

ANTI-ROMA DISCOURSES: THE STRUGGLE FOR ROMA HOLOCAUST RECOGNITION, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Norina Herki*

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Abstract

This paper aims to trace and chart the interplay between the struggle for recognition of the Genocide and the Roma civil rights movement, respectively to what extent memory, commemoration, reconciliation play a role and contribute to building a collective identity for the Roma, the Roma narrative – in which persecution, past trauma are important.

The paper will also analyze the struggle for recognition and identity as a resistance to the manifestations of Antigypsyism in contemporary society. Furthermore, the paper proposes to analyze the European dimension of the Roma mobilization, respectively to what extent there is a Europe-wide movement for recognition of the Roma Holocaust, given the many Roma groups, different regional histories and the heterogeneous identity of the Roma.

Keywords: Roma civil rights movement, Roma genocide, Antigypsyism, Memory, Identity, Recognition, Remembrance;

* PhD Student in Political Science at the Faculty of European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Contact: norina.herki@ubbcluj.ro

Echoes of the Romani Holocaust during the Covid-19 pandemic

The pandemic created or revealed a virulent world, in which tensions have broken out and inequalities have been highlighted, with nationalist, populist, authoritarian tendencies fueling the backsliding of democracy at global level. Despite the globalizing trend that our societies have been engaged in, the crisis has shown us that far from being citizens of the world, we are bound to nation-states, and the national states from the EU have demonstrated once again that the national states are far from impartial in their treatment of (national) minorities. Threats to the rule of law and democratic values in some EU countries have intensified during the pandemic and monitoring organizations have reported a rise in hate speech and hate crimes against Asian people, particularly against Chinese people in Europe and the Americas, and the Roma and migrants in the EU.

Matache and Bhabha have underlined that some of the measures taken by European member states under the guise of containing the spread of the virus have been disproportionate, militarized and “driven by a racist narrative that casts Roma as a collective health and safety threat” and are “harsh reminders of earlier European anti-Roma racist measures”¹. In an analysis of the social inequalities and vulnerabilities of the Roma communities in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, Rorke states that “this new virus has given added boost to an older one – racist scapegoating of Roma.”²

In Romania, according to a study carried out by IRES and Asociația Impreună in June 2020, one in ten Romanians considers Roma as being guilty for spreading the Coronavirus, after diaspora and migrants.³

In a compelling radiography of the negative, racialized portrayal of the Roma by the mass-media and social-media Costache exposes the ethnicization of the Covid-19 virus in Romania and traces back a tendency to look at and consider Roma bodies as a source of biological threat that goes back to

¹ Margareta Matache, Jacqueline Bhabha, “Anti-Roma Racism is Spiraling during COVID-19 Pandemic”, in *Health and human rights*, vol. 22, 1, 2020, pp. 379-382.

² Bernard Rorke, “Inequality, anti-Roma racism, and the coronavirus”, *EU Observer*, March 19, 2020, [<https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/147759>], 31 August 2020

³ Agenția Impreună and IRES Survey, “Percepția asupra romilor în timpul pandemiei de covid-19”, *IRES*, June 2020, [<https://ires.ro/articol/403/percep-ia-asupra-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-de-covid-19>], 1 October 2020

WWII eugenics theorists who advocated for the internment and sterilization of Roma. In Costache's view the pandemic did not produce nor was a catalyst for dormant racism, it simply produced new conditions for the ongoing racism against the Roma to precipitate. The source of this racism is traced back to the Roma Holocaust and Roma slavery in Romania and is identified as the root cause of the social inequalities that Roma face today. The pandemic is "a moment of sincerity in which long-held prejudices become presumably admissible. The ethical threads holding civil society together begin to fray, what is moral and the good lose meaning."⁴

The view that surges in racism are related to key, specific or crisis moments, is reinforced by a research study by the Ellie Wiesel National Institute for Studying the Holocaust, which has carried out two research projects, between 2016 and 2018, respectively monitoring and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Roma discourses, online and on social media. The authors of the research report identify as cause for the surge in hate speech on social networks, not only in Romania, three events in 2015: the project of building a mosk in Bucharest, the refugee crisis and the amendments to Gov. Emergency Ordinance 31/2002 on combating fascist, racist and xenophobic ideologies, which have served as pretext for massive hate campaigns against ethnic and religious minorities, in Romania, chiefly the Jews and Roma.

They have identified and constructed an online platform which indexes 39 themes of the anti-Roma and anti-Semitic discourse in the Romanian virtual space, and offer counter-narratives to combat such discourses. The following themes have been identified among the recurrent anti-Roma discourses related to the Romani genocide: "gypsies belong to an inferior race", "The gypsies were deported at the behest of the Germans", "Deporting the Roma to Transnistria- Saving them from Auschwitz?", "Only the criminal gypsies have been deported", "The Roma talk about the Holocaust only for receiving compensation".⁵ According to the report, anti-Roma messages are more dependent on biological racism, Roma being considered an inferior race (27% of the analyzed content on Facebook). Furthermore, memes of Antonescu and Adolf Hitler, images of fire weapons

⁴ Ioanida Costache, " "Until we are able to gas them like the Nazis, the Roma will infect the nation:" Roma and the ethnicization of COVID-19 in Romania", *DoR*, April 22, 2020, [<https://www.dor.ro/roma-and-the-ethnicization-of-covid-19-in-romania/>], 31 August 2020

⁵ [<https://faraura.ro/>], 30 September 2020

and crows are used frequently to evoke and approve the genocide against Roma. The authors of the report further emphasize that in the case of the Roma, the anti-Roma messages are much more radical, as 42% of the monitored and analyzed content proposes the extermination of the Roma, referencing the genocide against the Roma and Sinti and presenting it as a model to follow, and enjoy a greater audience.⁶ The research study also shows the lack of counter-narratives to combat such hate speech.

The Recognition of the Roma Holocaust, Shaping the Past and the Roma Narrative after the Fall of Communism in Romania

The Sinti and Roma Genocide has been dubbed for a long time as “The Forgotten Holocaust”, partly because its recognition occurs quite late, the earliest in 1982 in Germany, and in Romania, after the fall of Communism, and partly because, in terms of research and knowledge production, the interest has been modest and the struggle to make the Roma genocide more widely known and recognized as an integral part of European history is still ongoing.

The dominant narrative, or the public discourse concerning the Roma Holocaust in Romania, is related to the fact that the deportation of the approximately 15.000 Roma was not racially or ethnically motivated, but rather socially, in the sense that only criminal, “asocial” Roma have been deported. Other dominant narratives are related to the fact that only nomad Roma were deported and that the deportations, and ultimately the extermination of the Roma have been carried out at the behest and instigation of Nazi Germany, the Romanian state having been blameless of the atrocities.

Knowledge production plays an important role in the formation of such narratives. Earlier research on the history of the Roma in Romania, particularly the Roma Genocide, has been reluctant or failed to recognize the racist and systematic character of the Roma genocide, some have emphasized the social character to the detriment of the racial and ethnical character, while others present an “essentialized Roma identity, obscure a

⁶ Institutul Național Pentru Studierea Holocaustului Din România “Elie Wiesel”, *Discursul instigator la ură împotriva evreilor și romilor în social media*, 2016, [http://www.inshrew.ro/ro/files/proiecte/DIU/DIU_social_media_1.pdf], 30 September 2020

long history of marginalization and subordination and favor the blaming the victim approach".⁷

Moreover, in Romania, during the communist regime, talking about Romania's war time racist policy, particularly the deportations to Transnistria was taboo, and the fact that the Roma were not considered a national minority, respectively were not listed as "co-inhabiting nationalities", not only reduced scientific interest in the Roma population, but also did not enable them to benefit from legislation concerning minorities nor the political, educational, cultural, or other measures taken in favor of the co-inhabiting minorities.⁸

Following the fall of the Communist regime in Romania, the EU enlargement eastward, the strategic objectives regarding the European Union and NATO, Romania's accession to the Council of Europe, NATO and EU, as well as fulfilling certain criteria related to democracy, rule of law and human rights, that would fuel the important steps made by Romania in early 1990s regarding the recognition and protection of national minorities, including the Roma, and create the context for recognition of the Jewish and Roma genocide in Romania. In addition, westward migration, the frequency of the interethnic conflicts from 1990-1996, the reports of the intergovernmental and international organization and institutions regarding the situation of the Roma in Romania, bring about the interest of western countries for improving the situation of minorities.⁹

However, the years immediately after the fall of Communism have focused on the victims and crimes of the Communist regime, rather than the Holocaust, mainly due to the fact that the communist experience was more recent, but also because the narrative of the nation as perpetrator of violence and genocide was in contradiction with the narrative of the nation as victim of the communist regime. Paradoxically, Antonescu „was billed as a hero for fighting Communism”, statues have been erected in several cities,

⁷ Marian Viorel Anastasoiaie, "Roma/Gypsies in the History of Romania: An Old Challenge for Romanian Historiography" in *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 262-274

⁸ Viorel Achim, "Romanian Memory of the Persecution of Roma" in *Roma and Sinti: Under- Studied Victims of Nazism*, Symposium Proceedings. Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002, pp. 59-77

⁹ László Foszto, *Colecție de studii despre romii din România*, Cluj – Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale : Kriterion, 2009, pp. 73-75

and in 2006, he is placed sixth in a Romanian public television which sought viewer votes on the ten most popular Romanians of all times, his popularity decreasing only in the context of legislative measures that banned the promotion of fascism and Holocaust denial, with the joining of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union.¹⁰

Despite its potential for nation, collective identity building or political mobilization, the Roma Holocaust would remain untapped into for several decades, as the discourses after the Fall of Communism in Romania have focused on human rights rather than identity (re)construction, which is understandable given the inter-ethnic conflicts that emerged in the first half of the 1990s. In addition, Kelso mentions that for communities characterized by economic 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 recognition¹¹. The lack of an educated elite or a tradition of historical reflection on the past are also considered to have contributed to the absence of Roma narratives.¹²

In addition, a study on the testimonies of Romanian Roma Holocaust survivors, concludes that a direct consequence of the Holocaust is the rejection or the hiding of their ethnical identity because of the fear to be discriminated, persecuted or stigmatized.¹³

Thus, even though the first official recognition of the Roma as an ethnic minority occurs in the 1991 Constitution, in which Article 6 recognizes the right to identity and protection measures for national minorities, in the aftermath of the Holocaust and following the assimilation

¹⁰ Michelle Kelso, Daina S. Eglitis, "Holocaust commemoration in Romania: Roma and the contested politics of memory and memorialization" in *Journal of Genocide Research*, no. 16, 2014, pp. 487-511

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Andrzej Mirga, "Roma Genocide: Historic and Symbolic Meanings for Collective Memory and Identity" in Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Esteban Acuña C. and Piotr Trojański (eds.), *Education for Remembrance of The Roma Genocide. Scholarship, Commemoration and the Role of Youth*, Cracow: Libron, 2015, p. 60

¹³ Adrian Nicolae Furtună, Delia Grigore, Mihai Neacșu, *Sostar na rovas?... O Samudaripen thaj lesqı ciaci paramisi/ De ce nu plâng?... Holocaustul romilor și povestea lui adevărată*, București: Editura Centrului Rromilor „Amare Rromentza”, 2010, p. 170

policies of the Communist regime, the early post-comunist years of Holocaust denial, the Roma population in Romania, despite their demographics (census in 1992 indicates 400.000 Roma, while a study indicates 1,5 million; census data in 2002 indicates 535.000; census data in 2011 indicates that 621.573 Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity have declared that belonging to the Roma minority, however, experts estimate numbers between 1 and 2,5 million) are underrepresented and have only managed to acquire political representation ex officio, by virtue of the legislation for national minorities, which provides a deputy mandate for organizations of national minorities which participated in the elections but whose candidate was not elected. A statistical analysis regarding Roma self-identification in the last four censuses indicates a significant growth from 227.398, in 1977 to 621.573, in 2011.¹⁴

The Roma political leadership, in the 1990s and first decades of the 2000s has not focused on building an ethno-political project, in which the traumatic shared past, holocaust recognition and historical justice for the Roma played any role. Despite the political protocols, partnerships (tacit agreement in 2000¹⁵, 2003¹⁶, 2012¹⁷) with leading political mainstream party PSD, the political leadership has continued the social approach to the Roma minority, requesting measures for social inclusion, representation in the governmental structures, in exchange for supporting and promoting the mainstream party candidates in the parliamentary electoral colleges, claiming the recognition or wider recognition of the Roma genocide and historical reparation for the Roma minority has not been a preoccupation of the Roma political leadership.

¹⁴ Tamás Kiss, Ilka Veress, *Minorități din România. Recensământ 2011 - procese demografice*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2018, p. 64

¹⁵ Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Is there a model for the political representation of the Romanian Roma?" in *Sfera Politicii*, nr. 123-124, 2006, pp. 78-90

¹⁶ [<http://miris.eurac.edu/mugs2/do/blob.pdf?type=pdf&serial=1075996669257>], 1 October 2020

¹⁷ Alina Novaceanu, "Alegeri Parlamentare: PSD și Partida Romilor au încheiat un acord de susținere reciprocă", *Mediafax*, November 3, 2012, [<https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/alegeri-parlamentare-psd-si-partida-romilor-au-incheiat-un-acord-de-sustinere-reciproca-in-alegerile-parlamentare-10274051>], 1 October 2020

The agreements can be considered to be an example of the lack of a coherent ethno-political vision of the Roma community. Furthermore, Mişcoiu demonstrates that, politically speaking, the Romanian Roma communities, both in structure and representation, follow the model of "political precariousness", leading to an "underrepresentation and misrepresentation of the Roma community in Romania".¹⁸ Building on the heterogeneity of the Roma community, McGarry points out the ambiguous nationalism, „the lack of a coherent vision of and for the Roma nation” that accounts for parliamentary underrepresentation and the fact that the electoral support and political presence is disproportionate to their numerical weight.¹⁹

Though the authors assert that far from being observed and practiced by all people considered to be Roma on the bases of hetero- or autoidentification, in a recent investigation into the instances of Roma autonomous lawmaking, respectively the unofficial Roma legal system „Kris”, they argue that it has played over time a „crucial role in producing and reproducing the boundaries of Roma identity at large, providing a code of organizing Roma communities and sustaining the bases of solidarity among members”.²⁰ As traditional Roma groups have been foremost the targets of the genocide, it begs investigation to what extent operating outside state systems and the insulation of the Roma from the majority society has played a role in diminishing and marginalizing the Roma accounts about the genocide, which some mention have been underpinned by traditional beliefs. The confessions of the survivors, suggests one of the first Roma-led researches on memorialization of the Roma Holocaust in Romania, are considered „taboo subjects of the Romani culture, the shame of having been there”.²¹

It would be the Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, established by then president Iliescu, following a governmental incident of Holocaust denial which sparked international

¹⁸ Sergiu Mişcoiu, *op.cit.*

¹⁹ Aidan McGarry, "Ambiguous nationalism?: Explaining the parliamentary underrepresentation of Roma in Hungary and Romania" in *Romani Studies*, 19, no. 2 , 2009, pp. 103-124.

²⁰ Levente Salat, Sergiu Mişcoiu, "Roma autonomous lawmaking - the Romanian case" in Tove H. Malloy, Levente Salat, *Non-Territorial Autonomy and Decentralization: Ethno-Cultural Diversity Governance*, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 167-194

²¹ Adrian Nicolae Furtună, Delia Grigore, Mihai Neacşu, *op.cit.*, p. 176

outrage, that would break the camel's back and put an end to the victimhood narrative of Romania and that the genocide of the Jews and Roma was perpetrated by Nazi Germany, the Romanian state having been blameless.

The Commission was chaired by Nobel Laureate and Vice-Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Prof. Elie Wiesel and comprised recognized historians and public figures from the United States, Romania, France, Germany and Israel and was backed by the American Jewish Committee, B'nai Brith, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. The report of this commission, submitted in 2004, unequivocally concluded that the Romanian regime actively targeted, deported and murdered Jews and Roma.²²

As a result of the report, in 2009, the Romanian government unveiled a Holocaust memorial to commemorate over 280,000 Jews and 11,000 Roma who died as victims of the Ion Antonescu regime. Though their victimhood is recognized in the external and internal exhibits and the population losses made explicit, Kelso suggests that Roma are „simultaneously represented, unrepresented and misrepresented“, as the agents and context of their suffering are not well illuminated, the Romani language and the terms coined for the genocide, Porrajmos or Samudaripen are absent, "not seeking to capture the historical narrative in their cultural voices."²³

Romania has commemorated both the Jewish and Roma Holocaust on Holocaust Remembrance Day, October 9, as the date signifying the beginning of Jewish deportations to Transnistria.

Following in the footsteps of the European Parliament which declared in 2015, August 2 as the annual "European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day", in 2020 Romania adopted a Law establishing the 2nd of August as the National Day of Commemorating the Holocaust against Roma – Samudaripen. The initiator of the piece of legislation was the deputy representing the Roma minority from the Roma Party „Pro Europa“.

²² Elie Wiesel, Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihail E. Ionescu, *Final Report: of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, Bucharest, 2004, [<https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/international-commission-on-romania-holocaust.html>], 30 September 2020

²³ Michelle Kelso, Daina S. Eglitis, "Holocaust commemoration in Romania: Roma and the contested politics of memory and memorialization", in *Journal of Genocide Research* no. 16, 2014, pp. 487-511.

Wider recognition of the Roma and Sinti Genocide: From Oppression to Resistance and Remembrance

The spark that lighted the civil rights movement and the recognition of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust was lit in Germany, in 1979 at the first international memorial rally to commemorate the Sinti and Roma murdered by the National Socialists. The event attracted a lot of attention, Simone Veil, a survivor of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and the first female President of the European Parliament, was the key speaker at the rally.²⁴ A key event and turning point of the Roma civil rights movement in Germany, has been the hunger strike organized at the former Dachau concentration camp during Easter 1980 in which the strikers called out for the recognition of the genocide, and the occupation of the basement of the Tübingen University archive by eighteen Sinti who demanded the immediate removal of the Nazi race files to the Federal Archive, locating the files and documenting the genocide having been an important objective of the movement.

Germany would be the country who took the first steps to officially recognize the Nazi genocide of the Sinti and Roma in 1982. In 1997 the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma was officially opened with a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma, and in 2012 a Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime was erected in Berlin, marking “the closure of the struggle, both historically and symbolically”,²⁵ thus establishing a remembrance culture of the genocide of the Sinti and Roma who were killed in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The topic of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust and the issue of compensations is a recurrent topic at the World Roma Congresses (Genève 1978, Göttingen 1981, Warsaw 1990, Prague 2000, Lanchiano 2004, Zagreb 2008), and in the governing body of International Romani Union the

²⁴ ***, “First public civil rights campaign against racism”, 2020, [<https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/rom/recognition/first-public-civil-rights-campaign-against-racism/>], 31 August 2020

²⁵ Andrzej Mirga, *op.cit.*, p. 57

Commission on the Compensations for the Holocaust has always been included.²⁶

Nevertheless, it would be the context of the European Union as supranational entity in which national states, which has been proven that are not ethnically impartial, lose power both vertically and horizontally, that has created the premises for recognition and empowerment of national minorities, including the Roma, and for wider recognition of the Sinti and Roma genocide, enabling the Roma population to engage in transnational commemoration of the genocide and (re)construction of discourses on collective identity.

Following the Jewish model, the Roma activists have made efforts to coin a 'Roma name', in analogy with 'Shoah' respectively Porrajmos (in Romanes – 'the Devouring'), or Baro Porrajmos (in Romanes – 'the Great Devouring'), a term, considered offensive by some Roma groups, thus other activists invent and start to use an alternative term Samudardipen – in Romanes 'Overall killings'). Marushkiakova and Vesselin also mention that the words Holokosto or Holokausto, Kali Traš (in Romanes 'Black fear') are used together with metaphoric expression Berša Bibahtale (in Romanes 'unhappy years') to reference the Sinti and Roma Genocide.

Romani Resistance Day is an initiative of Roma civil society that "sprung out of the need to rise above the role of victim ascribed to Roma by society and instead to stand up against prejudice and actively shape their own future" commemorating the victims but also remembering the acts of resistance.²⁷

The narrative of the Sinti and Roma Genocide becomes more diverse, recasting Roma not only in the roles of victims, but also as "heroes" by starting a culture of remembrance in what Brooks calls "one of the most significant - but understudied - acts of resistance", respectively the

²⁶ Elena Marushkiakova, Vesselin Popov, "Holocaust, Porrajmos, Samudaripen ... Creation of New National Mythology..", in *Studia Romologica*, 3, 2013, pp. 75-94, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235700074_Holocaust_Porrajmos_Samudaripen_Creation_of_New_National_Mythology], 31 August 2020.

²⁷ Council of Europe, Advisory Council of Youth, "The Statement on Romani Resistance Day", 16 May 2020, [<https://rm.coe.int/romani-resistance-day-16-may/16809e4ece>], 1 November 2020

uprising of the Sinti and Roma prisoners against the SS guards, in the Zigeuner lager, which postponed the liquidation of the prisoners for a few months.²⁸

The year 2015 would give new impetus to the Roma movement for Holocaust recognition. The European Parliament and some EU Member States, including Belgium, recognized the Armenian Genocide.²⁹ Crucial steps have also been made in terms of truth and historical justice with the European Parliament recognizing the Roma Genocide and paving the way towards reconciliation with the Resolution “International Roma Day– anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during WWII”. The European Parliament affirms in this resolution that “2 August has been chosen by Roma organizations as the day to commemorate all Roma victims of this genocide” and that the recognition “would thus constitute an important symbolic step in the fight against anti-Gypsyism and contribute to general knowledge of Roma history in Europe.”³⁰

The EP recognition prompted French officials as well, as in 2016 President Francois Hollande recognized and assumed responsibility for the estimated 200.000 – 500.000 Roma killed in the French concentration camps during the Vichy regime.³¹

Antigypsyism has been frequently mentioned and emphasized in policy documents of the Council, the EP and the EC. Despite competing definitions and alternative concepts to refer to Roma oppression, such as

²⁸ Ethel Brooks, “Remembering the Dead, Documenting Resistance, Honoring the Heroes” in *UN Discussion Papers Series*, 2015,

[<https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/paper23.shtml>], 1 October 2020

²⁹ ***, “Armenian Genocide: After EU, the US recognizes genocide in WWI”, *Brussels Times*, 30 October 2019, [<https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/world-all-news/76395/armenian-genocide-after-eu-the-us-recognizes-genocide-in-wwi/>], 1 January 2020

³⁰ ***, “European Parliament recognizes Antigypsyism and Roma Genocide”, Alliance against Antigypsyism, April 15, 2015,

[<http://antigypsyism.eu/?p=178%20eu%20and%20roma%20genocide>], 1 January 2020

³¹ Olimpia Nicolae, “Presedintele Francois Hollande recunoaste Genocidul Romilor intreprins de Franta in Al Doilea Razboi Mondial”, *Mediafax*, October 29, 2016, [<https://www.mediafax.ro/externe/presedintele-francois-hollande-recunoaste-genocidul-romilor-intreprins-de-franta-in-al-doilea-razboi-mondial-15880208>], 1 January 2020

anti-Roma racism, Antiziganismus, Romaphobia, Antigypsyism seems to be the prevalent term.

Several scholars and activists have attempted to define the concept and phenomenon, one such definition states that Anti-gypsyism incorporates elements of biological racism but it also centres around “cultural” differences between “us” versus “them”³² while another defines it as “a special form of racism directed against Roma that has at its core the assumptions that Roma are an inferior and deviant group. Other key assumptions of anti-Gypsyism are: orientalism, nomadism, rootlessness and backwardness”.³³ The Alliance against Antigypsyism, an occasional coalition of organizations that promote equality of rights for Roma has drafted the following working: “Antigypsyism is a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma ‘gypsy’ or other related terms, and incorporates: 1. a homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups; 2. the attribution of specific characteristics to them; 3. discriminating social structures and violent practices that emerge against that background, which have a degrading and ostracizing effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages.”³⁴

Rostas identifies the following manifestations of Antigypsyism: discrimination, segregation, physical, verbal and symbolic violence, collective punishment and mob violence, assimilation policies, deportations, extermination, mass expulsion of Roma from different countries etc., including Holocaust denial etc. Rostas underlines that Antigypsyism is embedded in structural institutions and has a systemic character, emphasizing the oppression of a group for its identity and the role of the state in

³² Valeriu Nicolae, “Towards a Definition of Anti-Gypsyism”, Ergo Network, 2006, [https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Valeriu-Nicolae_towards-a-definition-of-antigypsyism.pdf], 31 August 2020

³³ Sergio Carrerra, Iulius Rostas, Lina Vosyliūtė, *Combating Institutional Anti-Gypsyism: Responses and promising practices in the EU and selected Member States*, Brussels: CEPS, 2017, p. 71, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320879566_Combating_Institutional_Anti-Gypsyism_Responses_and_promising_practices_in_the_EU_and_selected_Member_States], 1 August 2020

³⁴ ***, “Antigypsyism. A reference paper” on Antigypsyism”, Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2017, [<https://securservercdn.net/192.169.221.188/abv.a52.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Antigypsyism-reference-paper-16.06.2017.pdf>], 1 October 2020

producing and reproducing racism as well as the impunity of the perpetrator. He argues that as a specific term, Antigypsyism predates the term racism, a product of modernity, and epitomizes an entire tradition of Roma oppression, which goes beyond European modernity, referencing the enslavement of the Roma in Moldavia and Wallachia. Following the model of the Jewish scholars in the coining of the term anti-Semitism, Antigypsyism would signal a shift in power and power relations, challenging the dominant narratives about the Roma and showing the need for historical and social justice.³⁵

Renan has been among the firsts to elaborate upon the importance of collective memory and of a common shared repository of history and culture for the accomplishment of any nationalist project. According to Renan, the nation is a culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion, based on the cult of the ancestors, that is to say built on a heroic past, great men and glory, a social capital on which to base a nation. In his opinion, national memories are made up "suffering in common", which unifies more than triumphs, and that this imposes duties and requires efforts.³⁶ In his speech, at the inauguration of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime, in 2012, Romani Rose, Chair of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, stated: "There is not a single family of Sinti and Roma in Germany who has not lost immediate family members. It shapes our identity to this day."³⁷ He later on added in an interview "There is no family in Germany, nor in the European countries that were under Nazi occupation, which did not fall victim to the Nazi regime."³⁸

Smith adds that in order for shared memories to become national they need to be attached to specific places and territories through a process of territorialization of memory, which inspires historical claims to historic

³⁵ Iulius Rostas, *A Task for Sisyphus: Why Europe's Roma Policies Fail*, CEU Press, 2019, pp. 16-20.

³⁶ Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?", in Homi Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 8-22

³⁷ Ethel Brooks, *op.cit.*

³⁸ "Interview with Romani Rose", International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 1.08.2016, [<https://holocaustremembrance.com/stories/interview-romani-rose>], 1 October 2020.

homelands and sacred sites.³⁹ In this sense, turning the former Roma camp and Lety pig farm from the Czech Republic into a commemoration site, the commemoration monuments, the annual commemoration at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Roma camp, which reenacts the past and establishes a tradition and culture of remembrance contribute and impact national and collective identity building.

Challenges instead of Conclusions

The power struggle for shaping the past and the Roma narrative of the Genocide is ongoing. The high-level recognition of EU bodies and institutions, and state-level formal recognition has not been translated at the level of the wider public. Recognition of the Roma Holocaust at EU level has been facilitated by international institutions, mechanisms and in the framework of the development of the discourse on minority rights.

The Roma Holocaust in Romania is an unresolved issue in Romania, as evidenced by its recurrence in contemporary anti-Roma discourses, especially during moments of crisis, society not having undergone the moral catharsis for reconciling the dominant and marginal narratives.

The Holocaust narrative has been more successful at European level, in Romania it competes with the Communist narrative, which references a more recent past and consistent with the national image of Romanian as victims and heroes of the Communist regime not to mention that Romania's war time policy remains controversial. While more remote in time as a historical event, the narrative of enslavement has received a wider acceptance in Romanian society, due perhaps to more documentation and research of the period, the abolition of Roma slavery coincides with the birth of modern Romania and has been deemed more acceptable as it pertains to a period before the modern age, in a time of principalities in which the Romanian state did not exist per se.

³⁹ Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism", in *International Affairs*, 72, no. 3, 1996, pp. 445-458.

The Roma movement in Romania deals marginally with the Roma Holocaust and does not tap into its potential for collective and national identity building. Recent approaches of framing the Holocaust as part of a long tradition of Antigypsyism, might serve as an instrument for countering anti-Roma discourses/racisms and mobilization for historical justice and reparation, however, scholars warn against building an identity based on victimhood and persecution. The term is receiving more and more acceptance in academic and activist circles, but also in European policy documents with the New EU Framework for Roma Inclusion giving more importance and calling upon EU member states to prioritize and combat Antigypsyism in their National Roma Inclusion Strategies. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how the term will be received and used in Romania, as the Romanian governments have had a social and combatting poverty approach to Roma. Furthermore, the Roma political project in Romania has focused for more than two decades on an identity politics based on replacing the “Gypsy”/ Tigan exonym with the “Roma” endonym. To what extent this shift, in form, will set the movement forward or backward, remains to be seen.

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