

Holocaust

compiled by the editors

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➤ *The persecution of “Gypsies” which had lasted for centuries culminated in genocide under the NS regime. Defined as a “problem”, “asocials” and “racially inferior”, the Roma were arrested and murdered in the German Reich and in the German-occupied territories.*

TRAURIGI ČERHENI

*Traurigi čerheni ando učo nebo.
Nan man blajbens ande mro šatno khere.
Ari man line andar mro šatno vodro,
mra džuvla muklom odoj le čavorenca.*

*Traurigi čerheni ando učo nebo.
Legede man andar mro šatno khere.
Ando logeri man legede,
odoj tharde man upro praho.*

A SAD STAR

*A sad star in the high heavens
there is no staying in my own house
they got me out of my own bed
leaving my wife and children.*

*A sad star in the high heavens
they took me from my own house
they brought me to the camp
where they burnt me to ashes.*

Ill. 1 Burgenland-Roma song in concentration camps, sung by Paula Nardai (from Hemetek, Ursula / Heinschink, Mozes (1992): *Lieder im Leid. Zu KZ-Liedern der Roma in Österreich*. In: *Jahrbuch des Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands*: 76-93, Wien, p. 81)

IDEOLOGICAL BASIS

The central terminology and attitudes, which were later used as reasons for killing “unworthy life” by the Nazis, had been determined long before the latter’s ascent to power. The term “race”, for instance, has been used since the 17th century in order to categorise people. Usually, this was done according to geographic criteria combined with external characteristics, like the skin colour or certain peculiarities. In the 18th century, Carl von Linné, the founder of the modern systematology of all living things, differentiated peo-

ple according to skin colour (white, red, yellow, black) into four types and attributed certain characteristics to each type. According to him, the Europeans are white, “ruled by laws, sanguine, and muscular”, while the Asians are light yellow, “ruled by opinions, melancholic and stiff”. The term “race” is up to this day inextricably interwoven with judgements on value. The skin colour as a means of differentiation is still common, even if the underlying notion of “races” has lost ground.

In the 19th century several racial theories were circulating. The different nature of – 3 to 11, depending on the individual theory – races was turned into different values. The highest va-

lue was attributed to the “Caucasian”, “white”, “Germanic” or “Aryan race”. In the mid-19th century, Arthur de Gobineau also postulated the existence of higher and lower “races” in his “*Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*” (Essay on the inequality of human races). In his opinion, the “Aryans”, and “Nordic peoples” in particular belonged to the higher races; thus, he reflected the general body of thought. What was new, however, was his strict rejection of “mixing” the “races”, which would lead to degeneration and finally to destruction. In connection to this, the Belgian Richard Liebich coined the term “unworthy life” a few years later (1868).

Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens.

Ihr Maß und ihre Form.

Von den Professoren

Dr. jur. et phil. Karl Binding und Dr. med. Alfred Hoche
früher in Leipzig in Freiburg

Verlag von Felix Meiner in Leipzig
1920

III. 3

Paul Ansin, called Weiskopp, was removed from the "Wehrmacht" for being a "Gypsy". He was shot in Auschwitz-Birkenau after the day he arrived there, still wearing his uniform.

(from Gilsenbach, Reimar (1993): Oh Django, sing deinen Zorn. Sinti und Roma unter den Deutschen. Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag, p. 70)

III. 2

The book "Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens" (Opening the way to the extermination of unworthy life) by jurist Karl Binding and doctor Alfred Hoche. Binding and Hoche, like others, dealt with the state's care of the mentally challenged in terms of financial cost-benefit calculation. Consequently, they argued that all those, who were a burden to society, should be killed (those leading a "ballast existence").

"It can be deduced that the average expenditure per person and year for the care of these idiots accounts for 1,500 M. If we take together, all the idiots in Germany that are in nursing homes, that comes to an estimated total of 20-30,000. If we suppose, for an individual case, that the person will live for 50 years, it can easily be seen that an enormous sum, in the form of food, clothing and heating, is withdrawn from the national treasury for unproductive causes."

(translated from Binding, Karl / Hoche, Alfred (1920): Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens. Ihr Maß und ihre Form. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, p. 54)

Against the background of scientific biology, which considered hereditary factors as fundamental to human existence, the ideas of superior and inferior, "pure" and "mixed races", "worthy" and "unworthy life" found their way into criminology. In 1876, the Italian Cesare Lombroso, for the first time made "genetic predisposition" responsible for the "Gypsies" ' alleged criminal acts in his "L'uomo delinquente" (The criminal man).

The idea that races could be made "superior" by controlling procreation, an idea which was widely believed in Europe and the United States, was coupled with the call for "eradicating" "unhereditary (erbuntüchtige) people" in Germany after World War I. The ra-

cial hygienist demands ranged from internment, to abortion and sterilisation, to euthanasia. In 1920, Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche demanded that all those who lead a "ballast existence" and who were a "burden to society" be killed. In 1923, the first chair of Racial Hygiene was filled in Munich; its holder, Fritz Lenz, wrote a text on "Menschliche Auslese und Rassenhygiene" (Human selection and racial hygiene), which later had some influence on Hitler's "Mein Kampf". Organisations, groups of scientists and influential private individuals fought to spread the ideas of racial hygiene, which fell on fertile ground in the Germany of the interwar years. Political parties, particularly the Nazis, used these ideas to fan the flames

of the increasing resentment towards the Jews and other population groups. [III. 2]

On July 14, 1933, the racial theory was finally adopted by the laws of the Third Reich. The notion of "unworthy life" had a significant influence in the Nazi race policy. On the one hand, "hereditary (erbggesund)" and "Aryan" offspring was supported, and on the other hand mentally and physically challenged people as well as "asocials" and "foreign races" were persecuted. The "Gypsies", whose place in the system was not easy to determine because of their Aryan descent, were generally considered "asocial" and were consequently seen as an "asocial race", in the absence of a better criterion.

CRIMINAL POLICE AND "ETHNOGENETIC REGISTRATION OF GYPSIES"

As far as the Roma were concerned, the Nazis could not only use the negative prejudices that were deeply rooted in the population, but also the decades of police experience concerning the

"Gypsy plague". Both in Germany and Austria the centralisation of the traditional police "Gypsy battle" started in the 1920s. At first, the authorities' registration of the Roma aimed at "preventively



Excerpt from the circular of Reichsführer SS und Head of the German Police in the Ministry of Interior, Heinrich Himmler, of December 8, 1938, about fighting the “Gypsy plague”.

“[...] 1 (1) Experiences from the fight against the Gypsy plague up to now and the insights of racial-biologic research make it

seem only logical to solve the Gypsy question through the nature of their race. Experience has shown that half-breeds make up the biggest share of Gypsy criminality. Additionally, attempts to make the Gypsies settle down have failed particularly with the pure Gypsies because of their strong migratory instinct. It is thus necessary to consider the pure and half-breed Gypsies separately

when dealing with the Gypsy question.

(2) To attain our goal, it is at first necessary to ascertain the racial affiliation of every single Gypsy living and travelling about, in the Gypsy way, in the German Reich.”

Ill. 4 (translated from: Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preußischen Ministers des Innern, Jg. 99, Nr. 51, 14.12.1938, pp. 2105-2110)

fighting crimes”. In 1936, the “Zentralstelle zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens” (Central Bureau for Fighting the “Gypsy” Plague) was set up in Vienna. In Germany, the “Reichsführer SS” – Heinrich Himmler – ’s nomination to the head of the police force within the Ministry of Interior paved the way for “standardised” action.

The “Gypsies” were at first, against a background of wide-spread anti-“Gypsyism”, seen primarily as a police problem, but due to the constantly rising influence of racial theory, the racist aspect in ideologically assessing the “Gypsies” became more and more important. The “Nürnberger Rassegesetze” (race laws) of 1935 led the way by classifying the “Gypsies” as “racially inferior” and by taking away their nationality and thus their citizens’ rights. It was the role of scientists to prove afterwards that these dogmas were right. The NS regime thus found another “enemy” whose slandering and approaching extinction could unify the “German people”.

When Robert Ritter, doctor and psychiatrist, took over the leading position in the “Rassenhygienische und erbbiologische Forschungsstelle” (Research Centre for Racial Hygiene) of the Reich’s Department of Public Health, he became a central figure in “Gypsy research” in the Reich. His real goal was proving that criminal and “asocial” behaviour was hereditary. Whereas the Jews had been accused of intellectually “dissolving” the structure of the state, the “Gypsies” were declared “primitives”, “poor in culture” and lacking history, who threatened the moral order by “mixing” and “building a criminal sub-proletariat” because of their race. Already by 1935, the demand was made that “Gypsies” should be interned in labour camps and sterilised by force. Ritter’s main focus were the “Gypsy half-breeds”, the classification being even wider than with the Jews: people were declared a “Gypsy half-breed” when one of their eight great-grandparents was a “Gypsy”. [Ill. 9]

Late in 1938, Heinrich Himmler announced in a circular that he would “solve the Gypsy question through the nature of that race”. The theories of Nazi scientists and politicians remained, however, contradictory until 1942/43. On the one hand, the Roma’s Indian descent classified them as “Aryans”, but on the other hand politicians and scientists wanted to prove their “foreign race” (Artfremdheit) in order to legitimise their persecution. [Ills. 4, 5]

Because of the ideological contradictions, the persecution of “Gypsies” was carried out in a far less coordinated way than that of the Jewish population. For instance, several Roma were still in the army in 1943, even though that very army was involved in the Roma genocide in the East, and even though thousands had already been killed in concentration camps. These members of the army were deported directly from the front to Auschwitz, sometimes even with medals of honour. [Ill. 3]

In seinem Erlass vom 8. Dezember 1938 hat der Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei im Reichsministerium des Innern die allgemeinen Richtlinien zur umfassenden Bekämpfung der Zigeuner im ganzen großdeutschen Reichsgebiet gegeben.

Der Erlass geht von den Erfahrungen und Erkenntnissen aus, die bisher bei der Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage gewonnen wurden. Er will, und damit packt er das Übel an der Wurzel an, die Zigeunerfrage aus dem Wesen dieser Rasse heraus lösen.

III. 5

In the Nazi-paper "Rechtsspiegel" from Februar 24, 1939:

"In his decree of December 8, 1938, the Reichsführer SS and Head of the German Police sketched the general guidelines for fighting the Gypsies in the whole Reich. The decree is based upon the experiences and perceptions gained from the fighting of the Gypsy plague so far. He wants, and by doing so he eradicates the evil, to solve the Gypsy question through the nature of that race."

(from Hancock 2002, p. 40)

THE FIRST DEPORTATIONS AND INTERNMENT IN COLLECTING CAMPS

After the Roma had been deprived of all their rights and possibilities of income, they often had to rely on the charity of local authorities, for which they were a considerable strain. This strain, caused by the Nazis, was used as a pretext to initiate measures of persecution against the Roma. The racial hygienist's main concern were the so-called "Gypsy half-breeds". In the course of the campaign "Arbeitsscheu Reich" (Workshy Reich), which was directed against beggars, pro-

stitutes, vagrants and "Gypsies", the first arrests took place. On the orders of the Reichskriminalpolizeiamt (Reich Office of the Criminal Police), 700 German Roma, most of them Sinti, were deported to the concentration camps Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Lichtenburg in June 1938.

One year later, 3,000 German and Austrian Roma were deported to the concentration camps Dachau, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück and Buchenwald. The NS authorities and the police could rely on the police investigations of the interwar years as far as the Roma's registration was concerned.

Because of the "Festsetzungserlass" (freezing-of-movement direc-

tive) by Himmler and Heydrich (1939), the Roma were not allowed to leave the towns where they lived. If they did not respect this decree, they were immediately admitted to a concentration camp. Under Himmler's orders ("Schnellbrief"), there was a wave of interments in collecting camps in 1939. The real goal of that decree was to concentrate all "Gypsies" in the German Reich – their number being estimated at 30,000 – in camps and to deport them as quickly as possible to the "Generalgouvernement" in Poland. The decree could not be translated into action quickly, which is why the provisional "collecting camps" were turned into "labour camps" similar to concentration camps. [III. 6]

LABOUR CAMPS

Numerous labour camps were erected in Germany, post-Anschluss Austria and in the German-occupied territories

of Central and Eastern Europe. Initially, most of these camps were designed as punitive labour camps for working Roma men only, like the many camps in Austria and in Germany. In Austria, for instance, there were at least 17 camps of different size.

Some of these "labour camps", like the Lety camp in Southern Bohemia, or the one in the Belzec complex in Poland, were turned into "Gypsy camps" for Roma men, women and children. Many camps were closed in 1943; the inmates were either de-

"GESTORBEN"

About half of the inmates of the Czech "Gypsy camp" Lety/Lettig were children up to the age of 14. In his book "The Holocaust of Czech Roma", historian Ctibor Nečas records their fate in great detail. One passage reads:

"Most heart-rendering and lonely must have been the last days of orphaned or deserted children whose parents had died or been transferred to hospital, and who were left to themselves. When they were found dead, their demise was entered in the personal card file with much delay and the records are incomplete or even erroneous.

For example, the dates of death of Františka Čandová, Jan Marion Čermák-Růžička, Marie Petržilková, Jiří Růžička, Václav František Růžička, Zdeněk Růžička, Božena Františka Růžičková, Josefa Růžičková and Marie Růžičková are only given by month, while that of František Florián just by year. The file cards of Ondřej Růžička and Růžena Růžičková are merely marked as 'gestorben' [dead] and no date whatsoever is given. Of similar scanty character are cards of Jan Růžička und František Procházka bearing only a note 'date of death unknown.' Some of the deceased children were not even properly identified."

III. 6 (from Nečas 1999, p. 91f.)

RACIAL HYGIENIC CATEGORISATION

Until 1944, when the classification of Roma was finally ended, the Rassenhygienische und bevölkerungs-biologische Forschungsstelle (Research Bureau for Racial Hygiene) under Ritter had “categorised” about 24,000 people; many of whom were no longer alive at that time.

(see Lewy 2001, p. 105)

“Ritter did it coolly, on the streets, in a friendly manner. One after the other was brought forward and sat down on a chair. Then he compared the children’s eyes, asked us all a lot of questions, and Justin wrote it all down. Then he said, “Open your mouth”, and he had some kind of instrument with which he measured the throat, the nostrils, the nose, the bridge, the set of the eyes, the eye colour, the eyebrows, the ears on the inside and outside, the neck, the hands, everything that could be measured.”

Ill. 7 (translated from Krausnick, Michael (1995): Wo sind sie hingekommen? Der unterschlagene Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma. Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, p. 97)

KILLINGS OF THE ROMA IN THE WARSZAW AREA

The Polish Roma researcher Jerzy Ficowski wrote what is up to today the most complete description of the Polish Roma’s persecution by German troops. He speaks about the suburbs and the Warsaw area:

“Often, the result was so total, that only the murderers remained as witnesses. [...] In 1942, Hitler’s fascists murdered many gypsies in the Warsaw suburbs; including 30 people in Grochów, men, women and children and also some families in Targówek. Many were shot in 1943 in the Bem-Fort, in Komorowa near Warsaw women and children were murdered, in the woods near Zyrardów a Gypsy family was shot, in the woods of Brack and Gazyck near Sochaczew more than a dozen families were murdered; similarly Gypsies in Konsk, Sochaczew, Marki; in Sielce in Warsaw seven families were burnt alive in a wooden shed; in Jadów the Gypsies of the area were rounded up and locked up in the local synagogue, all the men were shot. The women managed to flee during the night to Karczewo, where shortly after the German police started murdering the Gypsies, among others throwing the children out of the windows on the streets. Many of the Gypsies had hand guns, and fought the Gendarmerie until they had used their last cartridge. Only in exceptional cases, did people manage to flee. In a village near Milosna more than 20 people, among them more than a dozen children, were shot in January 1943. In October 1944 Gestapo men shot 104 Gypsies near Puszcza Kampinowska; only one single man was able to flee. Murders of that kind occurred far more often. [...]”

Ill. 8 (translated from Ficowski 1992, p. 65f.)

ported to the death camps, to other labour camps or were killed on the spot. Some camps existed until 1944, for example Dubnica nad Vahom in Western Slovakia. The biggest of the “Gypsy” camps, Lackenbach in Burgenland, which had up to 2,300 in-

mates in 1941, existed until the end of the war.

The internees had to perform hard physical labour: they had to dig feeders, river regulations, or reservoirs, do road-works, perform field work, and work in companies of all kinds. Mortality was

high, due to malnutrition, hard work, and diseases. In Lackenbach, 237 people died during the five years of the camp’s existence, in Lety, at least 326 people died in three years; in Belzec, although there are no exact numbers, the toll is believed to have been similarly high.

MASS EXECUTIONS

The systematic murder of Roma started in the summer of 1941, caused by the German assault on the USSR. As “accomplices” and “spies” of “Jewish Bolshevism” thousands of Roma fell victim to mass executions by the SS “Einsatzgruppen” (task forces) who, assisted by the army, murdered them behind the front. Contrary to the actions taken in Germany, the police’s main concern in most areas were the travelling, “racially pure” and “endogamous Gypsies” who, as a mobile population, corresponded best to

the image of spies. 33,000 Jews, and hundreds of Roma were among the victims of the mass murder in Babi Jar near Kiev, which was committed by the “Einsatzgruppe C” together with the “6. Armee”. As in the Soviet Union, more Roma were killed through mass executions than in the camps in Poland and other territories of Eastern Europe and the Balkans occupied by the Nazis. There are no precise numbers available, but conservative estimates talk about far more than 100,000 people who were murdered outside of the camp system. [Ill. 8]

In Serbia, occupied by the Germans since 1941, the so-called “revenge executions”, to which Jews,

Serbs and Roma fell victim, were of equal importance in the extinction of the Roma minority. Contrary to the East, the “Einsatztruppen” chose the victims, and the army carried out the executions. Harald Turner, Head of the German military administration, declared in 1942 that Serbia was the only country in which the “Jewish and Gypsy question” had been “solved”. The “Einsatzgruppen” and the armed forces were supported by local fascist organizations. In Croatia the “Ustascha”-militia, and in Hungary, under German rule from 1944 onwards, the “Arrow Cross”-fascists carried out the mass executions, organised the deportations and run the camps.

The Ghetto Lodz

The "Auschwitz-Erlass" (Auschwitz Decree)

Victims

The Survivors

THE WORK OF DR. MENGELE

Mengele's selections on the railway ramp at Birkenau, where he searched for his experimental guinea-pigs, are well known. He carried out his experiments in Barrack No. 32 of the Gypsy Family Section, crippling and murdering hundreds of people in the name of science. Helmut Clemens, eighteen at the time, had to work in the sickbay as an errand boy for Mengele. There he was an eyewitness to Mengele's crimes:

"In the evening I had to pull out the bodies that were piled up in a small hut, note the numbers on their arms and drag some of them over to Dr. Mengele. He then cut them up in various ways. On the shelves were jars in which there were organs - hearts, brains, eyes and other parts of the body."

III. 9 (Fings 1997, p. 104)

29. JUN. 1944
Hyg.-bakt. Unters.-Stelle
der Waffen-SS, Südost
Auschwitz OS., am 29. Juni 1944.
Anliegend wird übersandt: (12-jähriges Kind)
Material: Kopf einer Leiche entnommen am
zu untersuchen auf: Histologische Schnitte
Name, Vorname:
Dienstgrad, Einheit: siehe Anlage
Klinische Diagnose:
Anschrift der einsendenden Dienststelle: H.-Krankenbau
Zigeunerlager Auschwitz II, B II e
Bemerkungen: Der 1. Lagerarzt
K.L. Auschwitz II
Mengele
SS-Hauptsturmführer.
(Stempel, Unterschrift)

III. 10

Medical document requesting a histological examination of the head of a Roma child, dated June 29, 1944, and signed by Joseph Mengele.

(from Hancock 2002, p. 49)

THE GHETTO LODZ

As has already mentioned above, Roma should originally have been interned in the "Generalgouvernement Polen" in "collecting camps" only to wait for "their final deportation" (Himmler's "Schnellbrief" of 1938). In the Jewish ghetto of Lodz ("Litzmannstadt") a "Gypsy camp" was erected in 1941

under Himmler's orders. The SS, the "Jüdische Ordnungsdienst" (Jewish security force) and a "Gypsy police" set up especially for that task were to block off the quarter from the rest of the ghetto and the outside world. No information about the camps' condition should reach the outside. Between the 5th and 9th November, 1941, 5 transportations with a total of 5,007 Roma from Austria arrived in the Lodz ghetto. Members of the SS and the "Reichsar-

beitsdienstes" (Reich work force) guarded the camp and made some of the internees carry out forced labour. The Roma had to sleep on the floor and got neither medication nor enough food. After a short time typhus fever broke out. Those 4,400 people who were still alive in January 1942 were brought in trucks to the extermination camp Chelmno/Kulmhof and murdered in gas wagons. None of the original 5,007 Austrian Roma survived.

THE "AUSCHWITZ-ERLASS" (AUSCHWITZ DECREE)

On December 16, 1942, Heinrich Himmler gave out the directive that all "Gypsies" still living in the "German Reich" were to be deported to Auschwitz. The "Auschwitz Decree" was the final revelation of a plan which had existed de facto since 1938 and had been partially carried out already, namely the complete extinction of "Gypsies". Himmler's deportation order was directed against all "Gypsy half-breeds, Rom-Gypsies and Balkan Gypsies", the "degree of half-breeding" being no longer of importance. The ex-

ception of a small group of "racially pure Gypsies", who were to be used as "museum exhibits" in Himmler's open air museum, existed only on paper.

In the so-called "Gypsy family camp" Auschwitz, more than 20,000 Roma, who had, in the vast majority come from "collecting camps" in Germany, Austria, Poland, Bohemia and Moravia, were perched together in the smallest of places. 32 wooden barracks, each of which should originally have been used for 52 horses, were used as accommodation. Up to 600 Roma were put in one such barrack. Accordingly the sanitary circumstances were disastrous. Already after a few months hundreds of Roma

had died from malnutrition, epidemics and forced labour.

Roma were used for the most difficult clay- and building work within the camp. The hunger epidemic "Noma" raged among the children. Additionally, the camp system was marked by internal power structures. Political internees were at the upper end, Jews and Roma at the lower end of the hierarchy. Stereotypes and prejudices were taken over by the camp community. The identifications set down by the SS made quick recognition possible. Roma wore a brown or black triangle, the inmate number preceded by a "Z" (for "Zigeuner") was tattooed to the forearm.

III. 11

“The cry / my brother Ossi Z 5743 in Birkenau 1943 died from hunger and typhus fever”. Painting by Karl Stojka.

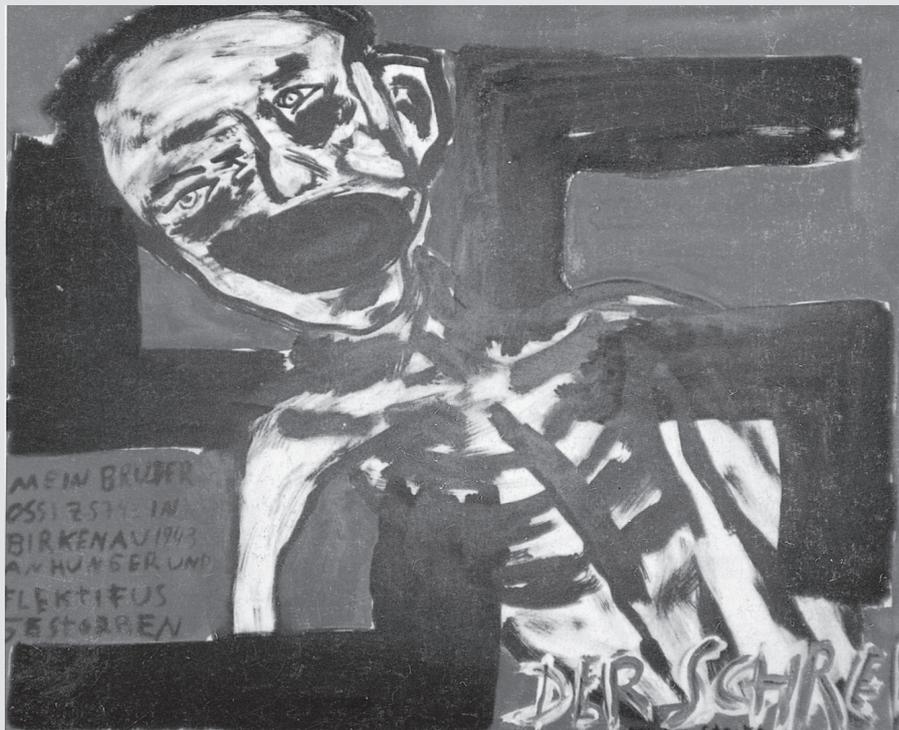
(from Stojka, Karl (1990): Ein Kind in Birkenau. Wien: self-published, front page)

The Austrian painter, Karl Stojka, was a boy of 12 when he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with his family in 1943. He recalls the death of his younger brother:

“My little Brother Ossi died from hunger. He was in the bed above, seven years old, and we had to go to work and he was alone! And when the others gave him more bread, then the elder ones stole the bread and the tea and the soup from him. And so he starved to death, he died. Where was God?”

III. 12

(from Cech / Fennesz-Juhasz / Heinschink 1999, p. 117)



Of all the Auschwitz camps, the “Gypsy camp” had the highest mortality rate. 19,300 people lost their lives there; 5,600 were gassed, 13,700 died from hunger, illnesses, epidemics and medical experiments. The latter were used in order to prove the fateful influence of “race” and heredity. The imagination of the doctors charged with this task, foremost Josef Mengele, knew no

bounds. Roma were injected with saline solutions and typhus bacillus, the doctors tried out colour pigments and heart injections in order to examine the eyes of twins. Hereby, the doctors, members of the SS and the army acted from a sense of science widespread in the general population. [Iills. 9-12]

Auschwitz is just one of many concentration camps in which the Roma

were murdered, partially before and systematically after the “Auschwitz Decree”. In addition, the second component of the extinction policy was carried out, namely forced sterilisation, both within the camps and in hospitals outside. Thousands of Roma, mostly women and girls, had to suffer this operation, often without anaesthesia. Many died during the operation.

VICTIMS

It is still unknown how many Roma fell victim to the Nazi persecution. Roma were not always registered as such, and come up in the victim statistics as members of the majority population, as “others” or not at all. Documents from the extinction camps and deportation lists were lost, are scattered in numerous archives or have not yet been analysed. The surviving records from the armed forces and the SS (“Schutzstaffel”, protective squadron) who alternately murdered behind the Eastern front, often at their own discretion, are incomplete and, particularly with reference to the Roma,

faulty. Murders of uncountable victims, at mass executions like the gas chambers, were not documented at all. Research has to rely on estimations; whatever their testimony, a number of at least 250,000 victims is considered highly probable.

Public discussion of that topic, if it takes place at all, is often based more on personal motives than facts. On the one hand, Roma organisations, their motive being clear, tend to estimate the numbers of victims at very high numbers. For example, minority activists were of the opinion in the German public that the genocide had had 500,000 or even 750,000 victims – numbers which are not confirmed by researchers. On the other hand, racially motivated historians questioned all research on the topic and, consequent-

ly, the genocide of Roma itself. Moreover, serious historical research also tends to deny the Roma persecution its racist character. The reason for this is often the motive to give justice to the Jew’s fate in its tragic singularity.

One thing is clear: Like the Jewish population, the Roma were deprived of their rights, interned and murdered in the German Reich. The documented proceeding of the persecution and the number of crimes taken from documents alone can lead to no other conclusion but that it was “racially” motivated mass murder. If, as has often been emphasised, the singular, historically new and unheard-of element of the Jews’ extinction was the machine-like precision and industrial

“THEIR SOULS ARE ILL”

The Austrian Romni Ceija Stojka from the Lovara-group, survivor of the camp in Auschwitz and a well-known writer and painter, describes how the children of the survivors suffered from the Holocaust trauma, too:

“When we got out, we were ill, completely! The heart was wounded, our head, our souls were ill. And at that time in this world the state – not the Roma or the normal mortals, but the state, should have had the insight to allow, like it is allowed today, enlightenment and talk about what would be necessary. These people should all have been treated. They should not have had children

for five, six years, those few people who got out, who were still there, until they had enough strength to be healthy, to be able to laugh again, until they felt good enough to see that the world is not bad and until they dared to bring healthy children into this world. At that time, nature followed its course: the world is beautiful, the flowers are coming up. And there is love in the world, nature saw to that. But our children – that is quite normal, and I believe that every person who thinks a little bit will say the same, that such children are overly sensitive, everything inside them, their heart trembles, cries immediately. Because their heart, too, their souls, are ill. And we had put this illness inside them. This fear,

always the fear, children grew up with it. And this is why they always look and turn around when they walk down the streets, do you understand, they turn around. Only a person who is afraid turns around!

When somebody becomes ill from the camp, and his head hurts and his soul bleeds for a father, a sister, a brother who stayed there, this person can only have a child that is wounded in its soul. It comes into this world, you can see how sweet it is, how beautiful, you raise it, you love it and kiss it, hug it. It grows, but this fear that was in you, you transfer it on to it, with the mother’s milk.”

Ill. 13 (from Cech / Fennesz-Juhasz / Heinschink 1999, p. 77)

dimension, then the singular element of the Roma murders was the naturalness with which they were received in

the circle of victims and the casualness with which the murders proceeded, even though to the end there may

have been no explicitly formulated, comprehensive schedule for their extinction.

THE SURVIVORS

After the war, the surviving Roma were confronted with the same prejudices they had had to endure already before 1933 in the whole of Europe. After 1945, there was no public inte-

rest in their fate at all. It was only in the late 1970s that the majority population developed a sense of injustice, the initiative having been started by Roma organisations which were able to establish themselves from that point in time on. Continuing prejudices had effects on the so-called “reparations”. Only a minority of the surviving Ger-

man and Austrian Roma and Sinti were able to assert their claims. The Austrian and German culprits mostly got away without imprisonment or were granted amnesty after a short time. Those few Roma who did not bow to pressure and pressed charges, were in many cases discredited again and cast off as liars. [Ill. 13]

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