

Fighting to Remember: The Struggle for Holocaust Remembrance through Romani Activism; The German and Czech Case (1989-Present)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence that Roma and Sinti activists' movements towards Holocaust remembrance had on the national Holocaust memory of Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as its influence on "universal" Holocaust memory. The thesis analyzes the positionality of Romani and Sinti Holocaust survivors within Holocaust discourse, and the ways in which these activist movements strived to take Roma and Sinti victims out of the category of "other" victims and highlight their narrative of struggle and resistance. Through the study of the positionality of Roma and Sinti victims in the Holocaust, I seek to understand what factors led to the erasure of the history of the Roma Holocaust and the strategies Roma and Sinti activists took to highlight the experiences of Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust.

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Introduction

An industrial pig farm stood next to a mass grave of Romani Holocaust victims for nearly 50 years. The pig farm was erected on this mass gravesite in the 1970s during the reign of The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and was protected for decades by the current Czech government until 2016 when it was agreed that the pig farm would be removed. It took a twenty-year movement of Romani activists and their allies calling for the removal of the pig farm and for the establishment of a dignified memorial that honors the fate of the Roma Holocaust victims that rest there. During those twenty years, the movement was met with disdain and racism by some Czech government officials and by fellow non-Romani Czech citizens. The issue of the mass grave, which held the remains of victims of Lety Concentration Camp, a camp specifically designated for Romani prisoners, forced the Czech Republic to reckon with its history and memory (or lack thereof) of the Romani Holocaust victims.

The fight for the establishment of a memorial to Romani victims wasn't a new one, during the same period (the early 1990s) German Roma and Sinti were fighting for the establishment of a national Romani Holocaust memorial in what was the heart of the Third Reich, Berlin. Similar to the Czech case, after nearly twenty years of protests and negotiation, the *Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism* was established in 2012. This movement came at a time where German Romani and Sinti fought for Germany to recognize its history of persecution against the Romani and Sinti and to give them restitution and the same civil rights and liberties enjoyed by other German citizens.

These calls for recognition and acknowledgment sparked great debate in the realm of Holocaust memory. Questions such as if there truly was a 'Gypsy Question' that the Third Reich deployed to exterminate the Romani people and if Holocaust memory should also encompass the fate

of Roma were being asked by academics, governments, museum practitioners, and other victim groups.¹ The experiences of Roma during the Holocaust was inevitably put under a lens of analysis and became a source of great scrutiny. Despite this Romani activists continued their efforts for recognition, and in the present day, the communities' fate during the Holocaust is beginning to become a part of the consciousness of universal Holocaust memory.

The acknowledgment of the fate of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust is one that has been continuously contested in the space of both universal and national memories via public space and discourse. Acknowledgment in itself as it pertains to Holocaust memorialization is a battleground writhed with not only emotion and trauma but political motivation and competition of memory. When it comes to the Romani community, historically the acknowledgment of their fate in the Holocaust has lacked attention and research, and when brought to the wider conversation of Holocaust memory has been greatly contested, and in some cases dismissed altogether. In response to what appears as the dismissal of the Romani experience and suffering, Romani activists and scholars have (and continue to) demand not only acknowledgment but inclusion in both national and universal discourses on Holocaust memory.

In this thesis, I seek to understand the strategies taken on by Roma and Sinti activists to establish a memorial culture for the Romani Holocaust and the responses to these efforts via the construction of national and universal Holocaust memory. This analysis of the creation of a Roma Holocaust memory culture will provide insight into how Romani communities themselves commemorate the Holocaust and how national & universal discourses on the Holocaust respond to this memory culture which will help us understand the positionality of Roma and Sinti in Holocaust discourse in general. Additionally, I seek to analyze Romani insurgency into Holocaust memory by

¹ The term "Gypsy" is considered a pejorative/racist term by many that identify as Roma and/or Sinti, therefore the term is only utilized in the thesis when taken from direct quotes and to refer to specific debates.

looking at the Czech and German Romani activists' movements to establish Holocaust memorials for Roma in Lety and Berlin. Through this analysis I seek to begin to answer two questions:

1. Why has the fate of the Romani community been historically contested in Holocaust Memory?
2. How have Romani-led activist movements influenced the discourse on Roma and the Holocaust?

These questions are accompanied by sub-questions such as, how are the Romani viewed historically in Central Europe? How does the racialization of Romani influence how they are viewed in Holocaust discourse? What agency does the Romani community have within Holocaust discourse? I hypothesize that the marginalization and anti-Romani sentiment that has existed in Europe against the Romani community has ultimately contributed to the marginalization of the voice of Roma within Holocaust discourse. By exploring these questions, I hope to contribute to the historical understanding of the erasure of the Romani Holocaust, and additionally to provide solutions on how those of us concerned with Holocaust memory can create the required space for the Romani experience through academia, public spaces such as museums and memorials, and education.

State of the Art

Holocaust historiography as it pertains to the Romani Holocaust is lacking. As documented by the Romani Archives and Documentation Center, as of 2020 there are about 688 publications which include films, journal articles, government and/NGO reports, and books coming from all languages that generally deal with the Romani Holocaust ². According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's report (2016) on the historiographical bibliography of the genocide of

² Romani Archives and Documentation Center, "Romani Archives and Documentation Center Porrajmos Holdings" (Romani Archives and Documentation Center, n.d.).

This list is continually updated by the Romani Archives Documentation Center when new publications on the subject are made available.

Romani and Sinti, there only exists 12 publications that specifically deal with the historiography of the Romani Holocaust ³. This thesis seeks to help fill the gap of the historiographical analysis on Romani Holocaust memory and representation within historiography itself.

My thesis seeks to understand how the debate of the Holocaust uniqueness thesis has influenced the positionality of Roma in Holocaust discourse, which I believe is essential to understand why the historiography of the Romani Holocaust is lacking. It has been argued by prominent Holocaust scholars such as Steven Katz, Yehuda Baur, Deborah Lipstadt, Daniel Goldhagen, and others that the Holocaust is unique to the Jewish community, and in some cases the term Holocaust cannot be applied to the ‘other’ victims of the Third Reich. This has been argued on multiple bases such as quantity of victims, racial targeting, the use of industrial mass murder, and other points. This thesis has been greatly contested in the realm of ‘Comparative Genocide Studies’ where scholars such as David E. Stannard, Vahakn N. Dadrian, Daniel Blatman, and others have challenged these very bases. It has been questioned if the Holocaust as an event that is historically unique compared to other genocides and within itself was it unique to Jewish victims? For the purpose of my thesis, I will be expounding upon the positions of Ian Hancock and Sybil Milton, who challenge this thesis by arguing that the Romani victims of the Holocaust were persecuted on racial grounds and were subject to the same treatment and policies as Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Through the analysis of this debate, it has appeared that the question of Romani positionality has been glossed over and not significantly challenged by scholars. The ongoing exchange between these scholars has had a direct impact on how Holocaust Memorial culture developed, and ultimately categorized the Romani under the ‘other

³ Ilse About and Anna Abakunova, “International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance the Genocide and Persecution of Roma and Sinti. Bibliography and Historiographical Review Ilse about & Anna Abakunova,”

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/> (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, March 2016),⁷

https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/bibliography_and_historiographical_review.pdf

This report defines publications dealing with historiography as those that give a comprehensive overview and analysis of research that has already been undertaken.

victims' category. Understanding how this debate emerged and played out is integral to the understanding of the positionality of the Romani community in Holocaust discourse.

As my thesis delves into the development of Romani Holocaust memorial culture, it will be building off of the work of Ian Hancock, Huub van Baar, Slawomir Kapralski, and Gergely Romsics who all have written influential articles on understanding how Romani have memorialized and contributed to Holocaust memorial culture. Additionally, my thesis will be challenging notions made by Inga Clendinnen and others who argue that the Roma have collectively forgotten the Romani Holocaust by investigating how Romani memorial culture is different to that of 'traditional' Holocaust memorial culture. This thesis is essential to increase the understanding of why the Romani community have been marginalized in the space of Holocaust discourse, as we have a limited knowledge to why and how this has occurred.

Framework

In this thesis, I will be primarily pulling from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Romani Studies (CRS), as well as Memory Studies as my frameworks of analysis. CRT analyzes the ways in which institutions and institutional actors marginalize and oppress both minoritized and racialized groups, specifically through the analysis of laws and policies. I will be expanding the use of CRT to analyze the memory politics that surround Roma in both universal and national discourse about the Holocaust. The Romani community in both the Czech Republic and Germany have been and continue to be subjected to racial discrimination by national institutions, which has been influenced by racial ideologies that remain intrinsic to the structuring of these institutions. These national institutions, both government and academia, have a direct influence on how Romani people are embedded in their national histories, and prior to the activist movements led by Roma and Sinti, the Romani were largely left out of national Holocaust memory for a significant amount of time. To understand why the social movements for Holocaust remembrance had to take place, it is essential to understand the racial

positionality of Roma and Sinti in both Germany and the Czech Republic, and how these institutions interact with this community based on race. However, Romani people are not only significantly impacted by race, but also by class. The Roma remain one of the most impoverished minority groups in the European Union, which has directly impacted the ability for many within the Romani community to have political influence as well as be able to enter academia in order to have a significant impact on how history is written and produced on Romani Holocaust memory. I plan to analyze how class and race impact the positionality of Romani people in Holocaust memory via Kimberle Crenshaw's theory on intersectionality. I will also be analyzing how laws and policy towards Roma in Germany and the Czech Republic from the late 19th CE to the present both racialize and repress Romani in these regions, which is essential to understanding the motivation behind political organizing as well as the resistance to including Roma in national and universal Holocaust memory.

Additionally, I will be pulling from Critical Romani Studies to understand the construction of Romani identity and Romani political/activists' strategies. Through CRS, I will be able to understand anti-gypsyism in a European context, and how it materially impacts the Romani community. Additionally, I will be able to analyze the ways in which Roma have historically commemorated the Holocaust within their communities and why there is a motivation for their suffering to be acknowledged both nationally and universally.

Lastly, I will be pulling from various aspects of memory studies, more specifically the development of national and universal collective memory and its impact on historiography. Through this mode of analysis, I seek to analyze how Roma are positioned in the national Holocaust memory of the Czech Republic and Germany, and how the Romani community has influenced national Holocaust memory in these contexts. I will be pulling from Aleida Assman's theory on history and memory to analyze how memory formation by national actors influences national histories, and how the counter-memory created through Romani movements of remembrance challenges national

memory. Lastly, I'll be using her theory to critique the role national institutions have on national memory construction, and their ability to otherize communities like the Romani out of national history.

Methodology

In this thesis, I will be consulting a wide variety of source material to sufficiently answer my research questions. The literature as it pertains to the debate of the Holocaust uniqueness thesis will serve as primary source material for the purposes of this thesis. Analyzing the debate as it pertains to the 'Gypsy question' will provide clarity on how these debates influenced the ways in which the Romani Holocaust has and has not been remembered. Additionally, I conducted oral interviews with Romani and non-Romani participants that were a part of the organizing efforts towards establishing memorials in Lety and Berlin. There are current interviews with activists who participated in the establishment of the Berlin memorial, so I will be analyzing those interviews as well. These oral interviews will provide first-hand accounts of the challenges that these movements faced while fighting for the establishment of these memorials, which will give a more holistic view on what took place. Additionally, I will be analyzing newspaper articles, press statements, and reports in relation to the establishment of the Lety and Berlin memorial from various organizations in order to 1) see the development of the movements towards establishing these memorials, and 2) analyze the language used in these articles, reports, and statements in order to understand how these movements were perceived.

Organization of the Thesis

In chapter one I, will explore the positionality of Roma and Sinti in Holocaust memory through the analysis of the debates on the positionality of Roma in the Holocaust and the development of Holocaust memory in general. In chapter two, I will analyze the Romani led activist movement in

the Czech Republic to remove the industrial pig farm from the Lety Concentration Camp site and to establish a dignified memorial to those that fell victim at Lety as well as the discourse and debates that the movement faced. In chapter 3, I will analyze the Romani led activist movement to establish the National Memorial to Roma and Sinti in Berlin and the discourse and debates that the movement faced. In chapter 4, I will provide my key findings and concluding thoughts.

Chapter 1: History, Memory, and the Roma Holocaust

The Holocaust is a historic atrocity that is arguably a part of global memory. Starting as a memory confined to the survivors of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators, it became a defining collective memory of Europe, and now is a part of a global memory network. It took two decades after World War II for the discourse to begin surrounding the trauma and crimes of the Holocaust, and an additional two decades after that for the Holocaust to become a part of a discourse connected to morality and remembrance⁴. In the European context prior to 1989, Holocaust memory was mostly framed in a national context with each country dealing with the memory of the Holocaust in its own way which was influenced by the political peripheries they existed within. For example, the ways in which Eastern bloc countries dealt with the atrocities of the Holocaust differed to that of Western European countries. Post-1989 with the fall of the Soviet Union and the then expansion of the European Union, Holocaust memory began to have a more transnational nature. However, this did not come without resistance, as many nations were not ready to fully deal with the extent of their history with the Holocaust. The 1990s demarcated a memory boom, where the Holocaust was transformed from individual and national memory into a globalized historic event that was advocated to be cemented in the global memory network. This cementation took place in the form of memorials, museums, film, academic research, art projects, and a plethora of other mediums.

Despite this expansion in awareness and acknowledgment of the Holocaust, there was a hierarchy of remembrance that formed. The acknowledgment of the Holocaust became synonymous with the acknowledgment of the 6 million Jewish people that were murdered at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators, however the murder of other victim groups such as the Roma and Sinti did not become a part of the fabric of memory of the Holocaust. Instead, Roma and Sinti were slated until

⁴ Assmann, Aleida. 2010. "The Holocaust — a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community." *Memory in a Global Age*, 97

recently as “other victims” as opposed to racialized targets of Nazism. This otherization in remembrance created tensions in the memory culture of the Holocaust and in many ways led to the erasure of the experiences of Roma and Sinti victims of the genocide. This chapter seeks to understand the tensions that have existed (and in many ways still exist) as it pertains to the positionality of Roma and Sinti victims in Holocaust discourse and to see if these tensions can provide an explanation for the sidelining of remembrance for Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust.

Understanding History & Memory

When one thinks of memory we normally think about our individual memories and our personal relationships with them. However, memory can be understood as not only individual and personal but as collective and communal. Collective memory can be understood as shared memories amongst a group that are taught and internalized and help construct an identity and positionality. In many ways collective memory is mediated and influenced by the memory constructed by nations, institutions, and other influential actors. This is how collective memory is distinct from individual memory – individuals cannot construct their own memories; however, institutions can construct their own memories through the development and cementation of memorials, rituals, texts, images, symbolism, etc.⁵ Through this construction of memory there is the construction of narratives which organize how memories are to be understood and interpreted, and which memories hold relevance over others. In this way collective memory has an impact on one’s individual memory as it provides ways for an individual to position themselves and connect their individual memories to that collective memory and in many ways helps that individual form an identity in relation to the collective memory. However, it is not always the case that individuals can connect themselves to a collective memory, and

⁵ Assmann, Aleida. 2008. “Transformations between History and Memory.” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75 (1): 55

instead may experience otherization and a disconnect to the constructed collective memory. This can be seen in the ways in which Roma and Sinti activists interact with collective Holocaust memory, which I will explore later in the chapter.

Creating a Collective Memory of the Roma Holocaust

The call for remembrance amongst various actors representing Romani interests throughout Europe came from both a place of memorial and political motivation, or what Kapralski refers to as “memory as resource”⁶. Initially, there was a push to integrate Romani suffering from the Holocaust into the national consciousness in various European nations, which eventually led to a transnational call for remembrance in order to:

1. Receive restitution for the atrocities that were inflicted prior to and during World War II against the Romani minority
2. To end the culture of silence that existed around the Romani Holocaust
3. To gain recognition and representation of the Romani Holocaust via memorialization (monuments, museums, commemoration days, etc.)

And eventually

4. The creation of a Romani Nation

This call and eventual movement towards the remembrance of the Romani Holocaust was the foundation of what I would define as the project of memorial culture of the Romani Holocaust. The project of memorial culture of the Romani Holocaust is the transnational movement to document and raise awareness around the Romani Holocaust with the goal to have an established memory of the

⁶ Kapralski, Slawomir. 2015. “The Genocide of Roma and Sinti: Their Political Movement from the Perspective of Social Trauma Theory.” S.I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation, 43

Romani Holocaust as well as highlight and mitigate present issues that face the Romani minority. The establishment of the project of memorial culture of the Romani Holocaust was primarily shaped by the Romani community, its activists, and NGOS, not by European local and national governmental institutions or the academy outside of a few allies⁷. Despite the German government and other governments who historically collaborated with the Third Reich to bring about the genocide of the Romani people being aware of its crimes, almost all of them have not made the effort to commemorate Romani victims independent of the pressure from the activist efforts of Romani people and their allies. The crimes of the Romani Holocaust for a great period lived under a veil of silence that remained widely unacknowledged outside of Roma communities for decades. The first national recognition of the Romani Holocaust was in Germany where it was not officially acknowledged by the German government until 1982 following the successes of the Romani Civil Rights Movement in Germany⁸.

The Neglect of the Memory of the Romani Holocaust

Gyorgy Majtenyi, a professor of Romani social history, offers 3 possible explanations for why the memory of the Romani Holocaust was neglected⁹:

- 1) The silencing of the Romani Holocaust.
- 2) The inability of the Roma minority to express their views in public discourse before and after World War II, and lack of social solidarity with Romani community.

⁷ Majtényi, György. 2021. Review of The Memory and Histogrphy of Porrajmos. Making a a Transnational Site of Memory. S.I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation, no. 1/2021: 92

⁸ "Germany - Recognition of the Roma Genocide." n.d. Roma Genocide. Accessed April 14, 2022. https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide/virtual-library/-/asset_publisher/M35KN9VVoZTe/content/georgia-recognition-of-the-genocide?inheritRedirect=false

⁹ Majtényi, 90

- 3) The sparse documentation by the Nazis of their crimes against Roma which proved difficult for historical reconstruction.

The culture of silence and the continued marginalization of the Romani throughout Europe post-WW2 is one of the most significant factors towards the neglect of the memory of the Romani Holocaust. According to Oliver von Mengersen, a scholar of Romani Studies, Romani victims of the Holocaust were not a part of the general consciousness of German society after the war. In interviews conducted after the war with non-Roma Germans, participants were able to identify Jewish victims as victims of the Holocaust despite continuing to hold anti-Semitic views, however participants were unable to identify Roma as victims of Nazism¹⁰. In the case of Romania, the Romani Holocaust remained an extremely marginalized topic until the fall of communism, and even today remains a polarizing topic¹¹. This veil of silence extended to most countries where Romani people experienced persecution during the war, as many national memories focused on their own ‘victimization’ under Nazism, and in the case of former communist states, victims of USSR as well.

As for the inability of the Romani minority to represent themselves in public discourse before, during, and after World War II, this for sure played a large role in the lack of recognition of the Romani Holocaust early on. A significant portion of Romani people in Central and Eastern Europe were murdered during the genocide, thus leaving many Romani communities small and fragmented. Additionally, aforementioned, the lack of restitution to Romani victims made the recovery after the war very difficult. This positioning of a significant portion of Romani people being banished once again to the margins created difficult conditions for self-representation. According to Michelle Kelso, a specialist on the Romanian-Romani Holocaust, “communities that are characterized by economic

¹⁰ Mengersen, Oliver von. 2017. Review of *The Impact of the Holocaust on the Sinti Communities in Post-War Germany*. In *Beyond the Roma Holocaust: From Resistance to Mobilisation*, Universitas. 60

¹¹ Herki, Norina. 2020. “Anti-Roma Discourses: The Struggle for Roma Holocaust Recognition, Collective Memory and Identity.” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Studia Europaea* 65 (2): 283–302.

deprivation, and struggle, public commemoration may be an economic luxury that they forgo to focus on immediate needs and the pursuit of the public good of historical commemoration is influenced by class position and those with greater cultural, social, and economic capital are relatively more likely to both seek and receive recognition”¹². I believe that this is applicable to the movement towards the commemoration of the Romani Holocaust, as the early efforts towards commemoration of the Roma Holocaust victims were spearheaded by individuals a part of the ‘Roma Elite’ who had the ability to invest time, energy, and resources towards fighting for recognition. However, this exclusivity of remembrance being solely worked towards by the ‘Roma Elite’ changes as more grassroots efforts and commemorations begin to take place in the present.

The sparse kept documentation by the Nazis of their crimes against the Romani in my per view was not as significant towards the neglect of Romani Holocaust memory. This is because the evidence that did exist that proved the targeting of the Romani population was closely guarded by government archives that appeared to want to continue to keep the memory of the Romani Holocaust in the shadows. It took the intervention of Romani activists in many cases to gain access to these documents that would eventually add to the project of memorial culture of the Romani Holocaust. One of the most significant interventions of Romani activists in an effort to gain access to documentation was the occupation of the Tübingen University Archives in 1981, which I will expand upon in chapter 2¹³.

Whilst I mostly agree with the three explanations provided by Majtenyi, one that I feel he is missing is the presence of anti-Romani racism within varying European societies (which still persists today).

¹² Herki, 288

¹³ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma. n.d. “Occupation of the Tübingen University Archives in 1981.” [Www.sintiundroma.org](http://www.sintiundroma.org), Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma. [https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/exclusion-after-1945/civil-rights-movement/racial-files-from-tubingen-university/..](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/exclusion-after-1945/civil-rights-movement/racial-files-from-tubingen-university/)

Due to the prominence of this sentiment, it remained ‘appropriate’ and accepted that the Romani Holocaust remained silent for a long period, despite the calls from Romani activists who demanded that the plight of the victims be researched and acknowledged. This was especially pervasive within governmental and academic circles. Even when some scholars began to investigate the fate of Roma in the Holocaust, in some ways their plight was trivialized by those scholars. Some scholars argued that Romani people were not racialized by the Third Reich and therefore did not experience genocide, others argued that Romani people were ‘afterthoughts and essentially collateral damage of wartime. Some scholars, like Yehuda Baur and Steven Katz, even maintained that the Romani were targeted due to their ‘asocial’ behavior as opposed to their race, thus ultimately legitimatizing the racialized stereotype of asociality amongst the Romani minority. Many of these claims were made in direct response to activists that attempted to heighten the awareness of the Romani Holocaust, and as a result created a barrier for the Romani diaspora to achieve transnational awareness of their suffering during the Holocaust. It would be remised if we did not consider the possibility of anti-Romani racism being the backbone of some of these ‘scholarly’ and political responses that call into question if the genocide against Roma did or did not take place.

The Romani Holocaust and Academia

In the case of the academy, the effort to establish a memorial culture, more specifically, a historiography project of the Romani Holocaust, has come at odds with traditional historians (and still continues to), as this effort for commemoration has primarily been spearheaded and established by Romani activists. The foundation of the research of the Romani Holocaust being established by activists has been criticized by the academy as the research wasn’t done in an ‘academic’ or ‘objective’ mode. However, this criticism came after the fact, when historians largely glossed over the dynamics of the Roma under the Third Reich. Without the work of Romani activists establishing the

groundwork, it is hard to say if we would have a historiography of the Romani Holocaust. Mainstream academic research on the Romani Holocaust didn't experience a boom until the 1990s and were done as a result of the calls for remembrance by Romani activists and their allies.

The first academic studies on the Romani Holocaust were conducted in the 1970s primarily by Romani scholars in line with the Romani Civil Rights Movement which sought to document crimes committed against Romani people by the Nazis and their collaborators¹⁴. These scholars were directly confronted by some traditional historians who questioned the applicability of the concept of the Romani Holocaust as well as the source material that scholars of the Romani Holocaust were utilizing¹⁵. Traditional historians of the time were heavily reliant on written sources as they were considered to be superior to testimony at the time. However, these written sources characterized Romani people as criminals and shirkers, which for a while became the accepted basis for Romani persecution in the academy¹⁶.

Majtenyi offers five positions that researchers took on the genocide of Roma, which is important to understand the positionality of the Romani Holocaust in academia.

1. Researchers who claimed that the crimes that were committed against the Roma cannot be considered genocide because they were, in their view, essentially non-racially motivated.
2. Researchers who argued that although there was a genocide, it could not be called a Holocaust, thus emphasizing the uniqueness of the Shoah.
3. Researchers, primarily of Romani origin early in on in research about the Romani Holocaust, argued that the term genocide and Holocaust could be applied to the genocide of Roma.

¹⁴ Majtényi, 98

¹⁵ Ibid., 98

¹⁶ Ibid., 98

4. Researchers that argued that Jews and Roma were the only groups who were persecuted by the Nazis on a racial basis.
5. Researchers who emphasize the universality of the Holocaust and discussed the history of the Holocaust in a unified framework, united the aspects of all persecuted minorities.

This resistance to Romani Holocaust memory via the academy greatly contributed to the victim hierarchy that exists within Holocaust discourse, and ultimately shaped the way in which those that are educated about the Holocaust understand the positionality of victim groups.

Academic Debates on the Romani Holocaust

Despite the genocide of the Roma and Sinti throughout Europe during the Holocaust, there remains intense debate in academia surrounding the positionality of victimhood that Romani hold in the Holocaust. In this section I will analyze the debate surrounding the Holocaust uniqueness thesis, which directly calls into question the positionality of Roma in the Holocaust and analyze how this debate has influenced Romani activism towards inclusion in Holocaust scholarship and memory. In turn, the activism of the Romani community in response to these debates have also challenged the scholarship and has encouraged increased inquiry into the fate of the Roma during the Holocaust by scholars. This relationship between activists and scholars on the Holocaust will be expanded upon in the case studies in the following chapters.

Did Roma Suffer the Same Fate? The Debate on Holocaust Uniqueness

Unique (adj): That is the only one of its kind; having no like or equal; unparalleled, unrivalled, esp. in excellence. Later also in extended use (especially with premodifying expressions): uncommon, unusual, remarkable. [Oxford English Dictionary]

One of the most divisive and polarizing debates that take place in Holocaust scholarship, as well as general Genocide Studies, is the debate of uniqueness. The uniqueness debate in Holocaust scholarship does not only touch on the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a phenomenon, but on the uniqueness of the Jewish community as a target population for genocide, known in the context of the Holocaust studies as targets for the Final Solution. This debate directly concerns Romani victims of the Holocaust because it calls into question if Romani victims were targets of complete and total extermination by the Nazis. This debate as it concerns the Romani goes all the way back to the 1980s and has served as a significant point of contention amongst Holocaust scholars. We will be looking at the arguments made by major Holocaust scholars from the 1980's to the mid-2000s whose positionality on this issue laid the groundwork for how we view Romani as victims of genocide in the context of the Holocaust.

First, we will look at two major scholars that have argued that Jews were the only group slated for complete and total extermination by the Third Reich, Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli historian and well-respected Holocaust scholar, and Steven T. Katz, an American philosopher and respected Holocaust scholar. Yehuda Bauer from the early 80s onwards has taken a strong position on Holocaust uniqueness and has fiercely argued that Romani were not subject to a Final Solution project by the Third Reich. In a response to Sybil Milton in 1992 (A Holocaust Scholar who believes that the Holocaust should be inclusive of Romani) Bauer asserts that "...the attitude towards the Gypsies was a mixture of traditional anti-Gypsy prejudice and hatred on one hand, and racialistic hallucinations on the other hand¹⁷." Additionally, He points out that Roma were defined by the SS in the late thirties as having a hereditary a-social element, and that their a-social behavior was a result of being nomadic people. He then highlighted the focus of the SS to exterminate nomadic Romani, but not target

¹⁷ Bauer, Yehuda, and Sybil Milton. 1992. "Correspondence: 'Gypsies and the Holocaust.'" *The History Teacher* 25 (4): 513

sedentary Romani, which he says no such distinction was made for Jews, who no matter what were slated for extermination¹⁸. Additionally, he argued,

“The Gypsies were simply not important enough for the Nazis to be dealt with centrally. Hitler never mentions them. Nor does Rosenberg. In Nazi eyes they were no ideological problem or threat. They were an irritant; they were treated contemptuously as a plague¹⁹.”

He makes clear that despite their being some similarities to the ways in which Roma were treated to Jews, that since the Jews were direct targets of the Final Solution by the Reich their case is unique. Even after more comprehensive research was completed by scholars throughout the 90s that discovered Heinrich Himmler signed the “Auschwitz Decree” on December 16th, 1942, which ordered the deportation of the Roma and Sinti to Auschwitz to be exterminated, Bauer maintained his positionality in a 2005 *Haaretz* op-ed²⁰. “They [Romani] were not victims of the Holocaust; they were victims of the genocide of a different people, with different motivations and different outcomes.”

Yehuda’s positionality on the issue maintains that despite Roma being victims of mass murder by the hands of the Nazis, that because his belief that sedentary Romani were not targeted as much as nomadic Roma, and that Romani people did not pose a central threat to the Reich, that they cannot be considered as victims of the Holocaust. Furthermore, we can infer that he does not believe the Roma were targeted for simply being Roma, whereas Jews were targeted solely for being Jews. This position is greatly challenged with immense evidence (which I will present later) but is one that is still held in circles that hold on to Holocaust uniqueness.

Steven T. Katz has a similar positionality to Bauer and utilizes the persecution of the Roma by the Nazis as a case study to test his thesis of ‘unique intentionality’. In his thesis of unique

¹⁸ Ibid., 513

¹⁹ Ibid., 514

²⁰ János Bársony, and Ágnes Daróczy. 2005. Pharrajimos. Harmattan, 27

intentionality, Katz states that we must recognize two distinct forms of genocide, "... (A), understand(s) genocide as: the total destruction of a national, religious, or ethnic identity²¹. The second form, (B), understands by genocide: the complete destruction of all persons, i.e., individual human beings, who identify with and are identified by a given national or ethnic identity. That is, not allowing for the dissociation of an "identity" and an individual's nature, and thus denying the possibilities of conversion." He believes that the positionality of the Jewish people in the context of the Third Reich is more in line with the 'B' understanding of genocide because the Reich did not only seek out to destroy Judaism, which has happened multiple times in history, but wanted to destroy the Jewish people via genocidal practice²². In his comparison of the Romani and Jewish case, Katz argues similarly to Bauer that despite the racialization of the Roma by the Reich, that their a-social status was more significant than that of their racial one.

"It is correct that from the first the Nazis classified Gypsies as non-Aryans and sought to associate them with Jews racially, culturally, and historically; yet, at the same time, the Nazi policy towards the Gypsies was predicated not only on the over-ridingly important criterion of race, though this was a significant factor in the Gypsy debate, but also on the notion of "a-socials". Thus, in the majority of concentration camps, though forming a distinct sub-group, the Gypsies wore the common black patches indicative of asocials. And again, the 1937 Law Against Crime specifically links Gypsies with, for example, beggars, tramps, prostitutes, etc. who show "anti-social behavior."²³

Additionally, Katz compares the decimation of the Jewish population to that of the Romani population as an additional way to signify uniqueness of the Jewish case. "The fact that Jews died at

²¹ Katz, Steven T. 1981. "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust." *Modern Judaism* 1 (2): 161

²² *Ibid.*, 163

²³ *Ibid.*, 176

nearly four times the rate of Gypsies is a consequence of the different intentionality which propelled the slaughter of these two peoples by their common murderer²⁴.”

The issues of Romani being targeted for not mainly race but what the Nazis considered to be ‘asocial’ behaviors, that not all Romani were targeted because some were sedentary, but others were nomadic, and that the proportion of Roma killed are less compared to Jews are all common arguments to maintain that Jews were unique victims of the Final Solution. However, these positions have been greatly challenged, especially from the nineties onwards by Holocaust scholars and the Romani community.

Two significant scholars a part of this debate early on that directly challenged these notions that Roma were not targets of the Nazi Final Solution, and the uniqueness debate are Ian Hancock, a Professor Romani descent at the University of Texas, and Sybil Milton, who was a Senior Researcher at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is important to note that Ian Hancock was one of the only Holocaust scholars of Romani descent from the early eighties to the two-thousands and was consistently put in a position to be a representative of Roma in the academic sphere. In his work, *Responses to Porrajmos (The Romani Holocaust)*, Hancock challenged the idea of Holocaust uniqueness and made a case for the Holocaust to be inclusive of Romani victims.

Hancock challenged the relevance of sedentary Roma who may have been exempted from execution and points out that there were also Jewish people that received exemption from the Reich from mass murder, “There were in fact numbers of categories of Jews who were exempt, and who escaped death. Hillberg discusses these in detail in the first chapters of his book *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961)²⁵. As early as 1938, the German Reich asked various foreign governments to

²⁴ Katz, 177

²⁵ Hancock, Ian. 2010. “Responses to the Porrajmos (the Romani Holocaust).” In *Danger! Educated Gypsy: Selected Essays*, 226–63. University Of Hertfordshire Press. 232

extend invitations to German Jews as a means of getting them out of the country, but this policy was not extended to include Romanies.” He then makes clear that “As the Holocaust intensified, most of these exemptions, for both groups [Jews and Roma], were progressively rescinded.²⁶” He then emphasizes that only Jews and Romani were singled out for extermination, despite the exemptions that were made for both communities, due to the basis of race and ethnicity.

In direct contrast to the claims made by both Bauer and Katz that Roma were not subject to a Final Solution, Hancock points to multiple decrees and policies that called for the Final Solution to the Gypsy Question. He cited a letter sent by the Reich Main Security office in October 1939 that stated that the ‘Gypsy Question’ will shortly be regulated throughout the territory of the Reich, as well as a recommendation by Adolf Eichmann for the ‘Gypsy Question’ to be solved in tandem with the Jewish Question²⁷. Additionally, Hancock cites the signing of the Auschwitz Decree of December 1942 by Heinrich Himmler (mentioned prior) as the beginning of the Final Solution of the ‘Gypsy Question’²⁸.

As it pertains to the argument of Romani being targeted by the Third Reich more for the purpose of their perceived ‘asocial’ behavior than their race, Hancock asserted that this was an argument created and perpetuated by the German government to avoid having to pay war crime reparations to Romani, and that the Roma were indeed targets due to their racialization²⁹. Additionally, Hancock stated that ‘The racial identity of Romani people, and the genetically based rationale for their extermination, are abundantly documented and referenced”, which is clear via the decrees and policies which will be expanded in the case study chapters.

²⁶ Hancock, 232

²⁷ Ibid., 235

²⁸ Ibid., 235

²⁹ Ibid., 235

Sybil Milton, one of most well-known advocates for Romani inclusion in Holocaust historiography, also made sound points as to why the Roma should in fact be within the framework of victims of the Holocaust. She argues that “The Nazi Regime applied a consistent and inclusive policy of extermination -based on hereditary – only against three groups of human beings: the handicapped, Jews, and Gypsies ... Members of these groups could not escape their fate by changing their behavior or belief³⁰. They were selected because they existed, and neither loyalty to the German state, adherence to fascist ideology, nor contribution to the war effort could alter the determination of the Nazi regime to exterminate them.” Milton’s understanding of how Roma were treated by the Third Reich falls in line with the uniqueness logic that Katz proposed, specifically for ‘the disallowance for the dissociation of identity’, Roma were unable to opt-out of being Roma and were murdered because of their identity.

Milton also challenges this idea of Romani people being mainly persecuted due to the perception of asocial behavior. She confirms Hancock’s point that German restitution offices used this line of logic to deny Romani reparations and adds that “...defining an entire ethnic group as anti-social and criminal is a classic example of racism³¹.” Thus, making it clear that these descriptions of Roma being asocial criminals, thieves, spies, etc. are all a part of the racial stereotypes against Romani people, which is completely neglected in both Bauer and Katz’s positions. Milton homes in on this point by stating “Gypsies were *not* antisocial criminals, just as Jews were not members of an international conspiracy³². The Nazis killed Gypsies and Jews because they considered them racial aliens without a homeland.”

³⁰ Bauer, Yehuda, and Sybil Milton, 516

³¹ Ibid., 517

³² Ibid., 517

What is made clear by the positionality of those like Milton and Hancock who challenge the uniqueness framework of the Holocaust is that they believe that Roma were targets of the Third Reich due to racialized identity, as opposed to those that hold on to the uniqueness position who believe that Roma were targeted mainly due to their perceived ‘asocial’ behavior. I believe that this is a central flaw in the position of those who advocate the uniqueness position, they fail to recognize these ‘asocial behaviors’ as racial stereotypes that were used as the legitimization for the Third Reich to exterminate the Roma. Additionally, it must be made clear that the Romani were in fact perceived as a threat to the ‘racial purity’ of Germans, which is an additional reason as to why they were targeted for extermination. Racialization comes with perceived behaviors, lifestyles, intelligence, etc., so being asocial cannot be divorced with the Nazi perception of the Romani as a race of people. I argue that the charge of ‘asocial’ was in fact a part of the racial identity that the Reich imposed on to the Roma, and that is crucial in understanding the ways in which Roma were targeted by the Nazis. This debate surrounding the uniqueness of the Holocaust was consistently interacting with the public sphere and was influencing discourse on how we define the Holocaust, which leads to how we commemorate it.

Conclusion

I conclude that the victim hierarchy that was established by Holocaust scholars that rejected Roma rightfully as racialized victims of Nazism and instead denoted them as “other” victims can serve as an explanation to the sidelining of Romani Holocaust memory. The research and opinions formulated by scholars on the Holocaust ultimately influenced the ways in which it is perceived by the wider society, and if Roma are rejected as a targeted group slated for genocide in this sphere, it is unsurprising and inevitable that this sentiment is carried on outside of academia. This has had significant consequences, one being the lack of Romani representation in Holocaust museums

throughout Europe. However, due to the persistence of Romani activist, Romani victims of the Holocaust are beginning to be acknowledged as targeted victims of Nazism. Despite the barriers that existed against Romani people in their struggle for remembrance, they were not deterred and organized strategically to construct the memorial culture and historiography that exists today, which is continually growing. In the following chapters I will explore how the general discourse of the Roma Holocaust that was expanded upon in this chapter influenced the construction of national Holocaust memory in Germany and the Czech Republic, and how Roma and Sinti activists in both countries fought to integrate themselves in the national Holocaust memory of both countries.

Chapter 2: The German Case; The Battle for a National Memorial

The positionality of Roma and Sinti victims in Germany's national memory of the Holocaust has historically been contested. In this chapter I seek to provide historical context of the experiences of Roma and Sinti in the German lands and present-day Germany as it can inform our understanding of the current positionality of Roma and Sinti in Germany's' national Holocaust discourse. Additionally, in this chapter I seek to analyze the discourse surrounding the establishment of *The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered Under National Socialism*, and the ways in which the work of Roma and Sinti activists have solidified a space for Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust in Germany's national Holocaust memory.

Roma in the German Lands Prior to Nazi Germany

The history of Roma and Sinti within the German lands is a complex one that varied kingdom to kingdom, however overall historical trends can be demarcated. Roma and Sinti people have been documented to have lived within the German lands as early as the 14th CE. The earliest status of Roma in the German lands was one of protection by German kings and sovereign princes in the Holy Roman Empire like Emperor Sigismund³³. At the time, Roma and Sinti were seen as a valuable resource for labor as many specialized in trades such as locksmiths and blacksmiths and many were utilized as cheap labor for monasteries and powerful estate owners³⁴. Additionally, many within the aristocracy had an affinity for Roma and Sinti entertainment such as music and dance, which led to the romanticization of Roma and Sinti as “uncontaminated free spirits”³⁵. Despite this, Sinti and Roma that had nomadic lifestyles were frowned upon as the practice of nomadism was perceived as primitive

³³ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “Early Forms of Exclusion,” <https://www.sintiundroma.org/> (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2020), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/introduction/exclusion/>.

³⁴ Jim Mac Laughlin, “European Gypsies and the Historical Geography of Loathing,” Review (Fernand Braudel Center) 22, no. 1 (1999): 34

³⁵ Ibid., 34

and backward. The policy of protection was ultimately short-lived and took a significant shift in the late 15th CE. This shift was one from protection to marginalization during the transition from medieval society to the incoming early-modern era. During this time, Roma and Sinti were accused of being disloyal subjects and were consistently suspected of espionage which were grounds for expulsion. It was feared that Roma and Sinti were acting as spies for the Ottoman Empire³⁶. This led to the decision at the Reichstag meeting of 1498 that marked Roma and Sinti as *‘vogelfrei’* – ‘free game’ – which allowed for them to be killed without consequence. This decision was the beginning of an era of intense persecution of Roma and Sinti which led to an outpouring of violence against the group.

From the beginning of the 16th CE to the late 18th CE, a multitude of anti-Romani edicts were created and enforced that restricted the movement, economic participation, protection, and other aspects of life for Roma and Sinti which was not just consolidated to the German lands, but throughout the entirety of the Holy Roman Empire³⁷. Similar edicts were passed outside of the Holy Roman Empire as well, which limited the ability of Roma and Sinti to find a safe haven throughout Europe. These edicts, if broken, subjected Roma and Sinti to punishments such as public floggings, branding, expulsion, and executions³⁸. Despite this period of intense persecution, Roma and Sinti were able to find means of survival by successfully navigating social and economic relationships on interpersonal levels³⁹. The major consequence of the persecution of the Roma and Sinti as a result of these edicts was the development of the perception of inherent criminalization of the Roma and Sinti population by not only those in power, but in wider society.

³⁶ Mac Laughin, 36

³⁷ “Roma and Sinti: Germany,” minorityrights.org (Minority Rights Group International, June 19, 2015), <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/romasinti/>.

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ “Early Forms of Exclusion”

This idea of inherent criminality of Roma and Sinti was further developed during the era of the Second Reich (1871-1918) and the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). During these two periods the legal basis of Romani and Sinti criminality developed further and laid a foundation that the Third Reich would later utilize to execute their genocide. Through both of these periods' authorities gradually established *Sonderrecht* – special legislation – that targeted Roma and Sinti in the German lands. This legislation included trade restrictions, entry bans, and bans on settlement⁴⁰. Additionally, by 1899, the Munich Police Directorate in Bavaria set up an intelligence department with the specific purpose of surveilling Roma and Sinti with methods of early criminology such as photographing and fingerprinting due to the perceived criminal attributes of Roma and Sinti⁴¹. In 1905 the chief of the department, Alfred Dillman, utilized the records collected to publish the “*Zigeuner-Buch*” which he published with the purpose of encouraging “fighting the gypsy plight energetically.”⁴² This publication was distributed to varying law-enforcement agencies in the Second Reich.

In 1926 the Bavarian law for “Combatting Gypsies, Vagabond, and the Work Shy” was established and required the registration of all Roma and Sinti with police, labor exchanges, and local registry offices⁴³. This law was established under the pretense of being a preventative crime measure, which allowed authorities to take measures against Roma and Sinti even if a crime had not been committed⁴⁴. This inevitably led to legally sanctioned harassment of Roma and Sinti communities by authorities in the name of “crime prevention”. In 1927, a similar law was passed in Prussia which led to the creation of special identity cards that included a photograph as well as fingerprints for Roma

⁴⁰ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “Special Legislation Directed against ‘Gypsies,’” www.sintiundroma.org (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, n.d.), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/introduction/special-legislation/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.,

⁴² Helmut Samer, “‘Gypsy Policies’ in Germany from the 19th Century to the Foundation of the Third Reich (1933),” romani.uni-graz.at (ROMBASE, 2002), romani.uni-graz.at/rombase.

⁴³ Sybil Milton, “Sinti and Roma in Twentieth-Century Austria and Germany,” *German Studies Review* 23, no. 2 (2000): 319 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1432677>.

⁴⁴ Samer, 1

and Sinti people over the age of 6⁴⁵. It is documented that around 8,000 of these special identity cards were distributed⁴⁶. These policies became the national precedent of the Weimar Republic in April of 1929 when the national police commission adopted the 1926 Bavarian law as a federal norm and established the “Center for the fight against Gypsies in Germany”⁴⁷. By this point, it was outlined in law that Roma and Sinti were viewed to have inherent criminality in the eyes of the state and were seen as a nuisance to society, thus being labeled as a threat to the nation.

Roma & Sinti and the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft

After the assumption of power on January 30th, 1933, by the Nazi party with Adolf Hitler at its helm, the already established perception of the inherent criminality of Roma and Sinti as well as the “fight against Gypsies in Germany” would rise to the level of genocide with the purpose of creating the *Volksgemeinschaft* – “the people’s community.” The *Volksgemeinschaft* was Nazi Germany’s idea of a racially unified community that exalted the “Aryan race” as superior to all others. For Hitler, the purpose of the nation was to serve the *Volk*, and for him and the Nazi party that included the racial purification of society. This led to hierarchal racial classifications in the Third Reich such as *Herrenmenschen* – members of the master race and *Untermenschen* – subhumans. Roma and Sinti as well as Jews were classified under a sub-section of *Untermenschen*, ‘*artfemde Rassen*’ -- meaning races of different species⁴⁸. Additionally, Roma and Sinti were considered to be ‘asocial’ which was an umbrella term used to identify people that were unable to integrate themselves into a community⁴⁹. As this was a broad term, clarification of it was provided by the Nazi’s Racial Policy Office in 1940 which listed

⁴⁵ Milton, 319

⁴⁶ Milton., 319

⁴⁷ Ibid., 319

⁴⁸ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “Racial Ideology as a State Doctrine,” [sintiundroma.org](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/racial-ideology/) (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, n.d.), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/racial-ideology/>.

⁴⁹ John Perkins, “Continuity in Modern German History? The Treatment of Gypsies,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 18, no. 1 (March 1999): 63

multiple categories in which someone could be considered ‘asocial’, two of which can be applied to the Nazi’s perception of Roma and Sinti⁵⁰:

- (I) ‘In continual conflict with the criminal law, the police and other authorities on account of criminal, subversive or mischievous behavior’⁵¹.
- (II) ‘Is work-shy (in spite of being able-bodied lives parasitically from social welfare agencies)’.

These classifications made clear that German Roma and Sinti were not a part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* per Nazi ideology, but instead were assumed enemies of societal progression who needed to be eradicated.

“Rats, cockroaches, and fleas are also natural phenomena, just like Jews and gypsies (...) All of life is a struggle. We must therefore gradually eradicate these vermin by biological means.”⁵²

-Dr. Karl Hannemann in the journal of National Socialist German Physicians Federation, August 1938.

The Nazis were able to legitimize the exclusion of Roma and Sinti from the *Volksgemeinschaft* through their use of racial research conducted prior to the rise of the Third Reich and after. In 1936 the Racial Hygiene Research Center was established in Berlin with the assistance of Heinrich Himmler and was led by Dr. Robert Ritter with the purpose of assessing Roma and Sinti and how to classify them in terms of ‘racial biology’⁵³. This center worked in collaboration with the gestapo to collect statistical and racial data from over 30,000 Roma and Sinti throughout Germany. The research

⁵⁰ Perkins., 64

⁵¹ Perkins., 64

⁵² “Racial Ideology as a State Doctrine”

⁵³ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “A Comprehensive Assessment: The ‘Racial Hygiene Research Centre,’” [sintiundroma.org](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/comprehensive-assessment/) (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, n.d.), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/comprehensive-assessment/>.

conducted by Ritter was extremely invasive genealogical research that included anthropological photographing, the measurement of body parts, and the extraction of hair and blood samples⁵⁴. Through his research Ritter concluded that Roma and Sinti were “the products of mating with the German criminal asocial subproletariat” and a “people of entirely primitive ethnological origins, whose mental backwardness makes them incapable of real social adaptation.” Through his findings, Ritter was able to establish a “(pseudo)scientific” basis for the origins of Roma and Sinti asociality and racial inferiority, building off the pervasive historical insistence that Roma and Sinti are inherently criminal⁵⁵. By 1938, policing agencies as well as government and party agencies had created overlapping and collaborative databases that held information on Roma and Sinti, thus expanding the surveillance and criminalization of the group⁵⁶. These information files would be kept by the Nazi Party’s Racial Policy Office and were used to create policies and propaganda that targeted Roma and Sinti.

In line with the Nazi’s ideology on race, they implemented a plethora of laws and restrictions that deteriorated public and private life for German Roma and Sinti. In 1933, the Nazis had already begun its exclusion of Roma and Sinti in German society, starting with the implementation of strong economic restrictions. In September of 1933 Roma and Sinti were excluded from trade and professional organizations. This led to exclusion from working in music, sports, itinerant trade, and other economic sectors⁵⁷. This economic deprivation severely impacted the survival of German Roma and Sinti and led to mass migration to border countries like Austria and Switzerland, which led to an increase of anti-Romani measures being taken in those countries as Roma and Sinti were not welcomed⁵⁸. Exclusion from German society significantly advanced after the passing of the

⁵⁴ “A Comprehensive Assessment: The ‘Racial Hygiene Research Centre’”

⁵⁵ Nicole Rafter, “Criminology’s Darkest Hour: Biocriminology in Nazi Germany,” *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 41, no. 2 (August 2008): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1375/acri.41.2.287>.

⁵⁶ Milton, 321

⁵⁷ Ibid., 319

⁵⁸ Ibid., 319

Nuremberg Laws, which were established to solidify a more concrete and extreme racialized hierarchical order through law. Nuremberg Laws targeted racially distinctive minorities that were considered to have “alien blood”, which included Roma and Sinti, Jews, and Black people⁵⁹. These laws began to pass in September of 1935 and eroded the ability for Roma and Sinti to participate within society. These laws had provisions such as a ban on “race-mixing” and the loss of citizenship for those that were not considered of “German blood”, which resulted in the loss of voting rights and other consequential affects⁶⁰. These laws were even extended by localized authorities who sought to exclude Roma and Sinti from public life. In some areas within Germany, Roma and Sinti were excluded from restaurants, pools, playgrounds, grocery stores, and other places of business⁶¹.

This exacerbation of racial hysteria pushed by the Nazi Party encouraged municipal governments and local welfare offices to call on German police to confine Roma and Sinti into municipal “Gypsy camps” as early as 1933, but the pressure up ticked in 1935⁶². These camps interned entire German Roma and Sinti families and were located in fenced off ghettoized areas normally on the edge of villages and cities overseen by the SS and local police⁶³. Records that were collected on Roma and Sinti through varying offices helped in the process of rounding up Roma and Sinti to be interned in these municipal camps. Whilst interned in these camps, Roma and Sinti were subject to genealogical registration, forced labor, forced sterilization, and violent treatment from camp guards⁶⁴. According to the Sinti and Roma Documentation Center, around half of the German Roma and Sinti population at the time were imprisoned in a municipal camp. “Gypsy camps” were erected throughout

⁵⁹ Milton, 320

⁶⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Nuremberg Race Laws,” Ushmm.org (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 2, 2021), <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws>.

⁶¹ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “Forms of Exclusion,” sintiundroma.org (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, n.d.), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/forms-of-exclusion/>.

⁶² Milton, 321

⁶³ Ibid., 321

⁶⁴ Ibid., 321

Germany and Austria in places like Cologne, Essen, Hamburg, Berlin-Marzahn, Salzburg, and many other villages and towns⁶⁵. After 1939, municipal “Gypsy camps” would transition into assembly centers that aided the Nazis in their systemic deportation of Roma and Sinti into concentration and death camps such as Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück⁶⁶. Roma and Sinti who were not interned in municipal camps were rounded up in mass arrest conducted by the SS and then were deported to various concentration and death camps⁶⁷.

On December 16th, 1942, Heinrich Himmler established a decree that ordered the deportation of all Roma and Sinti families in Nazi occupied territories to concentration and death camps. Thereafter, a majority of German Roma and Sinti families were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. It is estimated that 90% of the German Roma and Sinti population died during the reign of the Third Reich, and that about 500,000 Roma and Sinti across Europe fell victim to the genocide.

German Roma and Sinti After the Holocaust

After the end of World War II, German Roma and Sinti were left in a state impecuniosity and had to regroup their lives after the murder of thousands of their people by the Third Reich. The persecution of Roma and Sinti in both West and East Germany continued after the war where German Sinti and Roma survivors of the Holocaust were excluded from accessing compensation, despite meeting the standards, in almost all cases, compensation was denied. It was argued by restitution authorities that the injustices suffered by the Roma under Nazi rule came as a result of criminal and anti-social behavior, thus not warranting compensation.

⁶⁵ Milton, 321

⁶⁶ Ibid., 321

⁶⁷ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, “Transfers to Concentration Camps,” [sintiundroma.org](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/transfers-to-concentration-camps/) (Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, n.d.), <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/the-path-to-genocide/transfers-to-concentration-camps/>.

“It has been concluded from examining the compensation entitlement of gypsies and gypsies of mixed blood in accordance with the provisions of the German Restitution Laws that said category of persons was persecuted and incarcerated largely because of their anti-social and criminal attitude, not on racial grounds (...). We therefore order that all compensation claims by gypsies and gypsies of mixed blood first be redirected to the State Office of Police Criminal Records, Stuttgart 0, Fuchsstrasse 7, for verification...”⁶⁸.

In the case of Romani people residing in East Germany (The German Democratic Republic) under soviet control, compensation was initially not offered to Romani and Sinti victims of the Third Reich due to compensation being reserved for those involved in the ‘resistance against the Nazi regime’⁶⁹. In May 1946, access to compensation was extended to Romani and Sinti victims of Nazism, however the compensation was heavily stipulated and sometimes lost due to Sinti and Romani people not being perceived as ‘societal role models.’

The early denial of compensation was reflective of the resistance to acknowledge the suffering of Romani Holocaust victims in West and East Germany, and ultimately relegated the experience of Sinti and Romani people to silence within society. Despite this resistance, German Romani and Sinti began their call for compensation and recognition as early as the 1950s. In 1956, Oskar and Vinzenz Rose founded the organization *Verband rassistisch Verfolgter nicht-jüdischen Glaubens* (Association of Racially Persecuted People of Non-Jewish Belief), which advocated for the compensation of Romani Holocaust victims as well as the integration of Romani and Sinti in the sectors of education, labor, and residency⁷⁰. Despite the organization being unsuccessful in its efforts, this organizing served as

⁶⁸ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma. n.d. “Compensation Claims by Gypsies.” [www.sintiundroma.org](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/set-en/en-030500zitatzid=5469&z=5..). Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/set-en/en-030500zitatzid=5469&z=5..>

⁶⁹ Dokumentations-und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma. n.d. “East Germany’s Recognition of the Sinti and Roma as Victims of Nazi Persecution.” [Www.sintiundroma.org](https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/exclusion-after-1945/difficult-new-beginnings/gdr/). <https://www.sintiundroma.org/en/exclusion-after-1945/difficult-new-beginnings/gdr/>..

⁷⁰ Majtényi, 90

the basis for the Roma Civil Rights Movement which would lead to post-war compensation and the eventual recognition of the Roma Holocaust in the German context.

The Roma Civil Rights Movement & Holocaust Recognition

In the 1970s, the German Roma and Sinti community experienced a significant political and cultural shift in Germany due to the groundwork done by German Roma and Sinti activists. During this time the German Roma and Sinti community mobilized in order to fight against the continued injustices that they faced during the post-war era as well as gain acknowledgment for their plight and experiences during the Holocaust. On October 27th, 1979, The German Sinti Association organized the first international commemoration ceremony to honor the Roma and Sinti victims of Nazism. This ceremony was held at the memorial site of the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Northern Germany and was attended by over 2,000 people⁷¹. Amongst the 2,000 were approximately 500 Roma and Sinti from over twelve European countries⁷². The commemoration received international media attention and received international media coverage via the International Herald Tribune. This commemoration was the first of many to highlight how the Roma and Sinti were persecuted by the Nazi regime and the persistence of anti-gypsyism that the German Roma and Sinti population were experiencing at the time. Soon after, a delegation of Roma and Sinti representatives presented a memorandum to the Federal Government in Bonn, Germany that outlined key political goals of the Romani Civil Rights Movement. One of the main goals was for Germany to officially recognize the Nazi genocide against Roma.

In order to achieve the goals outlined in the memorandum, German Roma and Sinti participated in a string of strategic protests to put pressure on the German government to officially

⁷¹ Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma. 2017. "45 Jahre Bürgerrechtsarbeit Deutscher Sinti und Roma." Heidelberg: Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma., 22

⁷² Ibid., 22

recognize the Roma Holocaust, provide proper compensation to Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims and their descendants, as well as gain equitable status with other German citizens. One of the most influential protests established to achieve these goals was the Dachau Concentration Camp hunger strike that took place on April 4th, 1980. Roma and Sinti activist wanted to gain access to the documents of the former “Landfahrerzentrale” office where files kept by the Bavarian criminal police documented the names, personal details, and finger prints of Roma and Sinti throughout Germany up until the 1970s. These files were important as they served as documented evidence of the persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Nazi era and could serve as evidence for just compensation of German Roma and Sinti Holocaust survivors. 11 Sinti activists participated in the hunger-strike, 3 of which were concentration camp survivors. The protest lasted seven days and received national and international coverage by over 100 media outlets and garnered a significant amount of public solidarity which marked a turning point in the public perception of German Roma and Sinti within German society. Ultimately, the regional government publicly acknowledged their need to address discrimination against the Roma and Sinti community. As for the documents, the German Interior Ministry claimed that they had been destroyed in the early 1970s. The hunger strike officially ended on April 12th, 1980, after the activists met with Federal Minister of Justice, Hans-Jochen Vogel, who promised to lend his support and described the protest as a “very important impetus” for dismantling prejudice⁷³.

Despite the claim from the German Interior Ministry that the files of the Bavarian criminal police were destroyed, German Roma and Sinti activists sought to gain access to additional documents on German Roma and Sinti during the Third Reich. They were adamant to obtain these documents in order to provide evidence of Nazi persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Holocaust and to

⁷³ Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 26

outline the ways in which this persecution was carried out. Prior to these inquiries made by Roma and Sinti activists, these documents had been kept secret for decades by officers in the German criminal police as well as former “race researchers”⁷⁴. In some cases, the documents were still used by “race researchers” to carry out additional pseudoscientific research post-Holocaust. This was the case of Sophie Erhardt, who continued this type of research utilizing the Nazi race files of Roma and Sinti at Tübingen University up until her retirement in 1968⁷⁵. In an attempt to gain access to these secret files and have them transferred to the Federal Archive in Koblenz where they would be accessible, in September of 1981, 18 Sinti activists occupied the basement of the Tübingen University archives where these documents were kept. The activists demanded the immediate removal of the Nazi race files to the Federal Archive, and within a few hours the documents were transferred there, thus making this action successful.

After a decade of successful organizing efforts by various German Roma & Sinti organizations, in February of 1982, nine of those organizations consolidated into the *Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma*, The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. Romani Rose, a German Sinti activist, was selected to be the chairman of the council. After its formation, the council was recognized by Germany’s federal government as an important representative body and became an essential authority on German Roma and Sinti issues in the years to come. In March of 1982, not long after the formation of the council, Germany’s Federal Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, officially recognized the Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti in Germany for the first time⁷⁶. In his recognition, Schmidt declared that “The Nazi dictatorship inflicted a grave injustice on the Sinti and Roma. They were persecuted for reasons of race. These crimes constituted an act of genocide.” Additionally, Schmidt expressed the

⁷⁴ Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma,

⁷⁵ Ibid., 30

⁷⁶ “The Recognition of the Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma.” 2020. European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti Und Roma. July 20, 2020. <https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/recognition/the-recognition-of-the-nazi-genocide-of-the-sinti-and-roma/>.

moral need to repair the wrongs inflicted by Nazi Germany and stated that the Federal Republic of Germany was obligated to compensate Roma and Sinti victims to help improve their social situation in Germany⁷⁷. This recognition by Schmidt is significant for two reasons:

1. It showed that the actions taken on by German Roma and Sinti activists proved affective and influenced the German government's positionality on Roma and Sinti as victims of the Holocaust.
2. The recognition that Roma and Sinti were persecuted on racial grounds by the Third Reich is a significant shift from the previously accepted narrative that Roma were persecuted solely because of their "inherent" criminality.

The efforts of German Roma and Sinti activists to gain acknowledgment from the German state about the crimes committed against the minority during the Holocaust was a significant feat, however, their efforts in solidifying the Roma Holocaust into the national memory of Germany did not stop there. This effort would continue on in the fight for a national memorial that would codify the experiences of not only German Roma and Sinti, but all Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust into public space, however, this effort did not succeed without resistance.

The Battle for a National Memorial, Shared or Separate Memory?

Nearing the end of the 1980s, discussions about Germany's memorial culture and its ability too properly reckon with the Holocaust became a hot button issue. In the summer of 1989, Lea Rosh, a German media personality, founded a citizens initiative known as *Perspektive Berlin*, a campaign to advocate for a central memorial in Germany to commemorate the Jewish victims of the Holocaust⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ "The Recognition of the Nazi Genocide of the Sinti and Roma."

⁷⁸ Blumer, Nadine. 2011. "From Victim Hierarchies to Memorial Networks: Berlin's Holocaust Memorial to Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism." Dissertation, University of Toronto., 141

Rosh started this initiative after visiting *Yad Vashem*, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, and believed that the absence of a central memorial in Germany was inappropriate as the Holocaust was carried out by German perpetrators. It was Rosh's idea that this memorial was "... in no way be a matter of the Jews, that is the victims. Rather this is a matter for the descendants of the perpetrators."⁷⁹ This initiative received widespread support by German intellectuals and politicians and was supported by many in the German public. Despite being a citizen's initiative, the debate surrounding the establishment of this memorial reached the German political sphere, who ultimately would spearhead the construction and the administration of the memorial via state and regional government funds. Despite widespread support for the construction of this memorial, the symbolism and meaning behind this memorial came under scrutiny notably by other victim groups of Holocaust who argued that a central memorial to all victims of Nazism would be more appropriate.

The Central Council of Sinti and Roma in particular was vocal about its disagreement with the establishment of a national memorial that only commemorated Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This public disagreement by the council sparked a debate specifically about the positionality of Roma and Sinti in the Holocaust in relation to Jewish victims, and it became contested if these victim groups shared the same status of victimhood thus needing to be commemorated separately. These public debates surrounding victimhood and the positionality of Roma and Sinti in the Holocaust as victims were reflective of the academic debates that were being discussed at the same time (see chapter 1). Early on, it was the position of the central council that a unified memorial was the path forward, and this positionality was expressed through the publishing of op-eds, petitions, and open letters. One of the most notable publications on this matter was Romani Rose's op-ed published on April 28th, 1989, in the German news outlet *Die Zeit* titled "A Memorial for All Victims".

⁷⁹ Blumer, 141

In this piece Rose makes clear that it is the council's position that there should be an establishment of a national memorial that commemorates all the victims of Nazism, and that the erection of a national memorial solely dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was a divisive project. He emphasized that Roma and Sinti, alongside Jewish people, were racial targets slated for genocide by the Nazi regime, and because of this, both memories should be honored in a single memorial. Rose took on the position that the inability for a national memorial to be inclusive of the memory of Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust was continued erasure of Roma and Sinti in Holocaust memory. Rose directly criticized the positionality taken by *Perspektive Berlin*, specifically one of the most vocal advocates for the project, Eberhard Jäckel, a German historian.

“...the demand raised by the Berlin citizens’ initiative “Perspektive Berlin” and spread in the ZEIT on April 7th by Eberhard Jäckel, the first signatory of the appeal for “Perspektive”, that such a memorial should only be related to the Jewish people, means a hierarchization of the victims, which is hurtful and offensive to the victims of the genocide and to the survivors of the Sinti and Roma minority. Eberhard Jäckel assumes that remembering the fate of Sinti and Roma means relativizing the crimes of the National Socialists, meaning “general non-binding”. Jäckel thus continues the injustice he complained about at the beginning of his contribution: the exclusion of Sinti and Roma from memory.⁸⁰”

In the article by Jäckel that Rose refers to, he addresses the criticisms that the *Perspektive Berlin* project was facing at the time and makes clear that monuments must be “specific and differentiated” and that “every memorial becomes meaningless if it is generalized”. He addressed the concerns expressed by the council by stating that,

⁸⁰ Rose, Romani. 1989. “Ein Mahnmal Für Alle Opfer.” www.zeit.de. Zeit. April 28, 1989. <https://www.zeit.de/1989/18/ein-mahnmal-fuer-alle-opfer/komplettansicht>.

“... one monument does not exclude other monuments. We already have many in our country, also for the victims of the Nazi Tyranny, and there will and must be more. Especially the so often forgotten gypsies should get one soon. In other words, which shouldn't really be necessary: Whoever demands a monument for the Jews does not want to prevent other monuments. What we demand is only that this one should not be general, but particular and distinguishable for them [Jews]. It should not result in general non-binding nature.⁸¹”

However, Jäckel didn't address the core concern that the memorial the citizens' initiative was advocating for would serve as the national Holocaust memorial, thus becoming the memorial that the country turns to in order to commemorate the victims, which for the council, a memorial of that scale should be inclusive of Roma and Sinti victims.

The debate continued on, and despite the council having a relationship with the Jewish Central Council, the two groups came into conflict over this monument. This happened, despite the initial claim of the citizen's initiative that the memorial was non-Jewish project, however over time, Jewish community leaders and intellectuals became intimately involved in the project⁸². In 1992, Rose made the claim that the Jewish Central Council was “distorting historical fact” by not including Roma and Sinti in the national memorial project⁸³. This prompted a response from the Central Jewish Council's leader, Heinz Galinski, where he emphasized the council's commitment to the commemoration of non-Jews, especially those that are Roma and Sinti, but that the exclusion from this memorial project was due to the distinct positionality that Jews held in the Holocaust which served as enough of a legitimization for a separate memorial⁸⁴.

⁸¹ Rose, Romani. 1989. “Ein Mahnmal Für Alle Opfer.” *Www.zeit.de. Zeit.* April 28, 1989. <https://www.zeit.de/1989/18/ein-mahnmal-fuer-alle-opfer/komplettansicht>.

⁸² Blumer, 147

⁸³ Ibid., 147

⁸⁴ Ibid., 147

An agreement was settled in July of 1992 to erect two separate memorials, one memorial dedicated to the Jewish victims of Nazism, and one dedicated to the Roma and Sinti victims of Nazism. This prompted the council to demand that the memorial dedicated to Roma and Sinti victims be in the same locational proximity to that of the Jewish memorial in order for there to be a shared memorial site. However, this demand was rejected by Ignatz Bubis, the new leader of the Jewish Central Council, who cited that a close proximity to the Jewish national memorial, which would also serve as a graveyard of Jewish victims, would be against Jewish religious law because there is a prohibition of shared cemetery spaces with non-Jews⁸⁵. This reasoning was approved by the Berlin senate in October 1992, “As stated the senate has committed itself to building a memorial of equal worth for the murdered Sinti and Roma of Europe⁸⁶. Although this memorial will stand on a separate site, the murder of the European Sinti and Roma will be commemorated in an appropriate manner.” However, in 1993, Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke out officially against the proposal of a shared memorial site and advocated for separate and distinct sites of remembrance, which resulted in the plans for the Jewish memorial to be placed south of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, one of the most central locations in the city, thus allowing the memorial to procure dominance in Berlin’s memorial landscape. This decision was protested by the council as they believed that this decision reaffirmed the hierarchy of Holocaust memory.

“Fifty years after the end of these crimes, not a single national Holocaust memorial in Germany in a central location, in the capital Berlin, commemorates this genocide, which is unique in history, of 500,000 Sinti and Roma and six million Jews. The decision of the Berlin Senate to erect the national Holocaust memorial to commemorate the Jews murdered in Europe on the federal government property south of the Brandenburg Gate next to the future Embassy of the United States cannot

⁸⁵ Blumer, 149

⁸⁶ Ibid., 149

therefore stand alone. Exactly the same resolution is now required for the erection of the memorial for the Sinti and Roma murdered in Europe on the same Federal Government property. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma will not allow the Holocaust memorial for the murdered Sinti and Roma to be excluded or deported to any other place in Berlin. There is no claim to sole representation for the national commemoration at this point, as the Central Council of Jews in Germany would like to demand afterwards. The uniqueness of the Holocaust means that both memorials must be erected at the same time.⁸⁷

The general controversy and debate contesting the legitimacy of a national memorial only dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust continued up until June 25th, 1999, when the Bundestag decided to hold a plenary discussing this very issue. The plenary session was titled “Parliamentary Resolution for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” and was meant to decide on if the national memorial should be dedicated solely to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust or all victims persecuted by the Nazis. During the session, multiple references were made by parliamentarians to the Roma and Sinti and the need to preserve the memory of the group in a dignified manner. This was likely the result of the persistent organizing and advocating by the council to insert themselves in Germany’s national Holocaust memory. It was ultimately decided that the city of Berlin would move forward with the construction of the national monument dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and that the Bundestag would fund the construction of several separate memorials throughout Berlin memorializing “other” victims of the Holocaust. The national memorial dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, now known as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, was inaugurated on May 10th, 2005.

⁸⁷ Rose, Romani. 1993. “Gedenken Ohne Ausgrenzung.” www.zeit.de. Zeit. December 17, 1993. <https://www.zeit.de/1993/51/gedenken-ohne-ausgrenzung>.

From Monument Disputes to Inauguration

With the approval of this resolution, the council shifted their focus to the location and the construction of the memorial site and urged the city of Berlin to secure the funding necessary and begin the construction of the memorial site as soon as possible, as Roma and Sinti Holocaust survivors were dying with old age. Several protests were staged by the Council of Sinti and Roma between 2000 and 2005 as there was a belief that the city of Berlin was stalling the construction of the monument. During that five-year period, it was decided that the memorial site would be located near the parliament building and the Brandenburg Gate, thus providing a central location for the memorial. However, there were disputes about the memorial inscription that the monument would receive. The council requested that a quote by a former president of Germany, Roman Herzog, be utilized at the memorial site. The quote by Herzog equated the plight faced by Jews and Roma during the Holocaust, which was important to the council as they have struggled to gain recognition for their suffering during the Holocaust and have historically been dismissed as racialized targets of the Nazis.

“The genocide of the Sinti and Roma was motivated by the same obsession with race, carried out with the same resolve and the same intent to achieve their methodical and final extermination as the genocide against the Jews. Throughout the Nation Socialists’ sphere of influence, the Sinti and Roma were murdered systemically, family by family, from the very young to the very old.⁸⁸”

Despite this, a spokesperson of the cultural ministry expressed concerns with utilizing the proposed quote as, “Historians also see differences between the persecution of the Jews and that of the Sinti and Roma, making it problematic to present them as equal.⁸⁹” Rose cited this notion by the cultural ministry as a lack of respect and ignorance about Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims.

⁸⁸ Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 70

⁸⁹ Deutsche Welle. 2004. “Row over Holocaust Memorial Inscription.” DW.COM. December 10, 2004. <https://www.dw.com/en/row-over-holocaust-memorial-inscription/a-1424247>.

Additionally, the proposed use of the word “gypsy” in the monument inscription was also contested. Reinhard Florian, a survivor of the Holocaust, said that he was opposed to the use of the word “gypsy” as when he hears it, he “thinks of the old times and of the SS”⁹⁰. The details of the monument were not agreed upon between the council and the German federal government as well as Berlin city officials until 2005. It was decided that 2 million euros would be allocated towards the construction of the monument and that the Israeli architect and artist, Dani Karavan, would serve as the designer and architect of the monument.

The construction of the monument did not begin until 2007, which halted several times thereafter due to disputes between Dani Karavan and the city of Berlin, who Karavan claimed was carrying out the design and construction of the memorial sloppily. Despite these conflicts, the monument was officially inaugurated on October 24th, 2012, by Chancellor Angela Merkel, twenty years after the project was approved in 1992. The inauguration ceremony was attended by 100 Holocaust survivors and their descendants to honor the memory of the Roma and Sinti victims of Nazism. The memorial is named *The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered Under National Socialism*. German Roma and Sinti activists ultimately achieved their goal of establishing a dignified national memorial, despite the continuous conflicts and roadblocks.

Conclusion

The advocacy by the Central Council of Sinti and Roma highlighted the tensions that existed between the memory of the Roma Holocaust and German national Holocaust memory. As highlighted in this chapter, Roma and Sinti were not initially seen as victims of Nazism until the advocacy by German Roma and Sinti activists who demanded the visibility and acknowledgment of the Roma Holocaust. It is hard to say if the crimes of Nazism against the Roma and Sinti would be acknowledged

⁹⁰ “Row over Holocaust Memorial Inscription.”

by German Holocaust memory culture without the activism by German Roma and Sinti activists. I believe that the debates that existed around the victim hierarchy of the Holocaust in the context of public memorials highlighted the struggle of the positionality of Roma and Sinti in Holocaust discourse. The core issue was the idea of equating the memory of the Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust to Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The decision made by the Bundestag made clear that despite the acknowledgment of Roma being racialized targets of Nazism, that German national Holocaust memory still abides by the uniqueness thesis discussed in the academic debates in chapter 1. This uniqueness thesis from the positionality of German Roma and Sinti activists should be inclusive of Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims, as they believe they suffered equitable fates to that of Jewish victims. Despite the German Holocaust memory culture abiding by the uniqueness thesis, it can be concluded that through the activist work of German Roma and Sinti activist during the Roma Civil Rights Movement as well as their success in establishing a national memorial to Sinti and Roma victims of the Holocaust that they were able to successfully include themselves in the Holocaust memory politic of Germany.

Chapter 3: The Czech Case; Lety Concentration Camp, A Battleground of Memory

Lety Concentration Camp as a site of memory and the discourse that has surrounded it is in many ways indicative of not only how the Czech Republic deals with its memory as it pertains to the Romani Holocaust but gives us insight into overall trends regarding the marginalization of Romani Holocaust history and memory. In this chapter we will come to understand the positionality of Czech Romani and Sinti in Czech history, the efforts made by Czech Romani activists and allies to establish a “dignified” memorial on the Lety Concentration Campgrounds, as well as analyze the discourse from multiple actors as it pertains to Lety. Through the analysis of both the activism and the discourse we can make observations on the development of Holocaust remembrance and recognition in the Czech Republic, how activism in this case was insurgent to the Czech Republic’s national memory, and to what extent anti-Romani racism has played a role in the marginalization of Roma Holocaust Memory in the Czech Republic.

Roma in the Czech Lands Prior to Nazi Occupation

Prejudice and what we consider now as anti-Romani racism existed within the Czech space towards Romani people long before the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia by Nazi Germany, or the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Anti-Romani racism can be traced back to the 16th CE, where the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand I, issued an edict for the Czech Kingdom to forbid ‘Gypsies’ from the Czech Lands⁹¹. During the Early Modern Era, Romani people were subject to extremely cruel treatment. In many cases, Roma had to learn to survive underground to avoid persecution, not doing so could result in brutal torture or even execution by the orders of the nobility. Near the end of the Early Modern Era, Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780) established a

⁹¹ Jana Horvathova, “Roma in the Czech Lands - RomArchive,” www.romarchive.eu (RomArchive), accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/roma-czech-lands/>

policy that called for the forced assimilation of Roma, which was continued by her son Joseph II (1780-1790), who established multiple settlements for Roma to live in order to stop Romani migration⁹². This resulted in the settlement of many Roma throughout the Czech and German lands and in some cases afforded settled-Romani people legal citizenship and subject status for the first time in history. A majority of settled Roma in the Czech lands lived within the region of Moravia, where despite experiencing discrimination by non-Roma in their villages, made the decision to permanently settle. However, this was not the common case for Romani people residing in Bohemia, a majority of whom continued a nomadic lifestyle and picked up trades such as blacksmiths, horse-traders, musicians, salesmen, and other lines of work⁹³.

Not long after the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1939), during the Interwar period, Law no. 114 was passed in 1927 with the attempt to solve “the Gypsy Question”, which would later on explored by the Third Reich and the ČSR. This law targeted traveling Romani people, as they were accused of committing rampant crime and required the possession of a ‘Gypsy’ identity card and documentation to be permitted to travel⁹⁴. This law also restricted areas within the Czech lands that nomadic Roma could go and allowed adolescents to be taken from their families if the law was not obeyed. This criminalization of Romani people via these policies continued to play into the negative perception of Romani people as those with inherently criminal tendencies, and in the case of the Nazi regime, criminality of Romani people began to be seen as biological. This marker of criminality, which has been persistent from the time of the Early Modern Era, has led to the racist tropes that are foundational in policy towards Romani people that still persist in the present. Prior to the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, new ‘Gypsy’ identification cards were

⁹² “Roma in the Czech Lands”

⁹³ Ibid.,

⁹⁴ Council of Europe, “Factsheet on the Roma Genocide in Czech Republic,” Roma Genocide (Council of Europe), accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide/czech-republic>.

issued to nomadic and non-nomadic Roma based on ‘race and biology’⁹⁵. This documentation would later be used to mobilize the Romani population into concentration camps in Bohemia and Moravia, and eventually Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

Czech Roma and the Holocaust

On March 16th, 1939, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939-1945) was established as a territory of Nazi Germany and assumed the power of the governing body of the first Czechoslovak Republic⁹⁶. Following this seizure, the Ministry of the Interior of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia established its first significant anti-Romani measure, which decreed that all Romani people must settle down and give up their nomadic lifestyles or be at risk of being placed in the protectorate’s newly constructed “Gypsy camps”. There were two camps constructed specifically for Romani people within the protectorate, Lety Concentration Camp in the region of Bohemia, and Hodinín Concentration camp in the region of Moravia. Lety Concentration camp was erected at the site of a former disciplinary labor camp with a new purpose of a “gypsy-camp” for “asocial” and “work-shy” Romani people to prevent them from interacting with the wider society as they were seen as a threat. These camps were modeled after the style of the concentration camps of the German Reich and were controlled and operated by Czech personnel. Initially, only men had been imprisoned in Lety, but in 1942 the camp began to accept women and children as prisoners⁹⁷. The condition of Lety was deplorable; camp prisoners were forced to complete debilitating labor, starvation was common, the barracks were overpopulated and in poor condition which created an environment ripe

⁹⁵ “Roma in the Czech Lands”

⁹⁶ Council of Europe, “Factsheet on the Roma Genocide in Czech Republic”

⁹⁷ “The Gypsy Camp at Lety | Holocaust,” www.holocaust.cz, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/concentration-camps-and-ghettos/the-gypsy-camp-at-lety/>.

for the spread of disease, which resulted in the deaths of many prisoners⁹⁸. Survivors of the camp even reported experiences of severe torture and beatings by camp personnel:

I was supposed to supervise some boys working in the woods and they ran away on me, and we got 25 lashes across our backsides as punishment, with a nightstick, in front of our mother, in front of everyone, a Czech policeman beat me. Then they put me into the gypsy wagon where the corpses were and left them lying there next to me for three days, no food either. The wagons were glued side by side to one another. I was crying, screaming, yelling "Mom, Mom, there are corpses here, I'm scared of them". I was a child, and I was afraid the dead would haunt me...."⁹⁹

(A testimony from a girl imprisoned in Lety at the age of 10)

Ultimately, a total of 1,039 people were imprisoned in Lety, and 326 people are reported to have died on the camp's grounds. Prisoners that remained in the camp up until May 4th, 1943, were transported to Auschwitz II, Birkenau, due to a decree made by Heinrich Himmler on December 16th, 1942, that ordered all Romani to be transported to the Auschwitz extermination camp. Lety Concentration camp officially closed on August 9th, 1943¹⁰⁰.

Hodinín concentration camp had a similar history to that of Lety concentration camp. Hodinín was also constructed for the purpose of interning "anti-social" Romani people residing in the region of Moravia. The prisoners of this camp also experienced starvation, disease, and torture enacted by Czech guards. Ultimately, the camp documented about 1,396 prisoners that had been interned there, 207 of these prisoners were reported to have died on the grounds of the camp¹⁰¹. Like Lety, the camp was liquidated on January 28th, 1944, in response to the decree established by Heinrich Himmler. 855

⁹⁸ Council of Europe, "Factsheet on the Roma Genocide in Czech Republic"

⁹⁹ "Czech Republic: Shocking Testimonies from the Lety Concentration Camp," romea.cz, August 4, 2014, <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-republic-shocking-testimonies-from-the-lety-concentration-camp>.

¹⁰⁰ Council of Europe, "Factsheet on the Roma Genocide in Czech Republic"

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,

Romani prisoners were sent to Auschwitz II where many died from starvation, disease, and murdered by the Nazis in the gas chambers or by torture.

After the liberation of concentration camps throughout Europe in 1945, only 583 Romani men, women, and children returned the Czech lands. Prior to the genocide it was estimated that around 6,500 Romani people lived in the Czech lands, thus the genocide nearly annihilated the entirety of the Czech Romani population.

Roma in The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

The policing and discrimination of Roma did not end in the Czech Lands after the fall of the protectorate but continued in the form of harmful policies under the guise of integration by the new communist regime. Coinciding this was the complete lack of official recognition or commemoration at an institutional or societal level of the genocide of Czech Roma¹⁰². The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was founded in 1948 after a coup d'état by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia that was backed by the Soviet Union. The ČSR had many state projects that it wanted to implement, and one of them was the solving of the “Gypsy Question” via the integration of the Czech and Slovak Roma population into the wider society. After the war there was a significant population of Romani people in the territory of the ČSR in comparison to other Eastern European nations. According to a census conducted in 1966 there was about 220,000 Romani people documented, a majority identifying themselves with Slovak origins, and about 6.5 percent identifying themselves with Czech origins^{103 104}. The fate of Slovak Roma after WWII was very different to that of the Czech Roma, and a majority of the population survived despite the genocidal intentions of the Nazis. Many of the Romani people

¹⁰² Slačka, Dušan. n.d. “Czech Republic - RomArchive.” Wwww.romarchive.eu. Accessed June 22, 2022. <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/voices-of-the-victims/czech-republik/>.

¹⁰³ Ulč, Otto. 1988. “Gypsies in Czechoslovakia: A Case of Unfinished Integration.” *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 2 (2): 307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325488002002004>.

¹⁰⁴ “Czech Roma” in this case refers to Romani people who trace their origins to the lands of Bohemia and Moravia- <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/voices-of-the-victims/czech-republik/>

within the ČSR ended up there as a result of post- WWII migration, since many Romani people were displaced during the war¹⁰⁵. Additionally, many were ‘disposed of’ by Hungary into the ČSR via the minority exchange treaty under the label of “repatriated Slovaks”. This new large post-war population of Roma in the ČSR was seen as an issue to be dealt with, as it challenged the ethnic makeup of the country. Additionally, racist attitudes towards the Roma did not disappear after the end of WWII, but instead persisted. The ČSR government did not want to preserve what they perceived as the culture or ethnic identity of Romani people, but instead felt the need to detach Romani people from said ethnic identity and culture as Romani culture was seen as primitive and backward. This led to their perception of Roma being defined as not a nation or ethnic group, but as people “maintaining a markedly different demographic structure.”¹⁰⁶

In its path to resolve the “Gypsy Question” the ČSR attempted to solve the issue via socialist ideology. According to Otto Ulč, a former professor of East European History at Binghamton University, the ČSR viewed the Romani people as victims of capitalism, so they believed that the overthrow of capitalism would take care of the “Gypsy problem”. Via this ideology, the ČSR produced propaganda through the medium of articles and movies about their project to create the new socialist ex-Gypsy citizen. Additionally, the ČSR became the first and only post-war Eastern European country to ban and criminalize the nomadic lifestyle of unsettled Roma and attempted to settle Romani communities across Czechoslovakia by force. Initially they sought out to solve the “Gypsy Question” by the 1970s. However, their goals were not achieved by this point, and the failure of the integration project was blamed on the Romani people themselves as being unwilling or incapable of integrating¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ Ulč, 307

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 307

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 309

The failure of the initial project towards integration led to the ČSR's government abandoning a timeline and working on the solution towards the "Gypsy Question" overtime.

Efforts Towards Remembrance & Political Organization in the ČSR

Despite the repression of Holocaust memory under the ČSR, it is documented that the small post-war Czech Roma community commemorated the victims in private familial settings and at times survivors would gather amongst one another¹⁰⁸. This was done through the visitation to the sites of the former concentration camps as well as to the gravesites of victims in Mirovice and Lety. A small memorial in the form of a wooden cross topped with a barbed wire crown was placed on the Lety site not long after the war by the Čermáková family who had family members interned at the camp¹⁰⁹. It is also documented by a local newspaper entitled the *Mirovice Chronicle* that a memorial service to the victims took place at the cemetery of the Lety Concentration Camp victims in 1968.

After the Prague Spring of 1968, a movement towards democratization in the ČSR, there were a slew of reforms, an integral one being the loosening of restrictions around media, speech, and travel. This led to the beginning of political organizing of Romani people in the ČSR, who were now able to express their experiences of discrimination via the integration project by the ČSR and express their disdain towards the attempted erasure of their ethnic identity. Many Romani people expressed disagreement with the forced settlement policy as many Romani were denied housing by local Czech citizens which still forced them to migrate, which was banned. Additionally, the issue of incentivized and forced sterilization by the ČSR's government towards Romani woman with the purpose of population control was challenged and regarded as an inhumane and genocidal policy. This led some in the Romani community forming the "Association of Gypsy Roma" and an official delegation to

¹⁰⁸ Museum of Romani Culture Brno. n.d. "Present Days | Memorial Památník Lety U Písku." [Www.rommuz.cz](http://www.rommuz.cz).
<https://www.rommuz.cz/en/lety-u-pisku/present-days/>

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,

the Romani World Congress (1968-1973)^{110 111}. The Association of Gypsy Roma led official efforts to commemorate Lety Concentration Camp by planning the construction of a memorial to Roma victims of the Holocaust on the site of Lety and planned for a similar project at the former site of Hodonín concentration camp¹¹². The organization hosted the first public commemoration of Romani Holocaust victims in the ČSR at the Hodonín site on March 18th, 1973¹¹³. In direct contrast towards these efforts towards commemoration, a pig farm was built on the site of the former concentration camp in the early 1970s, which would later become the center of a battleground for memory.

Additionally, these political associations demanded the status of National Minority as opposed to “Other Nationalities” status, which would have given Romani people access to equal citizenship to other Czechoslovak citizens, whilst also being able to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity. This ability to organize politically is an essential turning point for the Czech Roma as it was a platform for Romani people to their express issues with oppressive state institutions, which prior to this period was uncommon. Additionally, it transferred the conversation of recognition out of the private sphere of the Czech Romani community into the public. However, both the association and delegation were short-lived and were dismantled shortly after the invasion of the Soviet Union on August 20th, 1968, which curtailed reforms installed as a result of the Prague Spring. This curtailment of reforms brought about a crackdown of Romani political activism, however Romani people found ways to pursue their political goals even under intense repression.

¹¹⁰ “The Gypsy Problem in Czechoslovakia”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹¹¹ “Romany Optimism After Congress”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹¹² “Present Days”

¹¹³ Ibid.,

This political activism came via the advocacy of the wider Romani community outside of the ČSR who continued to represent the interests of Czech and Slovak Roma via the World Romani Congress and Romani-led organizations. The issues of Czech and Slovak Roma residing in the ČSR came to the forefront in Geneva at the Second World Romani Congress in 1978, where the congress criticized the inhumane actions of the ČSR. The congress denounced the ČSR denying exit visas for a Romani delegation who could only attend the congress utilizing tourist visas and criticized its policy that banned unsettled Roma from continuing their nomadic lifestyle¹¹⁴. Grattan Puxon, the secretary general to the Romani Congress, expressed his disdain of the ČSR curtailing the ability for Czech and Slovak Roma to participate in the congress, however made clear that they have maintained contact with Czech and Slovak community leaders and took their feedback in consideration for actions items that were discussed at the congress, “We kept a kind of hot line open to them and consulted them about all decisions, you could almost say that they participated by phone.”¹¹⁵ The involvement and input of Czech and Slovak Roma in the World Romani Congress of 1978 was essential, as they joined the call alongside Romani representatives across Europe to demand recognition and reparations from Nazi Germany and its accomplices for their genocide against the Roma of Europe.

Following the World Romani Congress of 1978, others within the Romani diaspora as well as some Czech human rights organizations acted in protest of the repression of the Czech and Slovak Roma. Near the end of 1978, The Czechoslovak Human Rights Movement published *Charter 77*, which was a detailed report that accused the ČSR of “exploiting public indifference and prejudice

¹¹⁴ “Let Us Be” by The Independent Weekly Economist, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹¹⁵ “Romany Optimism After Congress”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

towards Gypsies, whose rights were “De Facto Ignored.”¹¹⁶ The report outlined human rights violations by the ČSR towards the Romani community such as incentivized and forced sterilization of Romani women and accused the ČSR of trying to intentionally lower the birthrate of Roma. Czechoslovak government officials denied that there was ever a forced sterilization policy, however they did admit that sterilization was encouraged for Romani woman who had four or five children¹¹⁷. In July 1980, outside of the ČSR, two West German organizations, the Association for Menaced Nations, and the Federation of German Sinti, protested in front of the Czechoslovak embassy in Bonn¹¹⁸. Both organizations made claims of human rights violations committed by the ČSR’s government such as forced resettlement of Romani families, Romani children being taken away from their families by government authorities and bolstered the claims of *Charter 77* in regard to the forced sterilization of Romani women. The human rights violations according to these two organizations were severe, and they claimed that “... Gypsies in Czechoslovakia were suffering continuous persecution to the point of genocide.”¹¹⁹ These claims were countered via a campaign in the Czechoslovak press by the findings of the ČSR’s government commission, which denied any human rights violations towards the Romani population, and were wrote off these claims as Western propaganda¹²⁰. Despite these criticisms from outside and within, the ČSR maintained its efforts in

¹¹⁶ “The Gypsy Problem in Czechoslovakia”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹¹⁸ “Czechoslovak Situation Report 19”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹¹⁹ “German Gypsies Accuse Prague of Persecution”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

¹²⁰ “Czechoslovak Situation Report 19”, HU OSA 300-30-7:1108, Ethnic Minority Gypsies 1974-1984; Old Subject Files IV; Czechoslovak Unit; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

solving the “Gypsy Question” and moved forward with its integration project up until its disintegration in 1989.

Romani Holocaust Memory in a New Nation

After the fall of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1989), and the separation of the Czech and Slovak State (1990-1992), the Czech Republic was established on January 1st, 1993. As with the beginning developments of any nation, especially modern nation-states, there is a development of a national history and memory that help define domestic and international identity. In the case of the Czech Republic, this task was a difficult one, as there were a plethora of factors to consider. What is our identity post-communism? Who is a part of the Czech Nation? How will our national identity influence our international relationships? and the burning questions of how to deal with Roma and the memory of the Roma Holocaust? The latter questions were not ones that were voluntarily dealt with by the Czech State or society but were ones that in many ways were forced to be deliberated.

This deliberation of Roma Holocaust memory in the Czech case can be seen through the contested memory of Lety Concentration Camp. The debate surrounding Lety within Czech society, more specifically in its political sphere began in 1994, after archival discoveries in the South Bohemian Archive in Trebon made by a Czech American author, Paul Polansky, revealed an unspoken, and for many Czechs, unknown history of a Romani concentration camp. The recovery of these concentration camp documents that described the conditions of the camp and inmates of Lety led Polansky to make his findings known and continue his research to learn more about the interworking of the concentration camp. This research made Polansky unpopular amongst many Czech government officials and some Czech academics, who didn't want the controversy of Lety to be discussed. He was consequently banned from Czech archives after publicly discussing his findings and had to continue his research through Markus Pape, a German investigative journalist, who went to the archives on his

behalf¹²¹. Through these archival discoveries, Polansky went on to make an international moral case about the need to recognize and commemorate the history of Lety, and he vehemently scrutinized the presence of the industrial pig farm present on the site of the former concentration camp. At this time, efforts towards the reconciliation of Holocaust memory as well as the field of Holocaust studies experienced a significant boom, which inevitably spotlighted the Czech Republic through Polansky's campaign.

After international pressure, and efforts by the Czech government to show the capability of its new democratic regime as the government at the time was greatly interested in becoming an EU member state candidate, a plan was approved to inaugurate a memorial to the victims of Lety Concentration camp in 1995. This inaugural ceremony took place on May 13th, 1995, where the memorial was inaugurated by president Václav Havel. In Havel's ceremonial remarks he acknowledges that Czech Roma were indeed victims of the Holocaust, and speaks on the Czech involvement in the operation of the campgrounds,

"The Gypsy internment camp was established at the order of German Nazi officials. However, Czech police administered the camp and guarded the prisoners, and Czechs living in the neighborhood of the camp exploited the cheap labor force of the Gypsy prisoners. Very few of those Czechs found enough compassion and courage to ameliorate the tragic destiny of those prisoners. However, there were also Czech doctors who treated the prisoners and other Czechs who risked their lives to help Gypsy families avoid deportation, or who adopted Gypsy children to rescue them."¹²²

However, Havel only made one remark in regard to the pig farm where he describes it as a result of the "... communist totalitarian regime [who] made sure the memory of those Romani victims was

¹²¹ Polansky, Paul. 2012. "How Many Letys?" Romea.cz. July 12, 2012. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/paul-polansky-how-many-letys>.

¹²² Havel, Vaclav. 1995. "Václav Havel's 1995 Speech at the Unveiling of the Lety Memorial." Romea.cz. 1995. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/vaclav-havel-s-1995-speech-at-the-unveiling-of-the-lety-memorial>.

forgotten.”, thus glossing over the glaring issue that the pig farm was still present, which would become the center of the debate for the following twenty-plus years¹²³.

In the years to come after the inauguration of the memorial, Lety would become the center of debate across the Czech political spectrum and discussions on the removal of the pig farm would last for decades. The discourse that is levied towards Lety ranged in some rare cases full support for the removal of the pig farm to vehement opposition to the removal in fear that it will affirm the atrocities experienced by Czech Roma. In the remainder of the chapter, we will analyze the discourse that took place from varying actors, which will give us insight into both the resistance and acceptance of the removal of the pig farm as well as the history of the Roma Holocaust in the Czech context.

Czech Romani and Sinti Responses to Lety

The perspectives, relationships, as well as activist strategies as it pertains to the Lety Concentration Camp site and the issue of the removal of the pig farm varied amongst the Czech Roma community. Some people confronted the dilemma head on and helped organize efforts towards calling for the demolition of the pig farm, whilst others completely distanced themselves from the topic all together. Amongst those that dealt with the efforts towards the commemoration of the site, the strategies varied significantly. These strategies ranged from political lobbying, grassroots resistance, raising awareness through education, etc. with the ultimate goal of removing the pig farm and dignifying the memory of the Lety Concentration Camp victims. In this section will analyze the strategies taken by different Romani actors and their allies and see what influence their strategies had on the national discourse surrounding Romani Holocaust memory.

The Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust (VPORH)

¹²³ “Václav Havel’s 1995 Speech at the Unveiling of the Lety Memorial.”

The Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust (VPORH) was founded in 1998 by Čeněk Růžička, a Czech Romani activist and the son of Lety Concentration Camp survivors, who established the organization to seek redress for the crimes committed against Czech Roma during the Holocaust. Růžička sought to establish The Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust after learning about his families' experiences as Holocaust survivors. Růžička did not learn about the experiences of his family members during the Holocaust until 1997 when he was contacted by Markus Pape who wanted to request an oral history interview with Růžička's mother who was a survivor of Lety Concentration Camp. Because Růžička had no knowledge of his mother's experiences in Lety prior to this, he requested to see the evidence that Pape had that confirmed her as a prisoner of Lety. Pape informed Růžička about the history of Lety and brought him to the archives that held the inmate records that his mother was included in and took him to the former concentration camp grounds where the pig farm stood. In my interview Růžička he recalled his reaction to learning that the site of the former concentration camp was now occupied by an industrial pig farm.

“When I went to the farm [on the former grounds of the concentration camp] I literally got down on my knees and pledged that I was going to remove the farm from that place. It was the indifference of the farm being there that brought it home to me.¹²⁴”

Motivated by this newfound knowledge, Růžička made it his mission to advocate for Czech Romani Holocaust survivors and to demand for the removal of the pig farm on the grounds of Lety. He felt that the pig farm being on the grounds of the former concentration camp was not only disrespectful but was indicative of the indifference towards the experiences of Czech Roma during the Holocaust.

With the assistance of Markus Pape and Roma activists, Růžička formed the Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust with the purpose of gaining recognition and receiving restitution

¹²⁴ Růžička, Čeněk. 022. Interview with Mr. Růžička, Lety Concentration Camp Interview by Tayla Myree.

for the crimes committed against Czech Roma. In 1998 he held a meeting at a hotel a little outside of Prague that was attended by about 150 Czech Romani Holocaust survivors from former camps in Bohemia and Moravia and/or their descendants in order to pitch his idea for the committee. After collecting the contact information of interested Czech Roma Holocaust survivors and their descendants, Růžička hit the ground running and began to spearhead multiple projects in support of Czech Roma survivors and preserving the memory of the Roma Holocaust. One of the most notable projects that Růžička and the committee took on was their advocacy for the removal of the industrial pig farm off of the grounds of Lety Concentration camp. Růžička and the VPORH advocated for the removal of the industrial pig farm utilizing multiple strategies over a twenty-year period. These strategies included publishing historical research on the history of Lety, gaining domestic and international media coverage of the issue, negotiations with Czech government officials, and one of the most notable, hosting an annual commemoration ceremony at Lety.

The VPORH was able to raise awareness and put pressure on the Czech government to remove the industrial pig farm through negotiations with Czech government officials as well as international governing bodies. In my interview with Růžička, he described his experiences and challenges advocating for the removal of the industrial pig farm with Czech government officials and political figures. He described the committee meeting with a plethora of lawmakers, government officials, and differing administrations to discuss the issue and recalled that “Some people didn’t want to speak with me at all, and some people, I could tell they really only saw me as a Gypsy, I wasn’t anything to them.”¹²⁵ Růžička felt that this sense of avoidance by many Czech politicians was due to their attempts to maintain their political careers and not be associated with the Czech Romani community at all. “Anybody who discusses the Romani issue in terms of the discrimination that

¹²⁵ Interview with Mr. Růžička, Lety Concentration Camp

happens here and in terms of standing up for the Roma, they lose votes immediately. There is no neutrality on this issue here.¹²⁶ Despite this attitude that existed amongst some politicians, Růžicka and the VPORH were still able to apply political pressure, especially through the means of international intervention.

In 1999 the committee organized a public hearing about the Lety u Písku Concentration Camp site as well as the Hodonín u Kunštátu Concentration Camp site at the Czech Chamber of Deputies¹²⁷. This hearing was attended by over 400 people including Czech Romani Holocaust survivors, Czech MPs and senators, and Romani activist and cultural figures. During this hearing the committee advocated for the removal of the industrial pig farm off the site of Lety and for the memory of the Roma Holocaust to be preserved. That same year representatives of the VPORH became members of the Mixed Historical and Societal Commission in the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. This commission prepared and submitted the material that was considered at the beginning of government's considerations on how to move forward with the desecration of memory at the sites of Roma concentration camps in the Czech Republic.

In 2005, the committee continued their efforts and presented an exhibition that they curated entitled "Lety: Story of a Silenced Genocide" to both the European Parliament in Brussels and to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic¹²⁸. The exhibition included photographs and documents of Romani and Sinti who suffered and, in some cases, died in Lety concentration camp. The goal of the exhibition according to Markus Pape was to, "...inform the public and members of parliament especially about what happened in the concentration camp at Lety u Písku and we want to show this in a special way – these are not only documents but also the faces

¹²⁶ Interview with Mr. Růžicka, Lety Concentration Camp

¹²⁷ Růžicka, Čeněk. n.d. "A Vanished World: History of VPORH." www.rom-sinto.cz. <http://www.rom-sinto.cz/contact.html>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.,

and stories of people and we want to show that this is not only about countries or their history, but it is about real people.” When presented to the European Parliament it had a great impact on its members who then called for the close of operations of the industrial pig farm on April 28th, 2005, in their resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union,

“...whereas the Romani Holocaust deserves full recognition, commensurate with the gravity of Nazi crimes designed to physically eliminate the Roma of Europe, and calling in this connection on the Commission and the authorities to take all necessary steps to remove the pig farm from the site of the former concentration camp at Lety u Písku and create a suitable memorial...¹²⁹”

Despite the overwhelming majority of the European parliament at the time voting in favor of the resolution, it was reported that Czech members of the European Parliament from the Civic Democratic Party voted against the resolution because it mentioned the Czech Republic as a concrete example of discrimination against Roma¹³⁰. The passing of this resolution sparked discussions in the Czech media and information about the history of the concentration camp became more accessible to the Czech public through the media coverage. The European Parliament would again call on the Czech government to remove the pig farm and erect a proper memorial on the grounds of Lety in their resolution on a European strategy on the Roma in 2008¹³¹. When the exhibition was presented to the Chamber of Deputies in June of 2005, there were approximately 200 guests in attendance including the former Czech President, Václav Havel, other Czech political figures, and Czech Romani Holocaust survivors and their descendants.

¹²⁹ European Parliament. 2005. “European Parliament Resolution on the Situation of the Roma in the European Union.” Brussels: European Parliament.

¹³⁰ European Roma Rights Center. 2005. “Civic Democrat Members of the European Parliament Vote against European Parliament’s.” European Roma Rights Centre. July 21, 2005. <http://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/civic-democrat-members-of-the-european-parliament-vote-against-european-parliaments>.

¹³¹ “European Parliament Resolution on the Situation of the Roma in the European Union.”

Růžicka believes that the most influential strategy was the call for the removal of the pig farm at the annual memorial ceremony hosted by the VPORH at the Lety Concentration Camp memorial¹³². Annually in the month of May since 1998, the VPORH hosted a memorial ceremony commemorating the victims interned and murdered at the site of Lety Concentration Camp. Růžicka has been the core organizer of this commemoration ceremony, and every year has invited those a part of the Czech Romani community, activists, government officials, ambassadors, and the Czech public to participate. Over the years the ceremonies' program grew and would include speeches by the VPORH, Romani activists, Roma Holocaust survivors and the relatives of survivors, Czech officials, and the ambassadors of varying countries. Additionally, a wreath laying ceremony would take place at the memorial on the site and a religious commemoration presided by a priest would take place to honor the victims. During the ceremonies prior to the removal of the pig farm, attendees could smell the odor of pig feces throughout the commemoration which brought in perspective the denigration of the site. The commemoration ceremony was an inherently political event and became a space where Romani activists would demand in front of media, government officials, and ambassadors that the removal of the pig farm was necessary in order to dignify the memory of Czech Roma who were interned at the site. Each year this ceremony kept the call for the removal of the pig farm relevant in Czech media and placed immense pressure on the Czech government officials to act as there was an international presence in the form of the attendance of ambassadors from countries like the United States, Germany, Israel, India, and others as well as the presence of international media at these ceremonies.

Even with the mounting political pressure over the decades that the VPORH placed on the Czech government to remove the pig farm, most Czech politicians remained stagnant in their efforts

¹³² Interview with Mr. Růžicka, Lety Concentration Camp

to remove the pig farm off the grounds of the former concentration camp. Because of this, Růžicka credits the work of Daniel Herman, the former Czech Cultural Minister (2014-2017) a part of the Christian Democrats, and Bohuslav Sobotka, the former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (2014-2017), for being the actors that pushed for the ultimate removal of the pig farm on a governmental level. Růžicka believed that Herman and Sobotka were willing to push forward the call to remove the industrial pig farm off of the grounds of Lety because they were nearing the end of their political careers and had nothing to lose. Růžicka noted that their decision to side with the Czech Romani communities' call to remove the pig farm cost them any political future that they hoped to have. Both Herman and Sobotka lobbied within the Czech parliament to gain approval for the government to purchase the pig farm from AGPI and successfully negotiated a contract that allowed the Czech government to purchase the pig farm in the name of the Museum of Romani Culture for a total of 14,459,977 euros. This deal did not come without significant criticism, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

Růžicka cites the VPORH's strategy of patience and consistency as one of key reasons for the success of the removal of the pig farm. Now that the pig farm has been removed off the grounds of Lety, Růžicka believes that "Czech society will have to come learn and understand that Roma people know how to stand up for themselves¹³³. They know how to stand up for what they believe in." He hopes that with the establishment of a new memorial site the next generation of Czechs and Roma will be educated on this issue and have a new understanding of the past.

Konex and EGAM

Konex is a grassroots Romani organization that was founded in 2011 in response to a wave of anti-Romani demonstrations and violence where mobs of racists would attack Romani

¹³³ Interview with Mr. Růžicka, Lety Concentration Camp

neighborhoods and terrorize Romani people throughout the Czech Republic. Konexe would mobilize teams in order to non-violently blockade these mobs from reaching Roma neighborhoods and provided aid to victims that were direct targets of these violent demonstrations. Also, during that time, Konexe became interested in the scandal surrounding Lety Concentration camp and wanted to provide an alternative strategy to address the lackluster response from the Czech government. Konexe was of the opinion that negotiations between the VPROH and Czech government representatives were not transparent and that peaceful negotiations with the government did not yield any meaningful results. Konexe decided that they wanted to offer a more radical strategy to advocate for the removal of the industrial pig farm from the grounds of the concentration camp.

In 2012 Konexe attended the VPROH memorial ceremony with impoverished Romani men and women from the Ústecký region of the Czech Republic who knew little about the Roma Holocaust. According to Miroslav Brož, an activist with Konexe, Roma who attended the memorial ceremonies with them who didn't have knowledge of the Roma Holocaust prior had a very strong reaction to ceremony as well as the former concentration camp grounds and would tell other Roma about their experiences there when they returned to their neighborhoods. Some of the Romani people that Konexe exposed the memorial too would continue to attend the commemorations and contribute to Konexe's efforts. Additionally, Konexe formed its own commemoration activities where they would lay flowers at the front of the entrance of the industrial pig farm as opposed to the memorial site. That same year, Konexe was contacted by the European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM), an organization that brings together over 50 Romani and non-Romani organizations throughout Europe, to ask to contribute to the organizing around removing the industrial pig farm from the concentration camp site.

Konexe organized with EGAM to host the Czech Republic's first Roma Pride parade, a parade celebrating Romani culture and heritage, and made the issue of Lety the subject of the parade. Konexe coordinated with the VPROH for Čeněk Růžicka to participate in the Roma Pride parade and have him shed light on the issue of Lety. In 2013, Lety remained the subject of the Roma Pride Parade, which helped increase awareness of Lety to the Romani community of the Czech Republic, as well as to Romani communities outside of the Czech Republic. One of the most notable actions taken on by Konexe and EGAM to protest the industrial pig farm on the site of Lety was their action of a non-violent blockade. Konexe noted that whilst they were planning their action to blockade the entrance of the industrial pig farm on the site of Lety that they had reached out to various Czech human rights and Romani organizations, but that none of them demonstrated interest in participating. The first blockade action took place in May of 2014 and involved a small number of activists of varying nationalities. The activists pitched tents outside of the main entrance of the pig farm and blocked the entrance from supply trucks entering the farm. Some activists even brought their own chains that they used to lock the entrance shut. The blockade was met with several police interventions. The blockade lasted a total of five days and nights and gained coverage in national Czech media. The second blockade took place in 2015 with increased participation from activists around Europe, a majority being activists from Dresden, Germany who had close ties with Konexe and EGAM organizers. Additionally, the blockade was supported by a group called "Jews against the Pig Farm at Lety." A third and final blockade was staged in 2016 and became "symbolic" blockade due to the large police presence. Through Konexe and EGAM's more radical and grassroots approach to organizing, they were able to bring a significant amount of local and international attention to the issue of Lety which ultimately assisted in applying pressure to the Czech government to act and remove the pig farm off the grounds.

Non-Roma Responses to Lety

The calls for the commemoration of the Roma Holocaust and the removal of the industrial pig farm by Czech Roma activists and their allies elicited a wide range of responses across the political spectrum. What is notable is that it was rare for any Czech political parties or politicians to explicitly support the removal of the pig farm, but instead multiple explanations and inaction were made over the twenty-year period despite the call for the removal of the farm being strong from Czech Roma activists and the international community. In this section I will analyze some of the most influential discourse surrounding the Lety memorial.

Resistance and Indifference

The most uniform response that was common amongst Czech politicians and the wider public was the issue of the cost to remove the pig farm. Since the beginning of the discussions surrounding Lety, the price tag has always been a point of contention. Up until it was decided that the pig farm would be removed, the Czech state made claims that there was no available funds to finance the removal of the pig farm to make way for a dignified memorial on the site. This was despite the consistent calls by international actors like the European Parliament to do so. Another position taken by Czech politicians was that the removal of the pig farm was unnecessary. In 2017, the current Czech president, Miloš Zeman, a member of the Party of Civic Rights, a center-left wing party, announced that he was in favor of leaving the pig farm on the site¹³⁴. He argued that removing the pig farm would create “unnecessary” barriers for the business of the pig farm. Additionally, he stated that the memorial inaugurated there in 1995 was sufficient enough. These were the common public reactions by Czech political figures to the issue of the pig farm, with the exception of the politically right-wing

¹³⁴ Ryšavý, Zdeněk. 2017. “Czech President Zeman Is in Favor of Leaving Pig Farm on Site of Former Concentration Camp for Roma.” Romea.cz. June 30, 2017. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-president-zeman-is-in-favor-of-leaving-pig-farm-on-site-of-former-concentration-camp-for-roma>.

parties, which I will expand up on next. This public indifference and lack of engagement with the issue is a form of resistance in itself. This lack of engagement was likely a result of Czech politicians attempting to protect their political careers by avoiding engaging with the Czech Roma community which would likely be unpopular with Czech voters as noted by Růžicka early in the chapter.

Right-Wing Responses to Lety

The debate surrounding Lety Concentration Camp for right-wing circles within the Czech Republic was one that challenged the memory and history of the site, as well as litigated the ‘worthiness’ of the site being both commemorated and acknowledged by the Czech state. Ultimately, the far-right openly and vehemently opposed the history of Lety being recognized by Czech society and encouraged the acceptance of a revisionist history that absolved Czechs of any responsibility for their involvement with the genocide of the Czech Roma. In comparison to the rest of the Czech political spectrum, right-wing groups most openly opposed the memorialization of Lety, however, the commemoration of Lety was not a popular effort, even amongst left-leaning Czech politicians. This right-wing resistance took place in the form of protests, counter-memorials, vandalism, and even blatant Holocaust denial. The resistance to the memory of Romani victims is also indicative of societal perceptions of the Roma minority in the Czech Republic and the harmful existence of anti-Romani racism. It also reveals a battle for national memory and the construction of national identity.

The National Party

The National Party (Národní strana), founded in 2002, was a right-wing party that vehemently spoke out against the commemoration of Lety Concentration Camp. The party itself followed a hyper-nationalistic ideology that was severely anti-Romani and advocated for the Czech Republic to return to full national sovereignty, the minimization of the influence of foreign institutions, and a toughening

of national immigration policies. They felt that the Romani minority were inferior to “real Czechs” and are a burden and threat to Czech society.

The National Party joined the Lety debate and vehemently denied the testimonial accounts of Lety Concentration Camp survivors. They argued that those interned in the camp died of diseases that were caught prior to being imprisoned and believed that there was no Czech personnel involved in the internment of Romani prisoners, despite the historical record. Additionally, the party leader, Petra Edelmannová, argued that “The camp was primarily intended for the Gypsy minority, but the Germans also brought vagabonds and other asocials [Romani] here.”¹³⁵ Thus, denying the centuries old history of Romani people within the Czech Lands. In line with their beliefs, they argued that the pig farm on the site of the concentration camp’s grounds should remain, as it was too expensive to remove. Additionally, they believed that the Czech Roma victims were unworthy of a monument that commemorates their suffering and instead offered a counter-monument in which they believed would preserve the memory of “Czech patriots” who they felt were worthy of a national memorial.

In an interview with Lidovky.cz in January 2006, Edelmannová stated “In our opinion, it is not worth building monuments to similar people [Romani], we are building a monument to those who have accomplished something.”¹³⁶ In this interview, Edelmannová also made claims that she expected the National Party to receive thousands of dollars in investments for their monument to Czech patriots, and that their monument was a more cost-effective alternative to dismantling the pig-farm that was on the site of former concentration camp. She also claimed that she had received permission from the owners of the pig-farm as well as the mayor of the municipality, although both parties denied these claims. Not long after this interview was conducted with Edelmannová, the National Party

¹³⁵ “Tuláci Nemají Mít Pomníky | Domov,” Lidovky.cz, January 13, 2006, https://www.lidovky.cz.translate.google.com/translate/domov/tulaci-nemaji-mit-pomniky.A060113_114115_in_rozhovory_hlm?x_tr_sl=en&x_tr_tl=cs&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=op.

¹³⁶ “Tuláci Nemají Mít Pomníky”

placed an unofficial counter-monument on the campgrounds that they claimed commemorated World War II victims. This counter-monument was removed within a week by the mayor of Lety¹³⁷. Despite this, the National Party continued to hold demonstrations against the idea of removing the existing pig-farm to erect a proper national memorial to Romani Holocaust victims on the campgrounds.

The comments made by the National Party, their demonstrations on the campgrounds of Lety, as well as the counter memorial that they established was condemned by Romani activists and their allies. Markus Pape, a German investigative journalist, and human rights lawyer who was heavily involved in the activism towards removing the pig farm from Lety, confronted and disrupted the gathering of National Party demonstrators on the site of Lety and condemned them as Neo-Nazis in order to defend the need for commemoration of the site¹³⁸. Čeněk Růžička, the son of Lety Concentration Camp survivors and the chair of the Committee for the Redress of the Roma Holocaust in the Czech Republic, also defended the memory of Roma victims of Lety Concentration Camp in opposition to the National Party's demonstrations. He stated "My dad, he would have to rise from his grave and smack me in the face, if I allowed one of these scoundrels to come here and enter this space. I can't allow it to happen—I simply can't."¹³⁹ However, the condemnation of the National Party by Romani activists and organizations did not phase them, and up until the party's dissolution in 2011, the party continued speaking out against efforts to commemorate the Romani victims of Lety.

¹³⁷ Maštalíř, Linda. 2006. "Renewed Controversy at the Lety Concentration Camp." Radio Prague International. January 24, 2006. <https://english.radio.cz/renewed-controversy-lety-concentration-camp-8623478>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.,

¹³⁹ Ibid.,

Tomio Okamura and Romani Holocaust Denial

Tomio Okamura is a far-right populist politician and founder of the political parties Dawn of Direct Democracy (2013-2018) and Freedom and Direct Democracy (2015- present) and is a member in the Czech Republic's parliament¹⁴⁰. Both of these parties are[were] known for their anti-Romani, anti-EU, and anti-immigrant sentiments, especially those presented by the founder Tomio Okamura. As it pertains to Okamura's positionality on the debate surrounding Lety Concentration Camp, he is one of the leading contemporary voices in opposition to the commemoration and memorialization of the camp and has been outspoken in his denial of Holocaust victim status for Romani survivors of Lety.

Okamura's public opposition against the memory of the Lety memorial site began in 2014¹⁴¹. When asked in an interview with online political tabloid ParlamentniListy.cz whether the pig farm on the site of Lety should be removed he responded with the assertion that it was a "myth" to refer to Lety as a concentration camp and made claims that no one was ever killed there.

"When it comes to Lety, it would be good to clarify what we want to build there. According to the information available, this myth that it was a Romani concentration camp is a lie. There was a labor camp there for people who avoided proper work, including Czechs and Germans in the Protectorate. They were not interned on the basis of ethnicity, but on the basis of the gypsy way of life, which means that no working Roma were there. For most of the time before the camp closed the guards were not armed and the camp commander took his servant, who was evidently also his lover, to the cinema. No one was killed at the camp- people died there as a result of old age and the diseases they brought with them as a result of their previous travelling lifestyle. However, there

¹⁴⁰ Bridge Initiative Team. n.d. "Factsheet: FREEDOM and DIRECT DEMOCRACY (SVOBODA a PŘÍMÁ DEMOKRACIE, SPD)." Bridge Initiative. <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-freedom-and-direct-democracy-svoboda-a-prima-demokracie-spd/>.

¹⁴¹ Ryšavý, Zdeněk, and Gwendolyn Albert. 2014. "Czech MP Okamura Insults Romani Victims of the Holocaust, Media and Politicians Sharply Criticize Him." Romea.cz. August 4, 2014. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-mp-okamura-insults-romani-victims-of-the-holocaust-media-and-politicians-sharply-criticize-him>.

was a basic problem with the camp commander, who on the one hand did really beat the prisoners and on the other hand covered up the poor state of the camp, but he was removed, and medical aid was sent to the camp. The victims of the camp definitely were not victims of any kind of Holocaust. On the contrary, comparing them to Holocaust victims disrespects the actual victims of the Holocaust, whether they be Jews or Roma, who perished in the real concentration camps. Naturally I condemn and reject any kind of violence against people...".

In response to these initial comments, many politicians across the Czech political spectrum as well as Romani activists and organizations condemned Okamura's statement, whilst others agreed with his sentiments. Czech Romani and non-Czech Romani organizations such as ROMEA, Konexe, and European Roma Travelers Forum drafted an open letter correcting Okamura's revisionist approach to Lety and called for his resignation.

"Czech MP Mr. Okamura denied the Genocide of Roma and Travelers at the former concentration camp at Lety. Given that 500,000 Roma perished under the Nazi regime and given that Roma and Travelers face continuing discrimination to this day with the support of many state governments, Okamura's statements are completely unacceptable, insulting and finally, dangerous if we hope to avoid future violence and achieve a peaceful and unified future...¹⁴²"

Additionally in response to his comments, Czech Romani survivors and their relatives filed criminal charges against Okamura with claims that he was denying the genocide of Czech Roma. However, no formal conviction was brought against Okamura for his comments. Despite the backlash he received in 2014 for his commentary, he renewed his denial campaign on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2018, where he claimed that prisoners of Lety were free to come and go from Lety and therefore it could not be considered a concentration camp¹⁴³. In response to these comments,

¹⁴² European Roma and Travellers Forum. 2014. "Letter Addressed to the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic on Mr Okamura's Statement on the Lety Camp." Romea.cz. August 2014. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/letter-addressed-to-the-prime-minister-of-the-czech-republic-on-mr-okamura-statement-on-the-lety-camp>.

¹⁴³ Bikár, František, and Gwendolyn Albert. 2018. "Czech MP Marks International Holocaust Remembrance Day by Doubting What Happened at Romani Genocide Site." Romea.cz. January 30, 2018. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-mp-marks-international-holocaust-remembrance-day-by-doubting-what-happened-at-romani-genocide-site>.

charges were filed against Okamura, but once again, no conviction of Holocaust denial for his comments.

Reflections on the Right-Wing Response

What is clear from the response of the Czech Republic's far right is that their open and vehement denial of the Romani Holocaust as well as the atrocities that took place, specifically at Lety concentration camp, is particularly motivated by using harboring anti-Romani sentiments that exist within Czech society to gain political capital. The positionality of Czech Roma is a precarious one, marked by a status of marginalization that has continued for centuries in many forms. The scapegoating of the Roma minority is not new, and I would argue a fabric of not only Czech society but of European society as a whole. Anti-Romani sentiment is not unique to the far-right, but for the far-right it is expressed in an open and nefarious ways through blatant racism and antagonism. Whereas 'liberal' sections of Czech politics will instead use subtle language such as referring to the Czech Romani community as 'inadaptable'.

Conclusion

Despite the overwhelming public indifference shown by Czech politicians as well as by Czech society, Czech Romani activists still maintained the importance of implementing the history of the Roma Holocaust into the Czech's national memory as it pertains to the Holocaust. I would conclude that the avoidance of dealing with the history and memory of Lety concentration camp was a result of a) Czech society not wanting to deal with their personal involvement in the persecution of Roma during the Holocaust as it directly challenged the victim narrative maintained in the Czech national memory of World War II and b) the anti-Romani sentiment that exists within Czech society thus creating an attitude of indifference and resistance to granting Roma access to being a part of national memory. Ultimately, the Czech Roma were successful in beginning to insert themselves within Czech

national memory, however there is a long way to go as the decision to commemorate the Czech Romani victims of the Holocaust was not a societally popular move.

Conclusion

The German and Czech cases demonstrate the capability and influence that Roma and Sinti activism had on the national memories of Germany and the Czech Republic, despite the resistance that existed in both countries. Without these activist movements it is likely that the memory of Roma and Sinti victims of the Holocaust in both countries would go unacknowledged or that the Roma and Sinti would perpetually be considered as “other” victims. Additionally, both cases demonstrate the difference in anti-Romani racism that exists in both countries and how it manifests in relation to national Holocaust memory. In the case of the Czech Republic, anti-Romani racism in many ways presented itself in much more covert ways in the form of public hate speech and indifference, which appeared to be acceptable. However, in the case of Germany, it existed in the form of relativization and down-playing of the experiences of Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims. Additionally, it appears that German society was ultimately more willing to accept the Roma Holocaust as a part of German history and memory, whereas in the Czech case there appeared to be a complete and total unwillingness to accept the experiences of Czech Roma and Sinti as a part of national memory. Both of these cases were useful to understand the ways in which differing societies deal with the history of the Roma Holocaust as well as to understand the differing strategies utilized by activist coalitions to influence national memory within their own contexts.

As a result of my research, I conclude that:

1. One of the greatest influences towards the silencing and erasure of the historiography and memory of the Romani Holocaust was the anti-Romani sentiment that was especially pervasive in the post-war era which created a culture of silence and denial of the Roma Holocaust.

2. The activist movements of Roma and Sinti are to be credited for the preservation of the memory and history of the Roma Holocaust through their efforts to make Holocaust memory and scholarship inclusive of the Romani experience.

3. That the willingness to acknowledge and accept the Roma Holocaust as a part of national memory is dependent on the country as each country has a differing dynamic with their Romani populations during and after the Holocaust.

As the field of Holocaust studies progresses, we develop new and evolving understandings of how the Third Reich implemented its siege on its unwanted groups. With the evolution of our understanding, our definitions and commemoration efforts should expand. This should be done for the Romani community, as not only what happened to the group was genocide, but a part of the Holocaust as a phenomenon. Not expanding this understanding of the Holocaust to be inclusive of the Romani victims has been and is an act of erasure. As clearly argued, the Romani victims of the Holocaust suffered from the execution of ‘The Gypsy Question’, which took the lives of over 500,000 Romani people throughout Europe. This group was targeted on racial grounds and were subject to the fate of extermination by bullet, gas chambers, experimentation, and other means alongside their Jewish counterparts. Upholding the marginalization of the Romani community in Holocaust discourse does not do justice to the experiences of Romani victims, nor does it benefit the field of Holocaust studies.

This thesis has the potential to encourage other historians to begin additional historiographical analyses towards the phenomena of the Romani Holocaust thus bringing a much-needed investigation into the experiences of Romani Holocaust victims. Additional questions that can be explored is a more in-depth analysis of shared memory amongst the Jewish and Romani community, how the lack of research into the Romani Holocaust potentially influences present policy towards the Romani

community, the study of continual anti-Romani attitudes deriving from the Holocaust, and other important questions. As this is an under researched topic, there are many bases to be covered.

The movement towards commemoration for the Romani community did not end with Berlin and Lety but continue throughout Europe as more exposure is brought to this issue of erasure. Through this exposure we cannot begin to forget, but truly begin to remember the plight of the Romani community under the Third Reich.

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