

“The Woman was man and woman”

For a woman living within a traditional family it is (or was) very important to observe the rules that referred to clean and unclean. According to Rüdiger Vossen, the rules of avoidance and of cleanliness for groups of a high consciousness in terms of tradition are linked to the following fields: the female body and organs, the differentiation of the genders in relation with age, the separation from the non-Roma, hygiene, the preparation of food, and death. On the other hand, Roma groups who have been leading a settled life for a long time (for example the Burgenland-Roma) have completely lost these customs. When they were washing they had to clearly separate the ladies clothes from the mens. If a woman had made a mistake in this context, that would have been, like emphasised by Mrs. E., “infamous”. “I don’t know how to express that in German. We called it *prasto*.”

If taboos or cleanliness rules are seriously offended the *kris*, the court of the *Sinti*, decided about possible punishments. In the case of severe offences a person could remain a *prasto* for all their life. The consequences – e.g. the expulsion from the common meal – do not sound very terrible for non-Roma but for a traditional *Sinti* or a *Sintiza* on the contrary, for whom a life outside the group would not be imaginable and the honour is of a special relevance, such consequences represent extremely severe punishments.

The question about the origin of the orders is not asked. Mrs. E., “Like tales are passed on, these traditions are also passed on. The one has learnt it from the other one – and so on. I cannot imagine who would have asked.” Mozes Heinschink emphasises that such rules and traditions disappear when they are questioned. An expulsion from the group is nearly like a death sentence for a traditional *Rom*. It was the most severe punishment the *kris* could impose. In terms of customs, uses and living conditions of the non-Gypsies, many of them are strictly refused by the traditional Roma and Sinti, for example the idea to pass the twilight of one’s life in an old people’s home or to put there a relative.

[Eder-Jordan, Beate (1998) "Die Frau war Mann und Frau." Zur Stellung der Frau bei Sinti und Roma. Gespräch über ein tabuisiertes Thema. In: Stimme von und für Minderheiten, 28/3, pp. 12-15.]