

# Foreword

## Roma Holocaust, Memory, and Representation

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*Lise Foisneau* is a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). She defended, in 2018, a doctorate in anthropology on the political forms of a Romani collective in Provence; she conducted postdoctoral research on the memory of the Second World War at the Central European University (Budapest), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington), and EHESS (Paris). *Les Nomades face à la guerre (1939–1946)*, published in 2022, is her first book.



The 2010s were a turning point in the historiography of the Roma and Sinti genocide: archives were discovered, new topics were addressed, and testimonies of survivors have begun to be taken into account in historical research. However, this shift is not only the work of historians: it owes much to grassroots and activists' initiatives. Two of them in particular have contributed to train a new generation and to change the way we approach Romani history during the Second World War: *Dikh i na bister*, which brings together Romani youth each year to commemorate 2 August 1944, and *Romani Resistance Day* (16 May), which celebrates the incredible strength displayed by Roma in the face of persecution. Both of these initiatives have had a greater impact on scientific research than one might imagine, and their output is still to come. It is no longer possible to ignore the fact that the memory of the Roma Holocaust is alive and well, and that its transmission has never stopped. The struggle thus has reached historical research. In the political context of confrontations with the extreme right, which attempts to influence and even prevent historical research, a number of our colleagues are accused of 'ideology' and 'activism' when they tackle themes such as resistance, and when they suggest that there might be bias in past historiography. In this context of renewal and historiographical debate, members of the editorial board of *Critical Romani Studies* thought it was the time to devote an entire issue to the Roma Holocaust. How have certain grassroots initiatives impacted scientific research? How have historians taken up critical theory? And more generally, what is the state of War and Holocaust Studies about Roma and Sinti?

The Roma and Sinti Holocaust has been questioned, overlooked, and marginalized for several decades. The postwar period was not only the time when the perpetrators were held accountable, but also a period in which the Holocaust memory discourse was built. Nevertheless, Roma and Sinti witnesses did not testify during the Nuremberg trials, and those who perpetrated genocide against them were not brought to justice for those crimes. It resulted in both the exclusion of Roma and Sinti from the Holocaust discourse and the failure to include their war history in educational programs. As postcolonial scholars have already stressed, the lack of political representation and of a dominant position in majority societies is another reason for this silence. However, thanks to the commitment of the communities themselves, remembrance of the fate of Roma during the Second World War is gradually coming to the minds of Europeans. But the way is lengthy, as the memory of the concentration camp for Roma of Lety, on the territory of the Czech Republic, testifies. In the 1970s, the communist authorities established a pig farm there, which was not closed after the fall of the regime. The farm was privatized and after decades of fighting to remove it, in 2018, an agreement was reached, which in turn would result in the relocation of the farm. Finally, it has been decided to have a memorial site built in its place. This iconic example testifies of a general tendency towards Roma and Sinti communities and remind us of the words of the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha: "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membling, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present."<sup>[1]</sup>

The first two articles in this issue offer a renewed interpretation of the treatment of Roma and Sinti in Romania and France during the Second World War and recall that antigypsyism ideology was present in those countries before the rise to power of Ion Antonescu and Philippe Pétain. Both articles argue

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1 Homi K. Bhabha. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 63.

that the persecution of Roma and Sinti during the war is part of a longer historical sequence. In “Roma and the Question of Ethnic Origin in Romania during the Holocaust”, **Marius Turda and Adrian-Nicolae Furtună** highlight the existence of a Romanian eugenics discourse in which Romania could only recover its health and greatness if deprived of some of its members. Based on newly found archival material, the authors show that there was an attempt from the early 1940s to transform Romania into an ethnically homogeneous state. In the article entitled “Do French ‘Nomads’ Have a War History? A Review of Seventy-Five Years of Historiography”, **Lise Foisneau** offers a critical analysis of the methodological and thematic biases present in some historical research on the so-called “Nomads” in France during the Second World War. By focusing on how the history of French Roma and Travellers during the war was written, the author shows how the French postwar governments have relied on historical studies to deny the racial character of the persecution of the “Nomads”. The article by Marius Turda and Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, together with the article by Lise Foisneau, prove how the interpretation of history had long-lasting practical implications on Romani lives, for historiography matters – and also is the basis on which historiography has been conceived. **Slawomir Kapralski** reflects on the far-reaching consequences of colonial violence on violence against Roma in the late twentieth century. While exploring the roots of the Roma Holocaust, the author confronts Romani studies with the fields of colonial studies from the perspective of genocide studies. He questions the relationships among Nazi persecution of Roma, modernization, and colonization. He argues that the idea of government through extreme violence, typical of last century Europe, was experimented in the colonial situation, which was in itself a preparation to genocidal violence. In this context, Roma were seen as the “savages within” and suffered a form of domestic colonialism that was pre-genocidal.

In an issue devoted to the Roma Holocaust such as this, we thought it would be appropriate to include authors who have worked on the museographic representation of it. **Eve Rosenhaft and Kyu Dong Lee** have accepted to reflect on the experience of exhibiting the same photographic archive (Hanns Weltzel photographs) in two different exhibitions, one which took place in Britain, the other in South Korea. In the article entitled “Representing/Roma/Holocaust: Exhibition Experiences in Europe and East Asia”, the authors observed how European and Korean visitors responded to the exhibition. They offer a reflection on Roma as subaltern and racialized subjects and on the danger of aestheticization. Interested in the question of representation and misrepresentation, this issue publishes the results of a research project on the presence of Roma Holocaust in European textbooks. **Marko Pecak, Riem Spielhaus, and Simona Szakács-Behling** apply critical discourse analysis to a dataset of 472 passages and images referring to the Roma Holocaust from 869 textbooks. In their article, “Between Antigypsyism and Human Rights Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representations of the Roma Holocaust in European Textbooks”, one learns that when discussing the Roma Holocaust textbooks focus on numbers and murder techniques whereas Roma-specific details, survivor stories, and individual voices are rare. This systematic study provides a comprehensive picture of how the Roma Holocaust is taught via European textbooks.

The present *Critical Romani Studies* issue also hosts two articles that reflect on contemporary forms of racialization and segregation. **Simina Dragos’** paper directly responds to the observations and questions made by Marko Pecak, Riem Spielhaus, and Simona Szakács-Behling in their study on the representation of the Roma Holocaust in textbooks: she explores the responses of Romani students in a segregated

school in Romania to the majoritarian deficit narratives constructed about them. In “Romani Students’ Responses to Antigypsyist Schooling in a Segregated School in Romania: A Critical Race Theory perspective”, Simina Dragos inquires on the specific strategies of resistance implemented by Romani students to cope with the majority narrative. Also focusing on the constitution of a minority group within a nation, **Zoë James** analyses the way in which Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers are constituted into a community of difference. In a thought-provoking paper – “Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers as a Community of Difference: Challenging Inclusivity as an Anti-racist Approach” – the author expresses her concern that policy developments in the United Kingdom have racialized communities and then measures its consequences for Roma, Gypsies, and Travellers.

This special issue on the Roma Holocaust is highlighting the work of the Romani-Polish artist **Krzysztof Gil**. He kindly agreed that his 2021 piece of work called *Nostalgia is the luxury for other* would be featured on the front cover, and we are grateful to him for it. At this point it is worth adding that Gil uses such techniques as drawing, painting, installation, and graphic arts to draw attention to how the tragic past shapes and influences the Romani minority in the present-day. In his paintings he strategically tells the stories of decolonization and new beginnings. Gil is the author of the installation *Tajsa yesterday and tomorrow*, one of the most moving works of art in recent years, in which he conceptually revises and deconstructs classical paintings in order to make space for absent stories. In an article entitled “Futures Past Means *Tajsa*”, **Monika Weychert** discusses some of Gil’s installations, and looks at the presence of genocide in his work. She points out how the mechanisms of rendering long-standing violence is captured by Gil’s art and how his work allows us to understand that genocide is one moment in a longer sequence of persecutions.

In the book review section, **Anna Daróczy** reviews the anthology edited by Eliyana Adler and Katerina Čapková, *Jewish and Romani Families in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (2020), and **Dalen C.B. Wakeley-Smith** writes on how the methods outlined in *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice*, edited by Natalia Molina, Ramon Gutiérrez, and Daniel HoSang, can be of use regarding the situation of many Romani communities across Europe.