

László Karsai:
FROM THE ROMA HOLOCAUST TO THE PORAJMOS, IN THE
LIGHT OF THE LATEST SPECIALIST LITERATURE

In the spring of 1983 still as a university adjunct I was more and more desperately looking for a research topic I could elaborate on in such a way – within the frames of the contemporary system named ‘socialist’ – that I could have the chance to achieve the “Candidate of Historiography” scientific degree. I could not manage to get any really useful advice from anybody. When I raised with a dear professor of mine that I would gladly deal with one of the ideological questions of the Great French Revolution, he told me with a wave of his hand: “Laci, with the political views of yours...” At that time, I did not know yet that my father, the holocaust-survivor Elek Karsai, an acknowledged researcher of the Hungarian Holocaust of Jews had referred to the Hungarian Romani Holocaust as a serious debt of historiography. Finally, he was the one to propose that I should chose the history of the persecution of Hungarian gypsies as a topic for my dissertation. In the early 1980s there was not a single person in the world, who could have foreseen that within less than a decade the entire socialist regime would collapse. At that time the topic of the Holocaust of Jews and Roma belonged to the “tolerated ones” among the three categories (tortious, tolerated, supported) that determined the political and scientific life; it counted as a politically neutral matter, and raised only little interest. I would never have dreamed that writing my candidate dissertation to the best of my knowledge after long years of archival and library searching and interviewing Romani Holocaust-survivors would put me to a political “minefield”, and I would be accused of denying holocaust, being a friend of Neo-Nazis and wanting to reduce the number of Romani victims of the world war because of Jewish bias, and so on. Then, as now, my scientific and professional activities were defined by “Fiat iustitia, pereat mundus” – translated in a poetic way: “Let justice be done, though the world perish”. When I was

given the special honour of an invitation to give this presentation, I decided that I would not present you in short, here and now with everything from my candidate dissertation published in 1992¹. Instead, in the time allotted to me I will try to summarize the new scientific results born in the past 25 years about the persecution of gypsies before and during the II. World War.

Even as late as 2004 one of the expert historians concluded that especially due to the lack of fundamental works based on serious historical research there was no consensus among historians in the question, what had happened to the gypsies during the second world war.

The gipsy intellectuals of the individual countries started to deal with the story of the gipsy persecutions relatively late after the Second World War, and also then with some hesitation. By the time this topic raised the attention of the gipsy and other historians, it had already been overshadowed by the Jewish Holocaust. The topic that seemed to be a neutral but important research topic in Hungary back in the early 1980s, has for nowadays become an extremely sensitive issue that is at the heart of discussions in Europe and worldwide also in actual politics.

Back in 1983 nobody spoke of the Roma, the name “gipsy” was used. The expression “porajmos” did not arise in the least, just likewise for two decades after 1945 the misleading and incorrect expression “holocaust” was not used in connection with the persecution of Jews. Initially, until the late 1960s the expressions “liquidation”, “destruction”, blood era, “final solution”, etc. were used. I am still wondering, why and how it has been made obligatory to call the deeds of Nazis and their allies against Jews “a burnt offering to God” that is Holocaust.

The historiographical debates in connection with the persecution of gypsies are also really vivid, sometimes expressly vehement and even explicitly rude occasionally. According to the Israeli historian Henry Friedlander there was a gipsy “Final Solution”, at the same time the American historian of German descent Guenter Lewy believes that although the gypsies were

¹ Karsai László: *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1919–1945. Út a cigány Holocausthoz*. Budapest, Cserépfalvi K., 1992., p. 197.

persecuted during the Holocaust, as opposed to the Jews they were not victims of Genocide. Furthermore, Lewy is of the very questionable opinion that the persecution of gypsies was not driven on the basis of a racist ideology.² Lewy for instance attributed the closing down of the gypsy lager in Auschwitz to the need of places for the Hungarian deported Jews. If he had reviewed the list of the Hungarian transports of 1944 more carefully, he could have realised that from the middle of May until the middle of July about 40 000 Hungarian Jews were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, where according to reliable estimates around 20% of them were selected as fit for work.³

The others were in most cases killed in the gas chambers on the day of their arrival, and their bodies were burnt. Those able to work were separated out and taken to other camps, factories or for forced labour within a few days or weeks. It is highly probable that the inhumane conditions and the fear of infectious diseases in the gypsy camps led the decision-makers to order the liquidation of the gypsy lager. They did not bother about the overcrowding. Numerous Hungarian Jew survivors recalled/talked about spending a few days or weeks in the gypsy camp under dreadful conditions after their arriving to the lager.

But after the middle of July 1944 no more rail cars arrived from Hungary, and also due to the high mortality the crowdedness continuously decreased until 2nd of August.

I deeply regret not having found out back in the 1980s that 3800 Jewish Holocaust-survivors were interviewed by the co-workers of the National *Committee for Attending Deportees* in early spring 1945. 229 of them mentioned to have met gypsies in Auschwitz or elsewhere. Several of them reported of not gypsy Kapos, mistreating them (as one of the survivors recalled: “under German orders”⁴) and looting from their miserable food rations, but also of the closing down of the gypsy lager.

During the night from 2 to 3 August the Auschwitz gypsy lager was dismantled. According to certain survivors the young men and women were selected and taken to work beforehand,

2 Lewy, 2000.

3 Czech, 1990.

4 DEGOB 2437.

and “the elderly and the children were taken to the gas chambers without exception.”⁵ According to others the dismantling of the gypsy lager took several nights and they kept awaking to “horrible crying and screams during the nights.”⁶ The SS guards told a few Jewish women to reassure them that “only” the German gypsies were to be burned, because of their resistance: “these poor people were also treated horribly. The wild dogs set on them ripped their clothes with their meat off them.” Then they were taken to the gas chamber and finally to the crematorium.⁷

The first person to draw the attention to the fact that the gypsies were also victims of the Nazi racist politics was the Holocaust-survivor historian Philip Friedman American, deriving from Poland. He mentioned this fact in one of his articles in 1951.⁸ Another Holocaust-survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, the famous Austrian “Nazi-hunter” played also an important role in this field. Not only did he try to inform the public about the fact that not only the Jews were persecuted by Nazis, but also the gypsies, but he also provided the documents proving his assertions to the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in 1956. In the next decades a number of studies and books dealt with the history of the German supremacist-racist politics, and within also the gypsies were given attention.

The history of the gypsy persecutions in France, Romania, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Estonia⁹ and Lithuania is known from the international literature, but it can still be concluded that the Roma-politics of the Nazis and his alliances has not been sufficiently studied yet.

In the research literature there have been serious discussions even about the most basic questions regarding the topic. Can the Holocaust of Jews be compared to Porajmos? Was the

5 DEGOB 2257.

6 DEGOB 2788. Another survivor recalled: „especially the nights were horrible, we heard wailings and screams, those poor people were fighting with the SS troops, there was shooting.” DEGOB 3083.

7 DEGOB 3177.

8 Friedman, 1951.

9 According to the research of Anton Weiss-Wendt 31 000 civilians – among them 8614 Jews and 800 Gypsies – were killed in Estonia between July 1941 and October 1944. Weiss-Wendt, 2003.

enumeration and elimination of the entire Roma population planned by the Nazis? Was the Roma persecution racially motivated? Was it based on a sophisticated, Pan-European plan just as in the case of Jews? These questions were answered by Sybil Milton, Ian Hancock, Brenad and James Lutz in the positive, while Yehuda Bauer, Michael Zimmermann and Guenter Lewy answered no to the questions.¹⁰ I would like to highlight my view briefly. The Jewish Holocaust and Porajmos are comparable. I agree with the former leading historian of the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Institute Professor Yehuda Bauer that the Jewish Holocaust differs in its objective from every other genocide in the history of mankind until the II. World War. It had never occurred before the Nazi regime that the leaders of a state would have made a plan for the elimination of each member of a given population (discriminated on the basis of religion in the case of Jews) and for the implementation of this plan a significant part of the resources and instruments of a state would have been mobilized.¹¹

The fact that from this perspective the Jewish Holocaust is unique and specific, does not make it incomparable with other genocides, because by stating that it differs from every other genocide we have already compared it to the them. There was no plan for a European gypsy genocide, the Nazis did not plan the elimination of the entire Roma population. As opposed to the Jews, they were not regarded as an enormously powerful race with such ambitions as world domination and elimination of mankind. The gypsy persecution was racially motivated, the gypsy lifestyle was criticized based on genetic and pseudoscientific reasons.

It is often repeated in connection with Porajmos that the number of the archival sources is insufficient, for instance the gypsies were so disregarded by the authorities that they did not even bother to record what they were doing to them. The lack of evidences does not prove that the evidences do not exist. I do not doubt the good intentions of the amateurs who consider even that possible that although there were evidences in connection with the Nazi plans of a gypsy genocide, but they might have not been written down, they might have been

¹⁰ Tyaglyy, 2009, 26–27.

¹¹ Bauer, 1987.

annihilated or – still being kept hidden – have not been reappeared yet. One of the characteristics of a modern, bureaucratic state is that everything will be recorded in the forms of reports, notes, instructions, memorandums, etc. If it can be proved with the help of numerous archival sources that the plan of the European gypsy genocide has never existed, it is not worth referring to the fact that it is the gypsy issue in the case of which the most important documents are missing, have been destroyed or have never existed.

Professor of University of Texas Ian Hancock mentioning often proudly his gypsy origins disagrees with Guenter Lewy and in his attempts to prove at all costs that the politics of the Nazis did not make difference between the Jews and gypsies he took seriously even the infamous 1944 “blood for goods” idea of Eichman.

The SS Obersturmbannführer organizing the deportation of Hungarian Jews with great enthusiasm was only bluffing when he offered to spare the lives of one million Jews in case he would be given 10 000 lorries, he had no intention of sparing the life of a single one of the Hungarian Jews. When governor Horthy Miklós on 6th July 1944 suspended the deportations, Eichmann was furious, and “smuggled out” two additional rail cars of Jews to Auschwitz. When he found out that even Heinrich Himmler, the SS Reichsführer resigned himself to the suspension of the deportations, he was threatening to go with his complaints – ignoring the hierarchical authority – straight to Hitler. The question why the Nazi invaders did not deal with the gypsies in France, Belgium, Hungary, Romania and in numerous other countries occupied by the Nazis or their allies, could not be answered by Hancock either.

After the Nazis’ rise to power in Germany the travellers and strollers – regardless of whether they were Roma or not – were labelled gypsies and police authority measures were undertaken against them. The fundamental problem was also in Germany how to identify gypsies at all. In the case of Jews religion was “of great help” to the Nazis. Those having two grandparents with Israelite religion were declared Jews, regardless of whether their parents had left their religion and had been baptized or not. Also in Hungary – as generally in Europe and worldwide –

before 1945 there was no regulation or law for specifying who was to be considered gypsy.

It was a common prejudice Europe-wide that gypsies – especially the wandering ones – were burdensome for their narrower and broader living environment. Some doctors and journalists in the Balkans as well – just like in Hungary and Germany – claimed that the wandering gypsies spread communicable diseases, and raised the attention to the fact that in comparison with the “white”, “Aryan”, European “indigenous” population gypsies are an abnormally fruitful and prolific nation, they have too many children.¹² I knew about all this, but I was surprised that in 1938 it was a Hungarian AP journal who had to raise the attention of the editor of a Nazi newspaper to it. In the above mentioned case the Nazi “Big Brother” was given guidance by a smaller, Central-European, extreme-right brother. Another issue is that neither of the main ideologists and decision makers – Hitler and Szálasi – reacted to the gypsy issue, they did not mention the gypsies in any of their political speeches, articles, not once. Politicians, ideologists dealing with the gypsy issue at all, often complained not only the fact that the public of their country did not care about it, but also that there were no reliable facts about the exact number of gypsies living in the different countries. In Bulgaria the gypsies were registered as early as 1926 indicating separately their religion and mother tongue as well. As it turned out, 82000 of the 135000 gypsies were native gypsy speakers. But Serbia pioneered to register the number of the gypsy population as early as 1846, indicating separately in the national census not only their mother tongues and religions but also their lifestyles. The gypsies were classified into three categories: established, seminomadic and wandering lifestyles.

In Germany the child psychologist of the University of Tübingen Dr. Robert Ritter was the central figure of the Nazi gypsyology. He also believed in the popular and seemingly scientific theory according to which the genetic disposition of a person determines whether he or she will be a criminal or not. In 1936 Dr. Ritter was appointed the director of the Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Unit. He estimated

¹² Trubeta, 2003, 497–498.

the number of gypsies living in Germany at that time around 30 000.

With his colleagues he examined and interviewed thousands of gypsies and tried to work out their family tree. Ritter's final conclusion was that the gypsies deriving sometime from India "degenerated" and 90% of them were criminal-inclined due to genetic mingling.

In the executive order of the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws a separate section was dedicated to the gypsies and their "mongrels" – alongside the "Negros", indicating that marriage or sexual intercourse between them and the racially clean Aryans was prohibited upon pain of imprisonment. The Nazis distinguished between the those of 'alien blood' (Fremdblütige) and those with 'German blood' (Deutschblütige), or expressing it in a pseudoscientific way: Aryan. In the case of the latter mainly that was analysed whether they had mixed with other individuals of alien blood, because – according to the Nazis – it had deteriorating, degenerating effects.

When the Hungarian supremacist lawmakers wanted to follow the example of Nazis in 1941, they made two important distinctions. From 1935 on those Jewish, Negro and gypsy citizens of the III. Reich who had got into sexual intercourse with Aryans, were put to concentration camps together with their "race defiler" German Aryan male or female partners.

In Hungary "only" those Jewish men were imprisoned, who were engaged in sexual activity with a decent non-Jewish prostitute. The Arian Hungarian men were allowed to sleep with Jewish women as well as Arian women with Jewish men. The other important distinction was that – as opposed to the gypsies and black people – only the Jewish men were criminalised.

László Ravasz, bishop of the Reformed Church, who criticised the draft bill as a Christian, remarked in the upper house debate of the 1941. XV. Article of Law: Based on the draft bill, a Hungarian person can marry a Hottentot, a black, a gypsy or any other individuals, except for the Jews.¹³ When Professor Ferenc Orsós, academic, Member of the Upper House on behalf of the Hungarian Medical Association suggested that the Gypsy-Hungarian "mixed marriage" and sexual relationship

13 Felsőházi Napló, 1939–1944, II. k. 290. (18 July 1941)

should be banned, he was ridiculed in the Upper House, and one of those interrupting warned the Europe-famous pathologist: The purest Aryan is the Gypsy.¹⁴

The Nazis made a difference between Sintis and Romas. Sintis were appreciated also by Himmler. He knew as well that they had lived for long centuries on German territory, and he considered them both culturally and racially superior to the newly immigrant Roma having strict Eastern European relations and “roots”. Similarly to the Jews, gypsies were very divided Europe-wide. The long-established and integrated German Sintis looked down on the new migrant Roma, just as the assimilated Hungarian urban Jews looked down on the newly migrant orthodox “Galician” Jews, moreover, they regarded them as the “real causes” of anti-Semitism.

It was a common belief in the Balkans and also in other places from the 15th century on that gypsies were spies of Turkey. Some commanders of the Wehrmacht felt the same way, and thus treated the wandering gypsies as elements unreliable and suspicious of spying. As early as the end of September 1939 the central decision-makers led by the head of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) Reinhard Heydrich, aimed for the ethnic “cleansing” of the Polish territories attached to Germany from the Polish, Jews and Gypsies. They made a plan for the town-ghettoization of the Jews in Poland and for the deportation of about 30 000 German Roma to Poland, to the occupied General Government.

The larger-scale deportations and the creation of a Jewish “reservation” had to be postponed due to the protest of the local German authorities, and primarily Polish General Government leader Hans Frank, and later the whole plan was rejected. In the German army the process of “degypsisation” was carried out relatively slowly.

The High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) gave orders to the dismissal of the gypsies from the active military service on the 11th February 1941, but even a year later, when also the enlistment of gypsies should already have been stopped, the formerly mentioned order still had not been implemented. In many places those having only one gypsy grandparent were

14 Felsőházi Napló, 1939–1944, II. k. 297. (18 July 1941)

held back in the army.¹⁵ In Hungary gypsies were not discriminated in the army, they were allowed to fight or even “die a hero’s death” for the Nazis. In the DEGOB protocol there are four Hungarian Jewish slave labours referring to a gypsy private, petty officer. F. A. (Bp., 1922) listed the Commander of his labour company unit deployed on the Eastern Front labour and four other privates, among them with the gypsy individual Lajos Nagy. All he briefly remarked was: “three quarters of the company were killed”.¹⁶

B. P. (Bp., 1921) called his company commander, Ensign László Boldizsár “a sadist with rich fantasy”, and added: “the unit consisting of gypsies was excellent in adapting to him in torturing Jews.¹⁷ After many hardships (once they were saved by a major of the gendarmerie from being murdered by the APS) 121 people of the company of G. I. (Keszthely, 1898) following the proposal of their humane commander tried to escape in closed formation. Along the Western border they were stopped by a Hungarian lieutenant and were asked if they were Jews. “Then a gypsy private called Nyári bravely stepped out and said: ‘I humbly report, these are not Jews but Serbians.’ This was an ordinary gypsy, who we all remember with gratitude, because in this case and also in other cases he always treated us well and humanly, hundred times more fairly than the Hungarian military.”¹⁸

In 1940 the German authorities started the deportation of the gypsies to the occupied Polish territories. In May 1940 approximately 2500 Roma and Sinti people were deported mainly from Hamburg and Bremen to the surroundings of Lublin in the Polish General Government. There they were taken to forced labour camps. In the autumn 1941 5007 Sinti and lalleri gypsies were deported from Austria to the Łódź ghetto. There they were huddled together into separate street parts. The majority of them died in a few months, the rest of them were killed in the Chelmino death camp during the following years. The mass gypsy deportations from Germany started in March 1943. Estimates indicate that Himmler managed to exempt

15 Zimmermann, 2001, 117–118.

16 DEGOB 1708.

17 DEGOB 2643.

18 DEGOB 2347.

around 15 000 Sintis. According to Guenter Lewy's estimation 50% of the German Sinti survived the Holocaust.¹⁹

According to the new researches gypsies deported to Auschwitz came from Germany and Austria, Czech-Moravian Protectorate, Belgium, the Netherlands, and North-France. The exact numbers are still unknown. According to Belgian historian and former director of the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society José Gotovitsch 351 gypsies were deported from Belgium in a rail car. There were among them French, Dutch, German and Norwegian gypsies, and only 12 of them survived Holocaust.²⁰

In France approximately 3000 gypsies were taken into internment camps by the local authorities – without any German intervention –, but relatively few of them were later deported to Germany, in spite of the fact that these camps came under the control of the German militia from the end of 1942 on.

In Serbia the German occupying army murdered mainly the gypsy men. The Germans were surprised by the support and power of the resistance movement led by Tito. They tried to deter partisans from attacking and murdering German soldiers. It was announced that for each murdered German soldier 100 hostages would be shot, and 50 for each injured one.

As “an act of retaliation”, in the spring-summer of 1941 805 Gypsies and Jews were executed from the Lager of Šabac and 1295 Jews from Belgrad. Altogether 2100 Jews and Gypsies were executed as an act of revenge for the murdering of 21 German soldiers. Chief of the Military Administration in Serbia General Harald Turner, mentioned in a letter written to one of his friends on 16 October 1941 that 2000 Jews and 200 Gypsies had been shot dead in the eight previous days. “This task is far from being agreeable, but it is necessary in order to make the people understand what will happen if even one single German soldier gets attacked. Besides, this is the fastest way of solving the Jewish issue.” It is notable however that Turner did not consider the mass executions as the “solution” of the Gypsy Question. At

¹⁹ Lewy, 1999, 210.

²⁰ Gotovitsch, 1976.

the end of October, the gypsies were referred to as threats to the public security, and individuals not being able to contribute to the national community, moreover they even spy.²¹

The Jewish women, elderly and children and hundreds of Gypsies were locked up in the Zemun Lager. The Jews were murdered in Gas vans, the gypsies were released a few months later. However, according to a German source there were not any Jews or Gypsies left in Serbia by the spring of 1942, it is not true. Altogether around 1000-12 000 Gypsies were murdered by Einsatzgruppe-units. In the agenda of Himmler, apart from the name of Reinhard Heyndrich as meeting partner the following note is written to the date of 20 April 1942: "No Gypsy killing" A German newspaper estimated the number of the Serbian Gypsies 115 000 in 1943.²²

In **Romania** from the around half million gypsy population 26 000 people were deported mainly from Bukovina and Bessaria to Transnistria, to the area between the Don and Dnyeper rivers, where most of them died.

All of the Croatian Gypsies, around 25 000 people were murdered.²³

If the numbers published by the experts of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D. C.) are added, the number of the victims of the Gypsy Holocaust is less than 100 000. In the related literature generally the number of victims is indicated as 500 000, with the appendix that this number is half of the European Gypsy population before the II. World War.²⁴

In **Bulgaria** the Gypsies were not persecuted, and the majority of the Jewish inhabitants also survived the Holocaust. But while from the Macedonian territories attached to Bulgaria during the II World War a high number of Jews were deported, the Gypsies were left alone.

21 Zimmermann, 2001, 123. In the end of December 1941. the retaliation-rate was decreased: 50 Jews and Gypsies were executed in exchange for each murdered German soldier, and 25 ppersons for each wounded soldier. u. o. 124.

22 Zimmermann, 2001, 126.

23 <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005219> (Retrieved: 24 July 2018)

24 Crowe, HGS, August 2004., p. 296.

In **Greece**, similarly to Hungary, France or several other countries the Nazi occupiers did not care about the Gypsies.²⁵

All signs point to the fact that there was no “Wannsee-conference” about the Gypsy issue, the Nazi leaders did not develop a plan to solve the European Gypsy “issue”. It depended on the German military and police leaders of the particular authorities, what happened to the Gypsies.

As opposed to Serbia, on the occupied Soviet territories the Wehrmacht did not deal with the “dirty work”, it was the task of the “Einsatzgruppen”, the German reserve police units and the local Lituan, Latvian and Ukrainien, etc. collaborator armed units. Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of the Einsatzgruppe D being responsible for the mass murders in the southern areas, stated in his trial that he acted on command, and he received a verbal command from the subordinate officers of Heyndrich to murder all the Jews and Gypsies as early as before the start of the attack against the Soviet Union.

There is no doubt that he did not tell the truth. Heyndrich gave a written command to the Einsatzgruppen for the eliminating of the functionaries of the Communist International, the higher and middle management of the Bolshevik Party, the people’s commissars, the Jewish prisoners of war, Jewish party members and state officials, and the “ordinary” saboteurs, propagandists, snipers and murderers. Based on the latest literature the statement of Ohlendorf can be convincingly refuted. When he was firstly questioned before the Nürnberg court about the murders of gypsies, he mainly emphasized that gypsies had a hostile behaviour and they spied. If there had ever been a “Führer-command” to murder the gypsies, he should have mentioned it by that time.²⁶

In the “order of ranking” of those condemned to die the gypsies as racially lower-level potential and real spies considered asocial, the agents of the Jews, stood after the Jews and communists, but neither Heiyndrich nor other high-ranking Nazi leaders gave order for it. The deputy of Heyndrich, Gestapo-leader Heinrich Müller named in his special command five categories for the “special treatment”, that is to murder: partisans, communists, Jews, mentally insane people and

25 Trubeta, 2003, 498.

26 Tyaglyy, 2009, 30–31.

individuals who meant danger for the state. The gypsies were not mentioned by him either.²⁷ The reason given by Ohlendorf before the Nürnberg court for the murder of gypsy children was that he wanted to ensure the peace of the hinterland in the long run.²⁸

The systematic mass murders of the Jews were launched by the Einsatzgruppe-units in the occupied Soviet territories at the end of August 1941.

In the autumn of 1941 Hinrich Lohse, Imperial Commissar of the territory called Ostland (with the Balti states and Belorussia belonging to it) called the attention of Himmler to the problem of wandering gypsies, and ordered his subordinate officers to treat them as the Jews. He argued that the wandering gypsies spread infectious diseases, they were not willing to report for compulsory work and they spied. Lohse ordered his subordinate officers in November 1943 to treat the settled Roma just like the other non-Jewish inhabitants, to leave them alone and not to take them to concentration camps.²⁹

In many cases there was no distinction made between the settled and wandering gypsies on the territories behind the Army Group Centre, besides the Jews, gypsies were also slaughtered for instance in Belorussia, in many places of Ukraine such as Kiev. There are several relatively accurate data about slaughters of people by different Einsatzgruppen. The Wehrmacht units also reported regularly about the “pacification” actions in the hinterland territories, and these reports often refer to murders of gypsies. Serious historiographical works cannot be based on the reports of mass murderers only, source critics and new sources are needed in this case as well. Based on the Ukrainian and Crimea archival sources and testimonies of survivors the new researches proved that the summaries of certain experts about the total slaughter of the Crimea gypsies, for example Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, do not reflect reality.

By the time the units of Ohlendorf arrived at the Crimea, in November of 1941, the Jews and the members of the communist party had been being murdered for long months. It is also

27 Tyaglyy, 2009, 130.

28 Zimmermann, 2001, 127–129.

29 Tyaglyy, 2009, 128.

proven by the story of the persecution of Crimea gypsies that there were big differences in the so-called “Einsatzgruppe-politics” regarding the Jews and Gypsies. Based on the data of the 1939 census 2064 Romas lived in Crimea, and the number of the wandering gypsies was unknown by the authorities. A lot of them declared themselves Muslims and Tatars and were registered as such. Among them there were – similarly to Hungary – workers pursuing professions accepted and appreciated by their environment: horse dealers, hauliers, craftsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths and retailers. A special important group was that of the gypsy musicians. They lived in small separate districts in Simferopol, Bakhchisaray and Belogorsk. In the reports of the Einsatzgruppen from the end of 1941 – to the beginning of 1942 the gypsies were mentioned generally in the category “miscellaneous”, in the group of asocial, insane and saboteur individuals, often without identifying, how many of the group were gypsies.³⁰

The occupying German army counting on the Tatar’s support in Crimea, distinguished the Jews considered being of Tatar origin (karaitas and krymchacks) and the Muslim gypsies from the “other” Jews and gypsies intended for elimination. And so all the gypsies registered themselves as Tatars and the Tatars themselves supported them. Of course the Germans did not care about that, and the majority of the gypsies were taken away on lorries and shot dead. According to a nice legend when the soldiers of Einsatzgruppe D surrounded the Ciganskaya Slobodka in Simferopol and started to collect and take its inhabitants to the execution on lorries on 9 December 1941, the operation had to be cancelled because of the protest of the Tatar municipality and the locals.³¹ In reality a part of the gypsies were collected in the town, taken and shot dead. According to the official data 1700 gypsies lived in Simferopol at the beginning of the German occupation. At the beginning of the next year their number was only 1100, and one year later only 8. As there were no mass murders during 1942, it is probable that those who survived registered as Tatars and/or they hid. The majority of the Bakhchisaray gypsies were spared by the

³⁰ Tyaglyy, 2009, 33–34.

³¹ <http://wangfolyo.blogspot.com/2014/06/krimi-ciganyok.html> (Retrieved: 26 July 2018)

German, thanks to the intervention of the leaders of local Muslim communities. That must have been due to the standing together of the two communities living, praying and working together for a long time, and the gracious behaviour of the local German authorities.³²

In the villages of Crimea, the local authorities were ordered by the German occupiers to list all the wandering gypsies and the gypsies working in the kolkhozes and sovkhoses for long years, who were in many cases forced by the Soviet authorities to settle down. Their murder was carried out in close cooperation by the sub-units of the Einsatzgruppe D and the military gendarmerie, without making distinction between the two gypsy groups having different life-styles. The gypsies living on the countryside were sometimes spared, according to a summarising partisan-report (1 July 1943) all the Jews and several gypsies in the Crimea were murdered. After the liberation of Crimea, in the summer of 1944 the local Armenians, Bulgarians and Greek, and all the gypsies were deported by the Soviet authorities and the Tatars. In the NKVD-reports (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) there are many mentions of the Gypsies taken from the Crimea in the summer-autumn of 1944. A 1949 Soviet summarizing report refers to more than thousand Crimea Gypsies.³³

The work of the Nürnberg International Military Court was criticised many times by many. For example, the issue was raised, how much better it would have been, if the leaders of the Nazi regime had been judged by German courts instead of the courts of the allies. It was recognised relatively early that one of the biggest faults of the Nürnberg trials was – as it was identified by Drexel A. Sprecher, member of the USA legal group – that the persecution and execution of gypsies did not receive a separate count. This had serious consequences from many aspects. Firstly, the gypsies were deprived of their right to have an individual trial day, secondly, right after the II. World War several informative testimonies could have been recorded and shown to the public. This way the situation of the Roma has not changed after the II World War Europe-wide either: they remained in the same situation as before the Nazi seizure

³² Tyaglyy, 2009, 38–39.

³³ Tyaglyy, 2009, 42.

to power: marginalised and unknown, in extreme poverty. It cannot be surprising that in Western-Germany as long as until the 1960s the authorities were not willing to recognize the gypsies as victims of the Nazi racist politics, and in East-Germany it could not have been emphasized any longer during their seemingly enthusiastic building of socialism that Nazis were there only in the capitalist parts of the country, the “socialist” Germans had nothing to do with what Hitler and his followers had done. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federal Supreme Court of Justice declared in 1963 that the gypsies were also victims of racial persecution. The barriers were not removed to the compensation for the damages suffered by the Roma. During the time when the three compensation laws were carried out and were issued between 1953 and 1956, only a handful of Roma received compensation. The assigned officers were in charge as early as in the Nazi period, and most of them had the opinion that the gypsies were criminals who spent their well-deserved penalty-time in the Nazi prisons and Lagers. Even those gypsies could hardly get their compensation fine who had been taken under forced sterilization.³⁴

An especially sensitive topic is the issue of the remembrance, commemorations, memorials and museums in connection with the Roma-gypsy Holocaust. The fact that there is practically no mention of the non-Jewish victims of Nazis, and there are no pictures or items of them at the new permanent exhibition of Yad Vashem opened in 2006 in Jerusalem, is understandable, but more than a mistake or guilt. The permanent exhibition in USHMM deals with the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis, including the gypsies, too. At the permanent exhibition of the Páva Street Holocaust Memorial Centre one of the family stories is that of a gypsy family.

The European overview is rather dark. Back in 2011 the author of one of the summarizing studies wrote about the poor and insufficient acceptance of the Roma Holocaust. It is reflected in the insufficient compensation, in the hierarchical ranging of the sufferance-stories just as in the open or disguised hostilities, direct or indirect Holocaust-denial, anti-gypsy attitude and Roma-hatred. In our direct neighbourhood, in the Check Republic the issue of a commemoration about the Roma

³⁴ Crowe, David M.: HGS, 2012, p. 505–507.

Holocaust resulted in a political scandal-sequence reaching also Brussels. Around 90% of the gypsies, 6000 people living in the Nazi pseudo-state, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. They were taken from two detention centres, from the one next to Lety (approximately 70 km to the south of Prague) and the one close to Hodonin (close to the western part of the Czech-Slovakian border). Gypsy intellectuals and their non-Roma allies keep trying to build commemoration-places in the former camps, but their attempts have failed so far. What can be regarded as a positive sign is that in 2001 in Auschwitz a separate Gypsy-Holocaust exhibition opened in the camp museum showing EU- findings.³⁵

I would like to conclude by summarizing briefly the results of my research in connection with the Hungarian Gypsy Holocaust. In my book I dedicate a separate chapter to the number of gypsies that I estimated at 220 000 between the 1941 borders based primarily on the sometime national survey of the district medical officers. In the chapter discussing the social structure of Gypsies and their place regarding the division of labour, my aim was to prove that the tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of wandering gypsy population is a legend, the vast majority of the Hungarian gypsies lived in the villages and towns, mainly on their peripheries and carried out useful work. Quoting Miklós Szabó, my outstanding colleague: the gypsy issue was approximately as important social-political question in the Horthy-era as the issue of Native Americans in the USA today, that is: it was an irrelevant matter raising little attention.

It became the “Negro Question” only after the World War, as a result of the forced industrialization and the developing of Ghettos in large cities. The gypsy-politics of the Horthy-regime was not only about suppression, humiliation and gendarme-slaps, but also about assimilation and integration. There was no developed state gypsy politics, the authorities did not deal with the gypsies, or if yes, then just with the wandering gypsies.

From the beginning of the 1930s nation-wide gypsy-raids were organised twice a year, in May and October, during which the main interest of the authorities was to arrest the least possible gypsies. The gendarmerie and police leaders of the

35 Baar, 2011., 1–2, 6.

neighbouring counties deliberately did not harmonise the date of the raids, and so when the unconcealed raid started for example in Somogy county, the wandering gypsies could go to Baranya county, from where they returned a few days later, when the police began to “hunt” there. The first Regulation connected to the topic of gypsy Holocaust was issued together by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence on 23 August 1944 and it aimed at organising the first gypsy military forced-labour units. To these units not all the gypsy men liable for military service were to be conscripted, only the wandering and unemployed gypsies or those settled but not having a permanent job. According to our present knowledge approximately 4-5 squads could be formed. F. P. (Uszód, 1903) worked as a combat engineer with the no. 12/1 gypsy military labour squad formed in Mór. In his records he mentions also the no.14/1 gypsy labour squad.³⁶

The local authorities did not want to find gypsies matching the text and instructions of the regulation in their territories, and as opposed to the Jews, the gypsies did not obey blindly the orders. In case they were conscripted, sometimes they fled away or home. Moreover, on the day of issuing the Regulation about the gypsy military forced-labour squads the units of the Red Army reached the Trianon borders, and in the following weeks-months the size of territory under the control of the Lakatos- and later Szálasy-government continuously decreased. In October-November 1944 huge gypsy raids were launched in certain counties of the Western Transdanubia. There were regions from which all the gypsies were taken to the Fortress Csillag Komárom. There the men and women capable of work were sorted out, and the elderly, sick people, and the mothers with infant children were released.

The effectiveness of the gypsy persecutions in the AP era was impaired to a great extent by the sabotage and resistance. In Hungary there was no intensive anti-gypsy propaganda, I cannot stress enough that most of the people simply did not care about gypsies. The deputy-counts, sheriffs and notaries knew that since the German occupation the politics regarding Jews changed for the third time: firstly, the total deprivation of rights and deportation, then the suspension of the persecutions,

³⁶ DEGOB, 2966.

and lastly the AP's reign of terror. They knew well that the German occupiers did not care about the Hungarian gypsies. And they did not want to serve unscrupulously and enthusiastically the AP. They had nor the time neither the territory for anything else but sporadic murdering so to say to get revenge, for the regulation of the gypsies showing the way for the Russians, for deterrence. This is why I estimated the number of the victims of gypsy persecutions (those taken to forced labour, deported and murdered) approximately 5000 back in 1992. But now I think and hope that the number of the gypsies killed in our country, at Nazi forced-labour camps or at death-camps can be estimated at between 1000 and 2000. An outstanding historian colleague of mine, Peter Sipos, who deceased last year, wrote in the introduction of my book (and in my opinion he was absolutely right): "It is also justified, to call it genocide. What makes a system loathly is not solely the number of the deported and killed victims, but also the mere fact that it can happen to any, one single person."³⁷

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³⁷ Karsai, 1992, 4.

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