. Following day there was 2000 of us and Worker's Youth announced the march. Suddenly, according to evening TV news I and all other people were part of 2000 right-wing radicals going to arrive to Breclav." [FB event post]

Even if people willing to march or march's supporters were of anti-Roma setting, they strongly refused to be mixed up with radicals. The media were blamed for frame-shift: "Don't listen to the media that we will march hand in hand with extremists. That's what they want..." [FB event post]. Other people tried to reframe the event back: "Nobody cares that it is our security, Pete and equity what we are after. Don't label us as fascists, nazis etc." [FB event] The explicit effort to maintain distance from right-wing radicals was still present during and after the march, when some people perceived the presence of radicals negatively:

"From my perspective it's beneficial that the march was attended even by parents with their children and by plenty of decent [slušný] people. Unfortunately Worker's Party supported by shouting primitives degraded the discussion with the mayor into sad slapstick [fraška]." [FB event]

The innocent example is at hand. Immediately after the march was formally ended a group of people set out toward the district known for presence of Roma inhabitants. The aim of this venture was to "set things straight" [Misa interview] with Roma living in Breclav. Part of this venture is captured in [aforementioned video](#). Despite the effort to directly confront Roma with their assumed guilt, leaving the march, going to the zone guarded by police at Riegrova Street, march attendees were understood to be moderate:

"It was written everywhere that radical rushed toward Riegrova street. There was me, my sister, girl-friend of mine, explicitly normal people aged as my parents. There definitely weren't some radicals laying a siege as it was presented in television and other media." [Misa interview]

The perception of normality was preserved even during the activities which could be interpreted as out of comfort zone of an ordinary citizen. The boundary of moderateness shifted heavily especially when the security was concerned. The role of radical right-wingers officially organizing the march was rendered insignificant due to perceived extraordinariness of situation in Breclav:

"It doesn't matter who organize it, it doesn't matter who will walk next to you. What matters is to say explicitly that you have had enough, that's what connect people going to attend the Sunday march. Pete is a symbol of what happened to many people here in recent years. I cross fingers for him and all other victims so they can have opportunity to live their life fully despite their injuries." [FB event]

Being called extremist was undesirable for Breclav citizens. Everything they did and how they reacted was normal, adequate to the situation, then why label them as extreme? Even if they

refused to be framed as extremists, room was open for their association with the “real” extremists due to “lack of security” in the town.

The sense of security at stake was closely related to the extent of distance to the radicals from DSSS. Sense of security on one hand, and feelings of threat and danger on the other hand, define other cluster related to the people self-perception which I named cornered victims.

### **Cornered victims**

When browsing the data, Facebook comments, I developed a notion of people feeling cornered. They situated themselves into a position of being desperate and in a situation featuring immediate danger with no easy way out. Also common way of describing this was through self-victimization, understanding themselves as victims of Roma violence, idleness of authorities and media propaganda. On one hand, being cornered victim was constituted by Roma factor, on the other hand it was constituted by social powers - media and state institutions.

Let's take up once again the positioning to the DSSS, which changes profoundly when we take the "cornered victims" factor into account. The distinction between moderates and radicals almost disappears when there is a strong feeling of threat:

"I am definitely not a fan of DSSS, I have no twitch in my right arm [reference to hailing]. But I would rather shake fascist hand than gypsy's one. And I would rather watch a crew of hailing extremists than see how brownish-Czechs [Roma] attack white Czechs with almost no punishment, destroy their lives and do whatever they want to in our country. That's us who are home here, not them! I don't want to wait until moment I'll fear to let my children play in a park and let them be kicked to death by some bushmen!" [FB event]

Radicals appear to be much more normal and acceptable under the condition of perception of immediate Roma related threat. Well, there is something we share with these radicals, it is our country and our homeland we have in common. This is still only first step how normality of radicals is endorsed and moderates are brought closer to them. The second step moving radicals toward normalcy involves translating their position instead of threatening one into protecting one:

"We have one problem in common! We are not indifferent to the security of your town and you label us as a neo-Nazi? You let yourselves being fed by media that it is our opportunity to make troubles? Excuse me but when you or even your child will be laying on ground begging for help due to attack of unadjustable... You will be grateful for help of any DSSS supporter. The march is happening in order to change something, achieve something and demonstrate we want our rights!"

The definition of the march's goals remains vague, the stress is put on an issue of security and possible threat credited to the unadjustable, in other words, Roma. The willingness to defend against Roma moves radicals into position of only true representatives of citizens' needs. This position is characterized by inner ambivalence. On one hand, it positively responds to the necessity of protection and people's wish to set an alliance with a power able to protect them.

On the other hand, there is still feeling of danger caused by pollutedness of DSSS by their Nazi-like name and their radicalism:

"I am scared that only one who at least promise help to avoid situation of my daughter being raped and cut by razor by gypsies is Worker's and other nationalist parties. We are regressing before 1930 when a specific person also promised better future and bread for children. It wasn't fault of the "herd" they needed to feed their children. Are politicians willing to let things get out of the control in a name of humanity and racial tolerance and force us to vote for radicals? Unfortunately it is already happening! There is something rotten in this state!" [FB event]

The distance between moderates and radicals is thus almost eliminated due to fear of Roma and security concerns. The fear of Roma is a constant factor shaping people's definition of situation: "When I walk down the town and see gypsies or even gipsy kids I rather cross to the other side of a street, that's something they would never have done. So who fears who?????" [FB event] No matter whofhjf=

actually are the guys labeled as Roma, they are associated with fear. Moreover, this fear prevents person from getting into contact with Roma, and if they get into contact with Roma, a fear pre-forms way how person relates to Roma in advance before any actual interaction could have started.

It seems there are no more options left. At least during a week prior the march was situation framed as pressuring and demanding immediate action in order to restore safety and control over public space. [*reference to a chapter – code Place*] The space in which situation was defined was drastically narrowed and the urgency went up. In this narrower space the distance between radicals a moderates had been closing.

### **Police against us**

The police became part of a Breclav controversy as well. Surprisingly almost nobody cared about the investigation. Mayor's effort to frame Petr's case as a criminal deed which have to be investigated was ignored and the police was mostly discussed in the frame of protecting guilty Roma against justice. Ongoing investigation was rendered irrelevant and the role of the police was understood in a context of upcoming march. Police was anticipated to be on "their" side protecting gypsies: "I think the police will disperse us and who knows if they won't even attack us, and gypsies will be protected. And we will be for the racists." However, there are some reservations concerning the consciousness of individual policemen. "They have to stand on their side. Police are prostitutes hired by government. Many of them would rather march with us, but they can't." Nevertheless the police, which was protecting the neighborhoods where live some Roma families, was irreversibly label not as an ally investigating a Roma violence, but force protecting Roma and therefore Roma's ally:

"Policemen were against us. We went there calm, we wanted walk there [Riegrova street] to show them we won't be intimidated, we had no violent intentions. But police was against us from the beginning. Everything was against us." [Misa interview]

Another march participant had expressed himself quite clearly: "Fuck the police. If they are incapable to establish order in the city then we shall do it!" The police was thus translated from part of the solution into part of the problem. Firstly police have to change and start to deal with Roma with no excuses and then change will come. However, it must be noted that content and way of expressing opinion differed sharply between communication platforms. When there was a platform where a police officer directly responded to inquiries the overall character of conversation moved and became more moderate and respectful, as is demonstrated by thankful comments and slightly optimistic outlook: "Thank you for extensive answer. Upcoming summer season will test how it [safety measures] will work - hopefully to its best."

However, the main communication platform of FB march event was with no interaction with any of the police representatives. Therefore the police was voiceless and their intentions were exclusively translated by the march-mongers, who didn't hesitate to suggest that police will actively seek conflicts in order to pollute a decency of the march: "We have to be careful, the police use to put provocateurs into action in order to discredit the march and justify possible intervention." To sum up, people felt cornered by police too. When the police was rendered as not on our side, joining the crowd in order to set things straight in so-called Roma neighborhood, preventing people from setting things straight, they became Roma ally and therefore enemy of ordinary citizen.

### **Mayor and town council against us**

Local authorities failed to recognize the graveness of people's determination from the event's outset. Widely spread anger mixed with fear was addressed by mayor by emphasizing ongoing investigation and presenting safety measures which the town was going to put in place. This strategy didn't work and mayor failed to be perceived as one of us. None of the local politicians didn't explicitly state a support for the march, quite contrary they were seen as trying to ban the march: "Members of town-council were looking for ways how to cancel the event, however the ministry of internal affairs recommended to allow the march." [FB event] From the perspective of an informant was the mayor solely responsible for the attempt to ban the march:

"During last-minutes the mayor consulted lawyer in order to find out how to ban the march. On Friday it wasn't still clear [2 days to the march] if the march will happen, because the lawyers were analyzing if the announcement was flawless and delivered in the right time to find a weak spot and ban the march. But they couldn't cancel it, there was a lot of people organized on Facebook and posters were all around the town." [Misa interview]

Mayor did not communicate directly to the citizens. His speeches were delivered through town's Facebook page or local newspaper, however there was no real dialog. Only opportunity to communicate directly was a meeting held in local church where citizens including local Roma were invited. However the invitation was poorly communicated and the meeting was attended mostly by local Roma. This was understood as a grave sin of the mayor, to ignore local decent people on one hand and to associate with polluted Roma on the other hand:

"Instead of talking with citizens of this city who orderly pay taxes he is building his ego [honí si tričko] where he shouldn't have!!! Now we will cry even louder!!! This is not our mayor!!!!" [FB event]

Mayor's acting was adversely affected by his indecisiveness and inability to connect with local citizens. It wasn't clear if he was going to speak to the crowd at a main square where town council is located and where was the march's destination as well. Due to this lack of determination or missing a plan for acting a total failure followed. There was no sound system ready for the speakers, and when mayor had decided to speak to people he was barely audible:

"Mayor had demonstrated to all white Breclav citizens amount of respect he has for us. He wasn't hearable, perhaps he had nothing to say. But what's important is that the gypsies could hear him very well in a church. The mayor is shame of this town!" [FB event]

Mayor failing to address people was swiftly utilized by DSSS and their leader, who were equipped with a sound system: "Mayor's "speech" annoyed people and expelled them to the other side of the square to Vandas [DSSS leader], who got unnecessary attention" [FB event]. Radical leader's speech was evaluated as a success especially when compared to the mayor: "Vandas was right in everything he said. I hope this mayor is there [in office] for the last time." [FB event]

Two important local actors, the police and members of town council, were rather performed and framed by the march-mongers. We can see that during a week prior the march the police, local authorities and Roma were perceived as forming alliance against decent people, which was a great opportunity for DSSS who could fill in themselves into emptied role of citizen's protector.

## **Unite!**

"Remember our history. When we were Husite [medieval army in name of Jan Hus, Christian reformer] we were unbeatable even when facing bigger armies. But when we got divided we were beaten at once. Czech land for Czechs!" [FB event]

Being cornered forced people to unite themselves and fight a threat together. The theme of being united and being fractioned appeared as a condition in order to successfully overcome the Roma violence. This aspect represents a self-reflection resulting in analysis of own strengths and weaknesses. In-group was understood as too much fragmented and the march was translated as a unique opportunity to reunion once more: "We shall prove that we are not totally frustrated nation and that we are still able to unite ourselves, hold together even when there are individuals who wants to sabotage it at any cost" [FB event].

The goal of being united has a two-fold effect. One is to eliminate differences of in-group: "There is democracy and I don't care whether one hails and the other do drugs. When there are such problems we have to stand firmly together, we are Czechs!" [FB event]. The march has

invoked experience of official mass events during the communist regime years ago, but presently translated as of a positive value:

“We will need a poster stating: Who stands aside does not love the republic! It is an old slogan from communist time though, but is still valid!”

“You know what? I miss these times...” [FB event]

The other effect of being united leads to Roma people, who are considered to be united: “They [Roma] stands together as we don’t, and unanimously hate us :)” [FB event] Uniting of in-group shall balance this disadvantage. Roma are perceived mostly as group which is threatening and common negative experience with Roma is related to a situation, when decent individual faces a Roma gang which threatens her. The same mechanism is celebrated as a possible cure for Breclav: “We still outnumber them [Roma] and it’s time to show them who is a majority and how they shall behave!” [FB event]

The goal is to threaten Roma in very same way as they threaten us. When someone suggests forming a citizen association which would propose solutions and negotiate with authorities, it is considered to be useless because it won’t scare Roma:

“No civic initiative has never ever resolved anything. March will at least show how many people are upset. They will fear the mass of people much more than three members of an initiative.” [FB event]

The urge to regain lost unity underlies all the march. This unity shall be based on a fear, on one hand fear of Roma, and on the other hand to intimidate Roma.

## **Conclusion**

When we assume a worldview as is described above we won’t wonder about necessity of marching through Breclav, it will be a natural necessity and even moral obligation to attend. Breclav march was definitely multi-actor performance, however many important actors weren’t able to enforce their voice and push their definition of situation close to the ears of Breclav citizens. The part of the mayor is the most tragic. He was totally disregarded by march-goers and his lack of communication caused that he was defined by the march. March took over him and over the way how was the local government represented. The same applies for police.

What does it mean? It explains monolithic worldview among march-goers who gradually found themselves associated more with radical right-wingers who come to South-Eastern Breclav from North-West of Czech Republic. DSSS, controversial at first, gained support from locals, who at the same time developed profound distrust to their political representatives and a raw hatred for local Roma living in Breclav. What is ironical is the effort to unite. March-goers are associating with neo-Nazis from completely distant region of Czech Republic in order to demarcate themselves from their fellow citizens, Roma and politicians.



We shall not forget that a stimuli of a march was completely fabricated. The Roma community (I wonder if there is such thing in Breclav at all) was acted upon. No matter what Roma did could have influenced the sequence of events. They were spoken by march-mongers, by Peter's mother, their image and reputation were ready to use in advance. The Roma was the most significant actor in whole performance, however the Roma was the least autonomous actor at the same time. They were re-created and re-presented by march-goers in line with their worst stereotypes and these stereotypes spoke on Roma behalf.

It must be noted that whole story consisting of various segments holds together by glue of fear. The fear was an exclusive commodity of DSSS which allowed them to close distance between them and locals. Being cornered is internally linked to a fear, victim fears aggressor. And the fear is the march's main tool in order to regain the town, Roma must be intimidated. Fear is closely tied to anger, when the social structure allows to retaliate the fear transforms into anger and possibly aggression as well [citation The Logic and Meaning of Anger Among...]. The march can be seen as an attempt to gain a leverage over specific social group and to legitimize its inferior status.

*Informal conclusion. Oh, I am sleepy and cannot do more right now. The conclusion is terribly incomplete. Moreover, the paper lacks theory and relies heavily on a few sources, my bad. I will deliver more soon. This is just a beginning, promise.*

Sources:

FB event - <https://www.facebook.com/events/277738568980830/>

Footage from Riegrova street, English subtitles -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsnP42ljwCA>

The interview with Misa, march-goer

And some more.