

Extracted from **We Are the Romani People**, Chapter 4

ROMANIES AND THE HOLOCAUST: A REEVALUATION AND AN OVERVIEW

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"It was the wish of the all-powerful Reichsfuhrer Adolf Hitler to have the Gypsies disappear from the face of the earth"

(SS Officer Percy Broad, Auschwitz Political Division)¹

"The motives invoked to justify the death of the Gypsies were the same as those ordering the murder of the Jews, and the methods employed for the one were identical with those employed for the other"

(Miriam Novitch, Ghetto Fighters' House, Israel)²

"The genocide of the Sinti and Roma was carried out from the same motive of racial mania, with the same premeditation, with the same wish for the systematic and total extermination as the genocide of the Jews. Complete families from the very young to the very old were systematically murdered within the entire sphere of influence of the National Socialists"

(Roman Herzog, Federal President of Germany, 16 March 1997)

Miriam Novitch refers above to the motives put forth to justify the murder of the Romanies, or "Gypsies," in the Holocaust, though in her small but groundbreaking book she is only partly right: both Jews and Romanies did indeed share the common status- along with the handicapped- of being targeted for elimination because of the threat they were perceived to pose to the pristine gene-pool of the German Herrenvolk or "Master Race;" but while the Jews were considered a threat on a number of other grounds as well, political, philosophical and economic, the Romanies were only ever a "racial" threat.

Earlier writings on the Holocaust, however, either did not recognise this at all, or else failed to understand that the "criminality" associated with our people was attributed by the Nazis to a genetically transmitted and incurable disease, and was therefore ideologically racial; instead, writers focused only on the "antisocial" label resulting from it and failed to acknowledge the genetic connection made by the Nazi race scientists themselves. In 1950 the Württemberg Ministry of the Interior issued a statement to the judges hearing war crimes restitution claims that they should keep in mind that "the Gypsies were persecuted under the National Socialist regime not for any racial reason, but because of their criminal and antisocial record," and twenty-one years later the Bonn Convention took advantage of this as justification for not paying reparations to Romanies, claiming that the reasons for their victimization during the Nazi period were for reasons of security only. Not one person spoke out to challenge that position, the consequences of which have hurt the survivors and their descendants beyond measure,

though at that time the French genealogist Montandon did observe, however, that "everyone despises Gypsies, so why exercise restraint? Who will avenge them? Who will complain? Who will bear witness?"³ .

The past two or three decades have seen a tremendous increase in Holocaust-focused activities, in the establishment of museums and memorials, and in the creation of educational programs for the schools. Hand in hand with this has emerged an increasingly strident debate over how the Holocaust is to be defined, and who does or does not qualify for inclusion in it. The Anti-Defamation League's website defines Holocaust as "the systematic persecution and annihilation of more than six million Jews as a central act of state by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945." The program for the 33rd Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches defines it as "the Nazi attempt to annihilate European Jewry," and makes no mention in its pages of Romanies. In February 1987, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum organized a conference entitled Other Victims which included a panel on Romanies, but it included no Romanies either in its organization or among its presenters; at this time (Summer 2003) there is no Romani representation on the Holocaust Council at all. An international conference entitled The Roma, a Minority in Europe: Historical, Social and Cultural Perspectives held at Tel Aviv University in December, 2002 similarly had no Romanies among its organizers or speakers. Yet it would be unthinkable to have a conference on the fate of Jews in the Holocaust that had no Jewish involvement. We cannot be treated any differently.

Guenther Lewy⁴ has attempted to argue that not only were our people not a part of the Holocaust, but that our fate at the hands of the Nazis did not even qualify as an attempted genocidal action; a similar position has been taken more recently by Margalit⁵. Already during the question and answer session at a talk I gave in 2001⁶, a member of the audience called out-following my statement that the Romanies were only ever a racial threat-"and nothing more!" It is this competitive- and I must say meanly motivated and defensive-attitude which I want to question and challenge. It is unscholarly and unprofessional in the context of the Holocaust especially, and it serves no purpose to diminish the fate of the Romanies; instead it must only reflect badly upon those who attempt to do so. If the Holocaust is to teach us anything, it is concern for the treatment of human beings at the hands of other human beings, and the wicked senselessness of hating others for being different. The present-day relevance of this is clear from a recent editorial in The Economist which stated that the Romanies in Europe were "at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator: the poorest, the most unemployed, the least educated, the shortest-lived, the most welfare dependent, the most imprisoned and the most segregated"⁷. More energy is expended on making their case by those seeking to distance Romanies from the Holocaust than on examining the relevance of the Holocaust to the Romanies' present-day condition.

In an article published in 1996 I listed several of the arguments that have been made for diminishing the Porrajmos, or Romani Holocaust⁸, addressing each one in turn. In practically every case, statements were made which were simply wrong-the result of assuming a situation to have existed or not existed without bothering to check the

historical record. Several writers have written that there was no Final Solution of the Gypsy Question, for example Breitman (1991:20) who wrote "whatever its weaknesses, 'Final Solution' at least applies to a single, specific group defined by descent. The Nazis are not known to have spoken of the Final Solution of the Polish problem or of the gypsy problem." Nevertheless the earliest Nazi document referring to "the introduction of the total solution to the Gypsy problem on either a national or an international level" was drafted under the direction of State Secretary Hans Pfundtner of the Reichs Ministry of the Interior in March, 1936, and the first specific reference to "the final solution of the Gypsy question" was made by Adolf Würth of the Racial Hygiene Research Unit in September, 1937. The first official Party statement to refer to the endgültige Lösung der Zigeunerfrage was issued in March, 1938, signed by Himmler.

Without getting into what has been cynically called the "Suffering Olympics," since my more subjective feelings on the matter have already appeared elsewhere¹⁰, I will instead try to provide an overview of the details and sequence of Nazi action against Romanies for those for whom this information is new. I have paid a price for my outspokenness and have lost friends and support from some quarters, while certainly gaining it anew in others. I put it to those who have turned away from me to look deep into their own hearts and ask themselves why-really why-they have done so, when nothing I have written has been fabricated or ever written with malicious intent.

While it is true that all of the 'minimizing' rhetoric originates with some Jewish authors, I must hasten to add that most of the arguments in support of the Romani case originate with Jewish scholars too; indeed, almost the entire body of research on the Romani Holocaust is the result of Jewish scholarship. Despite the naysayers, the Jews are practically the only friends we have, and we recognize that.

The reasons for antigypsyism are complex, and are the result of several different factors coming together over time. I have discussed these in more detail in another essay¹¹, but briefly these are (a) that because the first Romanies to arrive in Europe did so at the same time as, and because of, the Ottoman Turkish takeover of the Christian Byzantine Empire they were therefore perceived to be equally a threat; (b) the fact that Romanies were a non-white, non-Christian, alien population (c) the fact that Romanies have never had claim to a geographical territory or have had an economy, militia or government, and (d) the fact that culture itself maintains a strict social boundary between Romanies and the non-Romani world. These resulted in excessively barbaric methods of control from the very time of arrival in Europe at the end of the 13th century, which included murder and torture, transportation and enslavement. The greatest tragedy to befall the European Romani population, however, even greater than the five and a half centuries of slavery in Romania, was the attempt to eradicate it as part of the Nazis' plan to have a 'Gypsy-free' land. Although it wasn't the first governmental resolution to exterminate Romanies (German Emperor Karl VI had previously issued such an order in 1721), it was by far the most devastating, ultimately destroying over half of the Romani population in Nazi-occupied Europe. Romanies were the only other population besides the Jews who were targeted for extermination on racial/ethnic grounds following the directives of a Final Solution.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, German laws against Romanies had already been in effect for hundreds of years. The persecution of the Romani people began almost as soon as they first arrived in German-speaking lands because as outsiders, they were, without knowing it, breaking the Hanseatic laws which made it a punishable offence not to have a permanent home or job, and not to be on the taxpayers' register. They were also accused of being spies for the Muslims, whom few Germans had ever met, but about whom they had heard many frightening stories; it was not illegal to murder a Romani and there were sometimes 'Gypsy hunts' in which Romanies were tracked down and killed like wild animals. Forests were set on fire, to drive out any Romanies who might have been hiding there.

By the nineteenth century, scholars in Germany and elsewhere in Europe were writing about Romanies and Jews as being inferior beings and "the excrement of humanity"¹²; even Darwin, writing in 1871, singled out our two populations as not being "culturally advanced" like other "territorially settled" peoples¹³. This crystallized into specifically racist attitudes in the writing of Dohm, Hundt-Radowsky, Knox, Tetzner, Gobineau, Ploetz, Schallmeyer and others¹⁴. By the 1880s, Chancellor von Bismarck reinforced some of the discriminatory laws, stating that Romanies were to be dealt with "especially severely" if apprehended.

In or around 1890, a conference on 'The Gypsy Scum' (Das Zigeunergeschmei⁸) was held in Swabia, at which the military was given full authority to keep Romanies on the move. In 1899 the Englishman Houston Chamberlain, who was the composer Richard Wagner's son-in-law, wrote a book called *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, in which he argued for the building of a "newly shaped . . . and . . . especially deserving Aryan race"¹⁵. It was used to justify the promotion of ideas about German racial superiority and for any oppressive action taken against members of 'inferior' populations. In that same year, the 'Gypsy Information Agency' was set up in Munich under the direction of Alfred Dillmann, which began cataloguing data on all Romanies throughout the German lands. The results of this were published in 1905 in Dillmann's *Zigeuner-Buch*¹⁶, which laid the foundations for what was to happen to our people in the Holocaust thirty-five years later.

The *Zigeuner-Buch* is nearly 350 pages long, and consists of three parts: first, an introduction stating that Romanies were a "plague" and a "menace" against which the German population had to defend itself using "ruthless punishments", and which warned of the dangers of mixing the Romani and German gene pools. The second part was a register of all known Romanies, giving genealogical details and criminal record if any, and the third part was a collection of photographs of those same people. Dillmann's ideas about 'race mixing' later became a central part of the Nuremberg Law in Nazi Germany.

In 1920, a psychiatrist, Karl Binding and a magistrate, Alfred Hoche, published a jointly-authored book called *The Eradication of Lives Undeserving of Life*¹⁷, using a phrase first coined by Richard Liebich with specific reference to Romanies nearly sixty years earlier¹⁸, and used shortly after him, again specifically referring to Romanies, by Rudolf Kulemann¹⁹. Among the three groups that they said were "unworthy of life" were the

"incurably mentally ill", and it was to this group that Romanies were considered to belong. Euthanasia, and particularly non-propagation through sterilization, were topics receiving a good deal of attention at that time in the United States; Nazi programs were to an extent based upon American research²⁰. A law incorporating the phrase lives undeserving of life was put into effect just four months after Hitler became Chancellor of the Third Reich.

Perceived Romani 'criminality' was seen as a transmitted genetic disease, though no account was taken of the centuries of exclusion of the Romanies from German society, which made subsistence theft a necessity for survival. The "crimes" listed in the Zigeunerbuch are almost exclusively trespassing and the theft of food.

During the 1920s, the legal oppression of Romanies in Germany intensified considerably, despite the official statutes of the Weimar Republic that said that all its citizens were equal. In 1920 they were forbidden to enter parks and public baths; in 1925 a conference on 'The Gypsy Question' was held which resulted in the

creation of laws requiring unemployed Romanies to be sent to work camps "for reasons of public security", and for all Romanies to be registered with the police. After 1927 everyone, even Romani children, had to carry identification cards bearing their fingerprints and photographs. In 1929, The Central Office for the Fight Against the Gypsies in Germany was established in Munich, and in 1933, just ten days before the Nazis came to power, government officials in Burgenland, Austria, called for the withdrawal of all civil rights from the Romani people.

In September 1935, Romanies became subject to the restrictions of the Nuremberg Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, which forbade intermarriage between Germans and 'non-Aryans', specifically Jews, Romanies and people of African descent. In 1937, the National Citizenship Law relegated Romanies and Jews to the status of second-class citizens, depriving them of their civil rights. Also in 1937, Heinrich Himmler issued a decree entitled "The Struggle Against the Gypsy Plague" which reiterated that Romanies of mixed blood were the most likely to engage in criminal activity, and which required that all information on Romanies be sent from the regional police departments to the Reich Central Office. In their book published in 1943, the Danish sociologists Erik Bartels and Gudrun Brun echoed this position, evidently unaware that the sterilization of Romanies had already been in effect for a decade:

The pure Gypsies present no great problem, if only we realise that their mentality does not allow of their admittance to the well-ordered general society . . . the mixed Gypsies cause considerably greater difficulties (. . . nothing good has) come from a crossing between a Gipsy and a white person . . . Germany is at present contemplating the introduction of provisions of sterilization in the case of such families²¹ .

Calling a population vermin, or a disease, rather than recognising them as being part of the human family is a technique used to dehumanize it and to distance it from society. Such terms were constantly used to refer to Jews and Romanies in the Third Reich in an

effort to desensitize the general population to the increasingly harsh treatment being meted out against them; after all, vermin and diseases need to be eradicated. Disturbingly, this language is still with us-in 1992 the Badische Zeitung carried the headline "A pure disease, these Gypsies!"²²

Between June 13-18 1938 'Gypsy Clean-Up Week'(Zigeunerauf- räumungswoche, also called Aktion Arbeitschau Reich and Bettlerwoche in the documentation) took place throughout Germany which, like Kristallnacht for the Jewish people that same year, marked the beginning of the end; for both populations it sent a clear message to the general public: there would be no penalty for their mistreating Jews and Romanies, since the very institution meant to safeguard German society-the police-was itself openly doing so.

Also in 1938, the first party-issued reference to "The Final Solution of the Gypsy Question" (die endgültige Lösung der Zigeunerfrage) appeared in print in a document dated March 24, and was repeated in an order issued by Himmler on December 8 that year and announced publicly in the NS Rechtsspiegel the following February 21st. Thus in the Auschwitz Memorial Book we find "The final resolution, as formulated by Himmler in his 'Decree for Basic Regulations to Resolve the Gypsy Question as Required by the Nature of Race' of December 8th, 1938, meant that preparations were to begin for the complete extermination of the Sinti and Roma"²³. Also in 1938, Himmler issued his criteria for biological and racial evaluation which determined that each Romani's family background was to be investigated going back for three generations; the Nazis' racial motive for exterminating Romanies is clear from the fact that they even targeted Romani-like people, taking no chances lest the German population be contaminated with Romani blood. Kenrick writes:

In general, a person with one Jewish grandparent was not affected in the Nazi anti-Jewish legislation, whereas one-eighth 'gypsy blood' was considered strong enough to outweigh seven-eighths of German blood-so dangerous were the Gypsies considered²⁴.

These was twice as strict as the criteria determining who was Jewish; had the same also applied to Romanies, nearly 20,000 would have escaped death. On 16 December 1941 Himmler issued the order to have Romanies throughout western Europe deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau for extermination.

In 1939 Johannes Behrendt of the Office of Racial Hygiene issued a brief stating that "[a]ll Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution is elimination. The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population"²⁵. In January 1940 the first mass genocidal action of the Holocaust took place when 250 Romani children from Brno were murdered in Buchenwald, where they were used as guinea-pigs to test the efficacy of the Zyklon-B cyanide gas crystals that were later used in the gas chambers²⁶. In June 1941 Hitler ordered the extermination of all Jews, Romanies and communist political functionaries in the entire Soviet Union. Reinhard Heydrich, who was Head of the Reich Main Security Office and the leading organizational architect of the Nazi Final Solution, ordered the Einsatzkommandos to kill

all Jews, Romanies and mental patients, although not all of the documentation regarding its complete details, relating to both Jews and Romanies, has so far been found. Müller-Hill writes:

Heydrich, who had been entrusted with the 'final solution of the Jewish question' on 31st July 1941, shortly after the German invasion of the USSR, also included the Gypsies in his 'final solution'. . . The senior SS officer and Chief of Police for the East, Dr. Landgraf, in Riga, informed Rosenberg's Reich Commissioner for the East, Lohse, of the inclusion of the Gypsies in the 'final solution'. Thereupon, Lohse gave the order, on 24th December 1941, that the Gypsies should be given the same treatment as the Jews²⁷.

Burleigh & Wippermann write further that:

A conference on racial policy organised by Heydrich took place in Berlin on 21st September 1939, which may have decided upon a 'Final Solution' of the 'Gypsy Question'. According to the scant minutes which have survived, four issues were decided: the concentration of Jews in towns; their relocation to Poland; the removal of 30,000 Gypsies to Poland, and the systematic deportation of Jews to German incorporated territories using goods trains. An express letter sent by the Reich Main Security Office on 17th October 1939 to its local agents mentioned that the 'Gypsy Question will shortly be regulated throughout the territory of the Reich'. . . . At about this time, Adolf Eichmann made the recommendation that the 'Gypsy Question' be solved simultaneously with the 'Jewish Question'. . . . Himmler signed the order dispatching Germany's Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz on 16th December 1942. The 'Final Solution' of the 'Gypsy Question' had begun²⁸.

Himmler's order stated that "all Gypsies are to be deported to the Zigeunerlager at Auschwitz concentration camp, with no regard to their degree of racial impurity". The Memorial Book for the Romanies who died at Auschwitz-Birkenau also says:

The Himmler decree of December 16th 1942 (Auschwitz-Erlaß), according to which the Gypsies should be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, had the same meaning for the Gypsies that the conference at Wannsee on January 20th 1942, had for the Jews. This decree, and the bulletin that followed on January 29th 1943, can thus be regarded as a logical consequence of the decision taken at Wannsee. After it had been decided that the fate of the Jews was to end in mass extermination, it was natural for the other group of racially persecuted people, the Gypsies, to become victims of the same policy, which finally even included soldiers in the Wehrmacht²⁹.

In a paper delivered in Washington in 1987, at a conference on the fate of the non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust sponsored by the U S Holocaust Memorial Council, Dr Erika Thurner of the Institut für Neuere Geschichte und Zeitgeschichte at the University of Linz stated that:

Heinrich Himmler's infamous Auschwitz decree of December 16th, 1942, can be seen as the final stage of the final solution of the Gypsy Question. The decree served as the basis

for complete extermination. According to the implementation instructions of 1943, all Gypsies, irrespective of their racial mix, were to be assigned to concentration camps. The concentration camp for Gypsy families at Auschwitz-Birkenau was foreseen as their final destination . . . opposed to the fact that the decision to seek a final solution for the Gypsy Question came at a later date than that of the Jewish Question, the first steps taken to exterminate the Gypsies were initiated prior to this policy decision.

This order appears to have been the result of a direct decision from Hitler himself³⁰. Breitman reproduced the statement issued by Security Police Commander Bruno Streckenbach following a policy meeting with Hitler and Heydrich held in Pretsch in June, 1941, viz. that "[t]he Führer has ordered the liquidation of all Jews, Gypsies and communist political functionaries in the entire area of the Soviet Union"³¹. SS Officer Percy Broad, who worked in the political division at Auschwitz and who participated directly in the murders of several thousand prisoners there, wrote in his memoirs twenty-five years later that ". . . it was the will of the all-powerful Reichsführer Adolf Hitler to have the Gypsies disappear from the face of the earth"³². At a party meeting on 14 September 1942 with Joseph Goebbels, Reichsminister of Justice Otto Thierack announced that "with respect to the extermination of antisocial forms of life, Dr Goebbels is of the opinion that Jews and Gypsies should simply be exterminated". Former SS General Otto Ohlendorf said at the postwar military tribunal at Nuremberg that in the killing campaigns, "there was no difference between Gypsies and Jews."

On 4 August 1944, some 2,900 Romanies were gassed and cremated in a single action at Auschwitz-Birkenau, during what is remembered as Zigeunernacht³³.

Determining the percentage or number of Romanies who died in the Holocaust has not been easy. Bernard Streck noted that "any attempts to express Romani casualties in terms of numbers . . . cannot be verified by means of lists or card-indexes or camp files; most of the Gypsies died in eastern or southern Europe, shot by execution troops or fascist gang members"³⁴. Much of the Nazi documentation still remains to be analyzed and, as Streck intimates, many murders were not recorded since they took place in the fields and forests where Romanies were arrested. There are no accurate figures either for the pre-war Romani population in Europe, though the Nazi Party's official census of 1939 estimated it to be about two million, certainly an under-representation. Regarding numbers, König says:

The count of half a million Sinti and Roma murdered between 1939 and 1945 is too low to be tenable; for example in the Soviet Union many of the Romani dead were listed under non-specific labels such as Liquidierungsübrigen [remainder to be liquidated], 'hangers-on' and 'partisans'. . . The final number of the dead Sinti and Roma may never be determined. We do not know precisely how many were brought into the concentration camps; not every concentration camp produced statistical material; moreover, Sinti and Roma are often listed under the heading of remainder to be liquidated, and do not appear in the statistics for Gypsies³⁵.

In the eastern territories, in Russia especially, Romani deaths were sometimes counted

into the records under the heading of Jewish deaths. The Memorial Book also discusses the means of killing Romanies:

Unlike the Jews, the overwhelming majority of whom were murdered in the gas chambers at Birkenau, Belzec, Treblinka and all the other mass extermination camps, the Gypsies outside the Reich were massacred at many places, sometimes only a few at a time, and sometimes by the hundreds. In the Generalgouvernement [the eastern territories] alone, 150 sites of Gypsy massacres are known. Research on the Jewish Holocaust can rely on comparison of pre- and post-war census data to help determine the numbers of victims in the countries concerned. However, this is not possible for the Gypsies, as it was only rarely that they were included in national census data. Therefore it is an impossible task to find the actual number of Gypsy victims in Poland, Yugoslavia, White Ruthenia and the Ukraine, the lands that probably had the greatest numbers of victims³⁶.

The 1997 figure reported by Dr Sybil Milton, the then senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Research Institute in Washington put the number of Romani lives lost by 1945 at "between a half and one and a half million"³⁷. Significantly, the same figure appeared again in a November 2001 report issued by the International Organization for Migration (the IOM), a body designated to locate and compensate surviving Romani Holocaust victims. The brief states that "[r]ecent research indicates that up to 1.5 million Roma perished during the Nazi era"³⁸. It is certainly a fact that interviews in the past four years by trained Romani personnel who have obtained testimonials at first-hand from claimants throughout central and eastern Europe have already shed startling new light on this issue: the number of Romani survivors is far in excess of anything previously estimated. By extrapolation, and from the same eyewitness accounts documented in recent years, the numbers of Romanies who perished at the hands of the Nazis has also been grossly underestimated. Eventually, these revised figures will find their way into the public record.

Since the end of the Second World War, Germany's record regarding the Romani people has been less than exemplary. Nobody was called to testify in behalf of the Romani victims at the Nuremberg Trials, and no war crimes reparations have ever been paid to Romanies as a people. Today, neo-Nazi activity in many parts of central and Eastern Europe makes the Romanies its prime target of racial violence. Kenrick summarized the situation after 1945 very well:

In the first years following the end of the Nazi domination of Europe, the Gypsy community was in disarray. The small [Romani] educational and cultural organizations that had existed before 1939 had been destroyed. The family structure was broken with the death of the older people-the guardians of the traditions. While in the camps, the Gypsies had been unable to keep up their customs-the Romanía-concerning the preparation of food and the washing of clothes. They solved the psychological problems by not speaking about the time in the camps. Only a small number of Gypsies could read or write, so they could not tell their own story. But also they were unwilling to tell their own stories to others, and few others were interested anyway. In the many books written

describing the Nazi period and the persecution of the Jews, Gypsies usually appear as a footnote or small section³⁹.

Martin Clayton has made similar observations:

Unlike the Jews whose Holocaust experience gave birth to a renewed political militancy and a flurry of angry creativity, the Gypsies were silenced as the war came to a close. Their circumspection was in no small measure due to the efficiency of the Nazi death machine. The clearest and most articulate young writers, orators, performers and dreamers that the pre-war Roma produced were buried in mass graves across central and eastern Europe. By the end of the war the European Roma were a decapitated people searching for someone to help explain to them what had just happened. Instead they were greeted with a wall of silence and blank stares from the authorities. No reparations, no apologies, no films or plays about their plight, no new land to settle and defend⁴⁰.

We still have a long way to go both with our understanding of the Porrajmos and with achieving its proper acknowledgment in the classroom; including a section on the Porrajmos must be viewed as essential to any Romani Studies-and Holocaust Studies-curriculum. One such workbook, the Facing History and Ourselves organization's Holocaust Resource Book⁴¹ lists just five pages in the index for "Sinti and Roma," but eighteen under "Armenians"- who weren't victims of the Holocaust, while the question following the section on the Romanies, which consists solely of a quote from Ina Friedman's Other Victims⁴², asks what the "striking differences" were between the treatment of Romanies and the treatment of Jews. Our history must be presented in its own context, and not as a corollary to that of another people.

An argument which is sometimes made is that the Romanies simply didn't preoccupy the Nazis; we have been called an "afterthought" in Nazi policy, even merely a "minor irritant," as Yehuda Bauer has called us⁴³. This is neither fair nor true, and statements have been made in print about Romanies which, had they been made about Jews, would have been immediately condemned as anti-Semitic. Some of them can probably be accounted for by the fact that our people were far fewer in number, were much more easily identified and disposed of, and had already been the target of discriminatory policy even before Hitler came to power. It required no massive effort on the part of the Nazis to locate and destroy a population that had no one to take its part. Haberer adds to this:

[Regarding] the persecution of Gypsies, it should be noted that their plight equaled that of the Jews. Their liquidation was part and parcel of the Nazis' agenda to eradicate 'worthless life'. Wrapped up in the Holocaust per se, the genocide of the Roma in the East is still very much an untold story. In some ways, their victimization was practiced even more ruthlessly because they held no 'economic value' and were traditionally considered a particular asocial and criminally inclined people [and] more alien in appearance, culture and language⁴⁴.

To this, and returning to the issue of race-based motives for eradication, we can add the conclusion of Austrian Holocaust historian Erika Thurner, who wrote

Jews and Gypsies were equally affected by the racial theories and measures of the Nazi rulers. The persecution of the two groups was carried out with the same radical intensity and cruelty. The Jewish genocide received top priority in planning and execution-this because of the different social status of the Jews and also their larger numbers. Due to their smaller numbers, the Roma and Sinti were for the Nazis a 'secondary' problem⁴⁵.

The United Nations too, did nothing to assist Romanies during or following the Holocaust nor, sadly, were Romanies mentioned anywhere in the documentation of the U. S. War Refugee Board. This is all the more puzzling since the situation was known to the War Crimes Tribunal in Washington as early as 1946, whose files contain the text of the meeting between Justice Minister Otto Thierack and Josef Goebbels on 14 September 1942, which stated plainly that

With regard to the destruction of asocial life, Dr. Goebbels is of the opinion that the following groups should be exterminated: Jews and Gypsies unconditionally, Poles who have served 3 to 4 years of penal servitude, and Czechs and Germans who are sentenced to death . . . The idea of exterminating them by labor is best⁴⁶.

Nevertheless, the situation is gradually improving. In Germany itself, the handbook and CD Rom on Holocaust education prepared for teachers and which was issued by the Press and Information Office of the Federal government in 2000 makes clear that recent historical research in the United States and Germany does not support the conventional argument that the Jews were the only victims of Nazi genocide. True, the murder of Jews by the Nazis differed from the Nazis' killing of political prisoners and foreign opponents because it was based on the genetic origin of the victims and not on their behaviour. The Nazi regime applied a consistent and inclusive policy of extermination based on heredity only against three groups of human beings: the handicapped, Jews, and Sinti and Roma ("Gypsies"). The Nazis killed multitudes, including political and religious opponents, members of the resistance, elites of conquered nations, and homosexuals, but always based these murders on the belief, actions and status of those victims. Different criteria applied only to the murder of the handicapped, Jews, and "Gypsies". Members of these groups could not escape their fate by changing their behavior or belief. They were selected because they existed⁴⁷.

Notes

1

Percy Broad. "KZ Auschwitz: Erinnerungen eines SS Mannes". Hefte von Auschwitz, 9:7-48 (1966), p. 41.

2

Miriam Novitch, *Le Genocide des Tziganes Sous le Rgime Nazi*. Paris: AMIF and the Ghetto Fighters' House, Israel (1968:3).

3

Christian Bernadec, 1979. L'Holocauste Oubié. Paris: Editions France-Empire, p. 44.

4

Guenther Lewy, 2000. The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies. Cambridge: The University Press.

5

Gilad Margalit, 2002. Germany's Gypsies. Cambridge: The University Press. This "competitive" aspect is particularly explicit in an earlier monograph by Gilad Margalit, where he states that "Antigypsyism and antisemitism are two very different phenomena of ethnic hatred, distinct in their content, dimensions and appearance (p. 3) . . . antigypsyism . . . is only a marginal preoccupation of the German extreme Right, compared to the constant and latent and exposed preoccupation with Jews and Judaism (1996: 26)."

6

At West Chester University.

7

Jonathan Ledgard, "Europe's spectral nation", The Economist, May 12th (2001:29-31) .

8

Ian Hancock, "Responses to the Porrajmos (the Romani Holocaust)," in Alan S. Rosenbaum & Israel Charney, eds., Is the Holocaust Unique? New York: Westview Press (1996), pp. 39-72 [reproduced on this website]. Some of the arguments I've received include: the respective overall numbers of losses cannot be compared; some Romanies were spared death; there were family camps for Romanies; the Holocaust was a divine punishment specifically intended for Jews; 'generalizing' the Holocaust diminishes its gravity; 'generalizing' the Holocaust weakens justification for Israel's existence; Nazi methods of dealing with Romanies were more humane; Romanies were responsible for their own mistreatment.

In the Romani language, the Holocaust is referred to as the Baro Porrajmos, or 'great devouring' of human life.

9

Reichsfuhrer- SS-Dokument S-Kr. 1 Nr. 557/38. The words "the final solution of the

Gypsy question" actually first appeared on page one of the very first issue of The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society in 1888, that question being what are the origins of the Romani people, and its resolution the intended aim of that new organization.

10

"Gypsies, Jews and the Holocaust," *Shmate: A Journal of Progressive Jewish Thought*, 17:6-15:(1987) ;"Uniqueness of the victims: Gypsies, Jews and the Holocaust," *Without Prejudice: International Review of Racial Discrimination*, 1(2):45-67 (1988); "Gypsy history in Germany and neighboring lands: a chronology," in David Crowe & John Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*. Armonk: E.C. Sharpe (1989:11-30) ; "The roots of antigypsyism: to the Holocaust and after," in Jan Colijn & Marcia Sachs Littell, eds., *Confronting the Holocaust: A Mandate for the 21st Century*. Lanham: University Press of America (1997:19-49) , "Downplaying the Porrajmos: the trend to minimize the Romani Holocaust," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 3(1):56-63 (2000) and op. cit. (note 8).

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In "The roots of antigypsyism: to the Holocaust and after," in Jan Colijn & Marcia Sachs Littell, eds., *Confronting the Holocaust: A Mandate for the 21st Century*. Lanham: University Press of America (1997:19-49) .

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This phrase, used by Tetzner, is documented in Rainer Hehemann, *Die "Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens" im Wilhelminischen Deutschland und in der Weimarer Republik, 1871-1922*. Frankfurt: Haag & Herschen (1987: 99,116,127), and in Wolfgang Wippermann, *Das Leben in Frankfurt zur NS-Zeit: Die Nationalsozialistische Zigeunerfervolgung*. Frankfurt: Kramer (1986: 57-8). Note that in Germany the traditional Romani population calls itself Sinti, and that the word Zigeuner is the German equivalent of 'Gypsy' and should be avoided.

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Danuta Czech & Walter Laqueur, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945*. New York: Holt (1979). A Jewish Auschwitz survivor now living in Los Angeles Remembered Zigeunernacht, and revealed recently that the Nazis told the Romani men that if they would agree to fight for Germany on the Russian front their lives, and the lives of their families, would be spared. The men agreed and were separated from the women and children, and shot. Nearly all of those who were subsequently gassed were Romani women and children. The purpose in doing this was that, as Ulrich König makes clear in his *Sinti und Roma unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, Bochum: Brockmeyer Verlag (1989:129-133), Romani families being eradicated together became completely unmanageable for the guards. See also Hancock 1996:50 (at note 8 above) for further discussion.

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Emphasis added. USGPO, War Crimes Tribunal File No. 682-PS, Volume 3: *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* Washington, The U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946, p. 496 (emphasis added). The Tribunal's then Chief Prosecutor Benjamin B. Ferencz, founder of Pace University's Peace Center in New York, did not recommend that the U.S. War Refugee Board include Romanies in their compensation payments to survivors, which amounted to several hundred million dollars. "Gypsies" are not mentioned anywhere in their documentation, and to date Mr. Ferencz has not replied to several requests for clarification.

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