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# "Difficult to Adapt People" – Roma and "Our" Victims in Post-Communist Memorial Museums[1]

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This article is a result of my larger five-year (habilitation) project on publicly funded post-communist memorial museums that focus primarily on the Second World War period. I analyzed how such institutions in all present-day "Eastern" EU member states changed their permanent exhibitions and museum guidebooks[2] over time, especially in the course of EU accession talks. In this paper I explore how Roma have been, if at all, represented in permanent exhibitions in these memorial museums. How have the "universalization of the Holocaust" and the "Europeanization of the Roma genocide" influenced the memory of the Roma genocide in post-communist countries in the course of EU integration? Which role do Roma play in what I came to call the "hierarchy of visibility" of different victim groups represented at the museums?

I argue that there are two different ways that post-communist memorial museums communicated with "Europe" during their EU accession talks. One group of museums demanded from "Europe" or "the West" that they acknowledge their country's suffering from Soviet crimes. At the same time they sought to contain the memory of Nazi victims, so that it cannot compete with "their own" victimhood during Soviet occupation. In the first part I will show that these museums, first of all, the Museums of Occupation(s) in Tallinn and Riga; the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius and the House of Terror in Budapest, basically omitted the Roma Genocide in their exhibitions and publications. The second part deals with another group of museums which "invocated Europe" and tried to prove their European-ness by copying "Western" musealization trends stemming first of all from Holocaust memorial museums: the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica; the Jasenovac

[1] This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (GMM – grant agreement No 816784) and before July 2019 from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): V663–G28.

[2] I analyzed ten memorial museums from Estonia to Croatia, understanding permanent exhibitions as hybrid media which are more than the sum of text, photographs and objects included in them, and conducted a diachronic discourse and visual history analysis of 52 museum guidebooks (Ljiljana Radonić, "Post-communist invocation of Europe: memorial museums' narratives and the Europeanization of memory," *National Identities* 19:2 (2017): 269–88; Ljiljana Radonić: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in postsozialistischen Gedenkmuseen. Geschichtspolitik zwischen der 'Anrufung Europas' und dem Fokus auf 'unser' Leid* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). I also look into the lack of memorial museums in Sofia and Bucharest.

Memorial Museum in Croatia; and the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest. They included the Roma genocide in their new permanent exhibitions from 2004–2006, albeit low in the "hierarchy of visibility", reproduced stereotypes and rarely portrayed Roma victims in an individualizing way. In the third part I will contrast these exhibitions which give attention to different victim groups with one that is devoted exclusively to Roma: the exhibition on the Roma genocide at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Finally, I will discuss the most recent developments with regard to the new inclusion of the Roma genocide especially in the Baltic countries in order to prove that the "Universalization of the Holocaust" and "Europeanization of Roma Genocide" are still gaining ground in some post-communist countries.

The "memory-boom" in the West after the Cold War emphasized the Holocaust as a "negative icon".[3] of the twentieth century. It has become a universal imperative for the respect of human rights in general and a "container" for the memory of different victims and victim groups.[4] Yet, Roma, Poles, and homosexuals were often referred to as "other victims".[5] In the EU, this "universalization of the Holocaust" includes another dimension: the Holocaust has been addressed as a "negative European founding myth".[6] by EU politicians and scholars:[7] Post-war Europe is understood as a collective that developed shared structures in order to avoid a recurrence of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In its search for an identity that goes beyond economic and monetary union, this founding myth provides a compelling common narrative that is otherwise lacking.

One result has been the growing attention for the Roma genocide, both on a scholarly level and "for Roma organizations and for individual Romanies".[8] In 1994, Roma from all over the world gathered in Auschwitz to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the elimination of the so-called *Zigeunerlager* (the "Gypsy camp"), and the Roma Association in Poland set up their headquarters in Oswiecim – a claim "to participation in the symbolic meaning of Auschwitz".[9] In the new millennium, the Council of Europe and the EU have increasingly

[3] Dan Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse. Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 7.
[4] Daniel Levy and Naten Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).
[5] Ian Hancock, "On the interpretation of a word: Porrajmos as Holocaust," in *Travellers, gypsies, Roma: The demonisation of difference*, eds. Thomas Acton and Michael Hayes (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 53.
[6] Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 15.
[7] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin Press, 2005).
[8] Sławomir Kapralski, "Identity building and the holocaust: Roma political nationalism," *Nationalities Papers* 25, 2 (1997): 276.
[9] Ibid., 277.

stressed the importance of remembering the Roma genocide. In 2005, the European Parliament (EP) passed a ground-breaking resolution in which it argued that:

> … 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 to create a suitable memorial … [10]

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that "the importance of teaching about Roma history cannot be overemphasized. Teaching about Roma history, raising awareness of the Roma genocide during the Second World War, and building and maintaining memorial sites are the least states could do to honour Roma victims."[11] Another EP resolution from 2005(b) not only "pays homage to all the victims of the Nazis" (Roma are explicitly mentioned) but also links remembrance in general directly to the current situation ("attacks on minority groups including Roma") when arguing that "lasting peace in Europe must be based on remembrance of its history".[12] Van Baar argues that "the reason why the EU's mobilisation of Holocaust remembrance for integrative aims also affects the Roma has to do with another, more general and widespread tendency to Europeanise the representation of the Roma"[13] – a trend I came to call the "Europeanization of the Roma genocide".
Even if state memorial museums are inaugurated in order to signalize readiness for "Europe" in an atmosphere without direct political pressure by the EU, but in which "the case for enlargement was articulated in terms of common values",[14] they are institutions that can contribute to this knowledge of the long-neglected Roma genocide. They not only display history, but also include a commemorative aspect since they deal with traumatic events of the recent past. Museums are key-producers of knowledge and history; they display how a society interprets its past, but they are definitely not neutral spaces of knowledge transfer showing how "it" was before. They are rather manifestations of cultural patterns, inclusion and

[10] European Parliament, "Resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union," 2005a, accessed 28 March 2021, www.europarl.europa.eu. See also: Huub van Baar, "The Way out of amnesia? Europeanisation and the recognition of the Roma's past and present," *Third Text* 22, 3 (2008): 382.
[11] Thomas Hammarberg, "The Romani holocaust and contemporary challenges: Tackling discrimination and human rights abuse of Roma," intervention by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 20–21 October 2011, accessed 28 March 2021, https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1855485; Gabriela Marin Thornton, "The Outsiders: Power differentials between Roma and non-Roma in Europe," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 15, 1 (2014): 111–12.
[12] European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism," 2005b, accessed 28 March 2021, www.europarl.europa.eu.
[13] van Baar, "The Way out of amnesia?" 382.
[14] Peter Vermeersch, "Reframing the Roma: EU initiatives and the politics of reinterpretation," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, 8 (2012): 1198.

exclusion mechanisms as well as social, ethnic and religious in- and outgroups – contested spaces.[15]

Furthermore, recent decades have witnessed a change in perspective of exhibitions: the focus on the victims' perspective has for the most part replaced hero, martyr or resistance narratives.[16] Having said that, we need to distinguish between the representation of individual victims, their stories, belongings and photographs from the "ordinary life before"[17] and on the other hand, the victim represented as part of a collective; as an emotionalizing symbol for national suffering. Interestingly enough, I will show that some exhibitions portray certain victims in an individualizing way that evokes empathy while representing others in an anonymous, distant way. Some of the exhibitions analyzed here fight the marginalization of Roma and the history of their persecution. But this by no means guarantees that they don't "reduce complex histories of cultural and ethnic identification processes" to simplified portrayal of Roma "as unchanging, historically enduring cultural and ethnic subjects, unaffected by social processes such as interaction, internal contestation, interpretation and categorisation".[18] Representations of the Roma as a clearly delineable whole "are well intentioned and carry an emancipatory message that fits in with the minority recognition model that advocacy groups and governmental bodies seek to promote",[19] but negative implications of such politicization should be taken into account. The case studies will show how this challenge is confronted in the museums.

**The First Group: Focus on "Our" Victims & Exclusion of Roma**

The Museum of Occupations in Tallinn, the Museum of Occupation of Latvia in Riga, the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius and the House of Terror in Budapest all deal to some degree with the Second World War period while at the same time putting a clear focus on the suffering of the majority population of the respective country under Soviet occupation. They all marginalize the victims of Nazi occupation – albeit to different degrees and by different means. And they all basically totally omit Roma victims.[20]

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[15] Monika Sommer-Sieghart, "Historische Ausstellungen als 'contested space'," in *Schauplatz Kultur-Zentraleuropa*, ed. Johannes Feichtinger (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), 159.
[16] Henry Rousso, "History of Memory, Policies of the Past: What For?" in *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, eds. Konrad Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 32.
[17] Katja Köhr, "Flucht in die Moral? – Museale Darstellungen des Holocaust zwischen nationalen Fragen und universellen Zugängen," *Medaon*, 1 (2007), accessed 28 March 2021, http://medaon.de/pdf/A-Koehr-1-2007.pdf.
[18] Peter Vermeersch, "Exhibiting multiculturalism. Politicised representations of the Roma in Poland," *Third Text* 22, 3 (2008): 261.
[19] Ibid.
[20] The other three museums from my project are "in-betweens" which I cannot elaborate on here. The Warsaw Rising Museum and the Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana do not mention Roma. Terezín, where

The Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius was the most drastic example of the omission of Nazi victims: Located in a former KGB and Gestapo prison, after its opening in 1992 it neglected the still visible traces of Nazi victims and focused exclusively on the two Soviet occupations. Only a tiny text board at the ground floor reads: "For visitors willing to get acquainted with the period of Nazi occupation in Lithuania and the Holocaust more extensively we suggest visiting the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum". 200,000 Jewish victims were also mentioned in a table about victim numbers from the two Soviet and the Nazi occupations. I argue that it was due to the "universalization of the Holocaust" that the museum added a tiny exhibition on the Nazi occupation in a prison cell in the cellar in 2011. While "our" victims of Soviet crimes are portrayed individually and with empathy on three floors of the museum, the Jewish victims are represented here either as an anonymous mass or as numbers, not through (for example) exhibiting objects which tell an individual story or private photographs attributed to the portrayed people or the photographer by name. In the "hierarchy of visibility", "our" victims are portrayed extensively and in an individualizing way, Jewish victims have been "added" to the exhibition, but not individualized; while Roma are not represented on the visual level at all and since 2011 only mentioned once in a sentence which mixes racial and political reasons for persecution: "The Third Reich was merciless in its persecution of the enemies of the regime: 15,000 Poles, 10–20,000 Lithuanians, and 5–10,000 Russians, Byelorussians, and Roma became victims of the Nazis."

The Museum of Occupation of Latvia conceived of the acceptance of the "*okupācijas fakts*"[21] – the fact that Latvia was occupied and not liberated by the Soviets in 1944 – as the basis for the survival of the young Latvian state.[22] In contrast to the Vilnius example, its founders always stressed the importance of exhibiting not only the Soviet, but also the Nazi occupation. The permanent exhibition which opened gradually between 1993–98[23] is to a huge part devoted to the Nazi period. Yet again, the over 300 individualizing objects all tell stories about "our" victims of Soviet crimes. While Latvian rescuers of Jews are portrayed

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up to five Czech Roma were killed, mentions their extermination in two sentences throughout the exhibition's guidebook (Vojtěch Blodig, Miroslava Langhamerová and Jan Vajskebr, *Die Kleine Festung Theresienstadt 1940−1945. Ein Führer durch die Dauerausstellung im Museum der Kleinen Festung Theresienstadt* (Prag: Gedenkstätte Theresienstadt, 2009), 15, 76.), but an exhibition on the Roma genocide has been added in 2020.

[21] Paul Lazda, "Latvijas 50 gadu okupācijas muzejs: Kāpēc? Kas? Kā?" 2003, accessed 28 March 2021, http://lpra.vip.lv/om.html.

[22] It should inform Latvians and other countries about the "tragic" history of the Baltic States, which has allegedly been forgotten by the world (Rebekka Blume, *Das lettische Okkupationsmuseum. Das Geschichtsbild des Museums im Kontext der Diskussionen über die Okkupationszeit in der lettischen Öffentlichkeit* (Bremen: Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, 2008), 36.).

[23] Valters Nollendorfs, *1940–1991. Latvia under the Rule of the Soviet Union and Nationalist Socialist Germany* (Riga: Latvijas Okupācijas muzejs, 2008b), 227.

individually, the Jews they tried to save are not. Jewish victims are only shown in humiliating pictures taken by perpetrators. Again, Roma are not represented on the visual level at all, but only mentioned twice in the German language guidebook saying that Jews and Roma were killed for racial reasons[24] and that the Arājs Kommando systematically murdered Jews and Roma (the number of 2,000 Roma victims is given).[25] In the English guidebook, they are mentioned once in the phrase "Holocaust of the Jews and the Roma instigated by the Nazis".[26]

The permanent exhibition at the Museum of Occupations in Tallinn from 2003, and that in the House of Terror in Budapest from 2002 are also cases in point. These other prominent representatives of this group of museums also show portraits of "our" victims – albeit stronger as part of a collective victimhood narrative – while displaying only anonymous Jewish victims as corpses, masses or numbers and not mentioning Roma at all. The "universalization of the Holocaust" has the effect that Jewish victims are included in the exhibition, yet the memory of the Holocaust is contained by different musealization strategies so that it cannot "compete" with the suffering of the majority population – also given the much higher numbers of Jewish Nazi victims compared to Soviet victims. The "Europeanization of the Roma Genocide" obviously did not yet reach this group of museums during the EU accession talks.

**The Second Group: "Invocation of Europe" & Inclusion of Roma**[27]

All three state-funded museums in this group opened new permanent exhibitions in the context of EU accession, and I argue that they "invocated Europe" in order to prove that their respective country was ready for EU accession despite diverse backlashes. The Museum of Slovak National Uprising (est. 1969) opened an exhibition titled "Slovakia in Europe's Antifascist Resistance Movement 1939–1945" in 2004, the year Slovakia joined the EU after catching up with its Central European neighbours in the EU accession talks in the last moment. Already in 2000, the museum's director and curator of the current exhibition explained his plans to expand the museum's sphere of interest in order "to fill empty areas in

[24] Valters Nollendorfs, *Lettland unter der Herrschaft der Sowjetunion und des nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1940–1991* (Riga: Latvijas Okupācijas muzejs, 2010), 58.
[25] Ibid., 55.
[26] Nollendorfs, *1940–1991*, 64.
[27] For a more detailed analysis of the three museums, see: Ljiljana Radonić, "'People of Freedom and Unlimited Movement': Representations of Roma in Post-Communist Memorial Museums," *Social Inclusion* 3:5 (2015): 64–77.

the historical memory so as to be able to correspond to a European standard".[28] Hungary's Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest opened a few weeks before EU accession in 2004 – despite no permanent exhibition having been installed at that point, but only in 2006. This first Central European Holocaust museum must be seen in the context of the severe critique of the also state-owned House of Terror; a nationalist, historical revisionist museum which Viktor Orbán inaugurated during his election campaign in 2002. The current permanent exhibition at the Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia opened in 2006, while the accusation that the country was not cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia blocked EU accession talks. The Minister of Culture appointed a US educated director who stressed that the exhibition had been conceptualized together with experts from abroad in order to be "recognized internationally and follow international standards".[29]

All three museums deal with phenomena from the Second World War period, but the scope of their exhibitions is different. The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising focuses on one particular event (the uprising in 1944) in which Roma took part alongside others and which led to deadly racial persecutions of Jews and Roma by the Nazis and their Slovak collaborators. The Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia is *in situ* – at the site of a former Ustaša concentration camp where Roma were the second largest victim group.[30] The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest is dedicated to the mass murder of Jews and Roma from an entire country – Hungary. All three museums reference "Western" musealization trends and individualize Jewish victims – and all three include Roma victims to a significant degree. This fact can only be understood in the context of the "Europeanization of the Roma Genocide". Yet, the way Roma are represented in these three institutions by no means ends the tradition of depicting Roma as the alien "Other".

**Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica**

In this Slovak museum from 1969, Roma are not mentioned in the guidebooks from 1977, 1985 or 1990, but only in the two most recent ones from 2000 and 2006 – a result of the "universalization of the Holocaust" and the "Europeanization of memory". "Gypsies" are

[28] Tomaš Sniegon, *Den Försvunna Historien. Förintelsen i tjeckisk och slovakisk historiekultur* (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2008).
[29] "Seminar s međunarodnim stručnjacima," *Vjesnik*, 14 February 2004, accessed 28 March 2021, www.vjesnik.hr.
[30] 47,627 Serbs, 16,173 Roma, 13,116 Jews, 4,255 Croats, 1,128 Muslims and 846 other victims have been identified by name (see: "List of Individual Victims of Jasenovac Concentration Camp," http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=6711 (accessed 28 March 2021).).

mentioned once in 2000: "As part of the state persecution special military labour camps were founded for non-Aryan citizens. … In the camps Jews, Gypsies, socially discriminate people – non-Aryans – were placed, having been deprived of all citizen and human rights".[31]

In the current exhibition from 2004, Roma are not mentioned on the permanently displayed text boards. There is a memorial for victims of the "Roma Holocaust" erected in 2005 in the outer commemorative part between the two halves of the museum where a commemoration takes places every year on 2 August. Roma victims are also present in the 1,000 "pages" of information on the TV screens all around the permanent exhibition from 2004. Eight "pages" of the less visible info-screen material deal with Roma under the title "Persecution and repressions against Romany population". Visitors who deliberately choose this chapter read the following:

> From autumn 1942 to autumn 1944 the Roma question in Slovakia was solved in form of labour camps for antisocial and difficult to adapt people. Over 5000 Roma were in the camps. In November 1944 the labour camp in Dubnica nad Váhom was transformed into a detainment camp, where whole Roma families were concentrated. It was reckoned that they would be deported into some sort of the [sic] concentration camps but because of a typhoid fever epidemic, the deportations did not take place.

Like the "solution of the Jewish question" elsewhere in the exhibition, the term "Roma question" is used in the first sentence without ever being questioned or put in inverted commas, and Nazi argumentation is reproduced through the terms: "antisocial" and "difficult to adapt people".

For the first time, however, the museum also provides detailed information about Roma victims, the numbers of victims at each murder site and their – not only German, but also Slovak – perpetrators on the first page of the Roma section on the info-screens.[32] There is no mention of the fact that Roma took part in the Uprising – in contrast, two "Jewish volunteers" are mentioned by name. The most striking visual element is a humiliating photograph of the "exhumation and identification of the victims from the mass grave near Krupina". It shows two men pulling a dead man (presumably Roma) out of a crevice; he is hanging upside down from a rope they have tied around his thigh. Two photographs show the "exhumation and identification of the murdered Roma Pod Hradovou" – corpses first scattered in the mud and

[31] Slovak National Uprising Museum, *Exhibition guide* (Banská Bystrica: SNU Museum, 2000), 15.
[32] "Men of Roma origin" who were arrested by Slovak collaborators and handed over to the Gestapo are also mentioned in the section on reprisals in the town of Krupina.

then strung together on timber planks. In strong contrast to that, two individualizing private portraits are also included. They show Jozef and Jakub Eremiaš, two young Roma murdered at Kremnička on 20 November 1944 after the uprising had been quashed. In comparison, the info-screen includes hundreds of individualizing private photographs of other victim groups, first of all ethnic Slovaks, but also Jews. The most touching sections include first a private photograph that evokes empathy, followed by the lifeless body of this person. To sum up, Roma do play a role at the Slovak museum for the first time since the 1960s, but only in the commemorative section, and in the exhibition are low in the "hierarchy of visibility". Humiliating photographs of anonymous victims are combined with the first two individualizing portraits.

**Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia**

At Jasenovac, the former *Ustaša* death camp in Croatia, a memorial area was established in 1966. "Gypsies – Roma" are first mentioned in a guidebook from 1974 as the first ones to be interned in the "Gypsy camp" Uštica.[33] We learn that this part of the Jasenovac camp complex was founded in the first half of 1942; that people were liquidated with blunt objects and knives and later burned. In the guidebook from 1981, Roma are mentioned twice; first when introducing the racist policy of the *Ustaša* who "wanted to annihilate all Serbs, Jews and Gypsies".[34] The second "fact" mentioned in the guide is that approximately 40,000 "Roma-Gypsies" were killed after being brought to Jasenovac from the whole territory of the *Ustaša* state, the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia, NDH). This number of victims is too high, and corresponds with the manipulation of the numbers in Tito's Yugoslavia, where 700,000 was the codified, mythological number of victims for Jasenovac.[35] Today, 83,145 victims have been identified by name; 16,173 of them Roma, of which 5,608 were children, 5,688 men and 4,877 women. Roma were the second largest victim group in Jasenovac.[36]

The current exhibition from 2006 follows the trend stemming from Holocaust museums to individualize the victims. The names of Roma victims are inscribed among the others on the glass plates hovering above the heads of the visitors within the exhibition, and Roma are always mentioned alongside the other victim groups. The panel which depicts Jasenovac as a

[33] Radovan Trivunčić, *Jasenovac i jasenovački logori* (Jasenovac: Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 1974), 28.
[34] Gojko Jokić, *Spomen-područje Jasenovac* (Jasenovac & Belgrade: Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 1981), 5.
[35] Holm Sundhaussen, "Jugoslawien und seine Nachfolgestaaten. Konstruktion, Dekonstruktion und Neukonstruktion von 'Erinnerungen' und Mythen," in *Mythen der Nationen. 1945 - Arena der Erinnerung*, edited by Monika Flacke (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004), 399.
[36] See: "List of individual victims."

death camp explicates: “Serbs, Jews and Roma were murdered with no verdict since they did not fit into the proclaimed Ustaša concept of racial and national purity.” A central element of the exhibition are 16 video testimonies of survivors, one of them being Nadir Dedić who was arrested as a minor in the Bosnian part of the NDH in the fall of 1942 – not initially because he belonged to the Roma community, but because he was blamed for setting a blaze as a signal for partisans.

Several computer working stations throughout the exhibition and the museum’s website provide (similar) further information about the victim groups. About the Roma, we learn that mass arrests began in May 1942.

> In July 1942, when the number of Roma arriving in the camp was at its highest, they were separated into two groups. The older men, women and children were separated from the younger men and immediately sent to be liquidated in Donja Gradina. The younger men were accommodated in Camp III C, set up in the open on the site of Camp III (Brickworks). Many died of hunger, dehydration, exhaustion and physical abuse. Some Roma were housed in the so-called Gypsy Camp in the village of Uštica, in the abandoned houses of murdered Serbian families. … Almost no Roma who entered the camp, regardless of age or gender, survived ….[37]

The text is followed by links to two photographs, one showing Roma women and children, some barefoot and some sitting on the ground in front of a house titled “Uštica – House of Loud Weeping, the place where Roma (women and children) were housed during 1942”. The other one shows an old woman with missing teeth wearing a scarf and a taller man, both being pressed against a barbwire fence. In contrast to the other groups, there are no private photographs of Roma from before (or after) the war, only photographs taken by perpetrators here.

The current museum’s publication includes chapters on the destinies of each victim group written by a renowned expert. The second largest victim group, the Roma, is only mentioned once outside of the chapter dedicated to them, with the sole statement that “the Roma were virtually eliminated”.[38] The late Narcisa Lengel-Krizman, the author of the Roma chapter, writes of the “forgotten holocaust” of Roma,[39] as opposed to “a wave of repulsion and revolt”

[37] “Roma in Jasenovac Concentration Camp,” Jasenovac Memorial Site, accessed 28 March 2021, http://www.jusp-jasenovac.hr/Default.aspx?sid=7035.
[38] Tvrtka Jakovina, “Nezavisna država Hrvatska,” in *Jasenovac Memorial Site*, ed. T. Benčić Rimay (Jasenovac: Jasenovac Memorial Site, 2006), 30.
[39] Narcisa Lengel-Krizman, “Genocid nad Romima – Jasenovac 1942,” in *Jasenovac Memorial Site*, 159.

against the mass extermination of Jews – "although, it must be admitted, their numbers were much greater than those of the Roma".[40] The hierarchy of victims reappears at the end of the chapter:

> It is certain that in comparison to the other inmates, the Roma had the worst time of it in the camp. Although they were used to persecution, the world of the concentration camp, in which hatred and evil ruled, was completely foreign to them. For a "people of freedom and unlimited movement" the barbed wire of the camp was unthinkable.[41]

We learn that "immediately after the declaration of the NDH, the Ustasha terrorist regime targeted Jews, Serbs and Croatian Communists and anti-Fascists, while the Roma were left alone until the spring of 1942, when they were slaughtered within a period of two to three months".[42] The question of resistance is raised once: "After about ten days in these conditions, most of the inmates were so physically and mentally debilitated that they had no thoughts of organised resistance".[43]

This chapter differs from the others significantly, since it addresses questions like Romany grammar or where the name Roma comes from – while the chapters on the other victim groups do not give such exoticizing background information. Only four out of 12 text pages of the chapter are devoted to the Roma in the NDH. We learn clichés about "the nomadic Roma": "In time they learned the value of gold. … Money comes and goes and is subject to change. Their experience of wandering through various countries taught them this golden wisdom".[44] Lengel-Krizman also raises the "fact" that "their women are still known for their colorful style of dressing".[45] Since she authored the first monograph on the Roma genocide in Jasenovac,[46] which she also sums up insightfully in the chapter, one may assume that those "outliers" can be explained by some kind of weird pedagogical idea that ended up very close to racist cliché. Furthermore, while the texts on Serb and Jewish victims (written by a Serb and a Jewish expert) include plenty of testimonies, there are none from Roma here, since – as the author argues shockingly – "the witness statements of the few survivors are so shocking that we may, although we are not bound to, accept them as trustworthy and authentic", so she

[40] Ibid., 155.
[41] Ibid., 170.
[42] Ibid., 162.
[43] Ibid., 164.
[44] Ibid., 157.
[45] Ibid., 158.
[46] Narcisa Lengel-Krizman, *Genocid nad Romima. Jasenovac 1942* (Zagreb: Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 2003).

does not accept them.[47] There is one paragraph that depicts a specific event in an empathetic way, and it deals with Roma musicians playing "the terribly moving concert which the Roma put on for their own people and the other inmates".[48] The publication contains 221 photographs, most of them portraits of victims before or after the war as well as pictures from inside the camp. Yet, Roma are the only ones who are represented with only four pictures, all of them solely from inside the camp, none from their lives before.

The fact that there is only one video testimony from a Roma can be explained by the fact that hardly any Roma survived Jasenovac. But there is not a single visual representation of this group that was not produced by a perpetrator, while there are numerous portraits of Jewish, Serb and Croat victims from their life before. Also, in the museum's publication, the Roma are the only ones not granted a voice of their own, since the author of the chapter is a non-Rom who declares "their" testimonies to be not "trustworthy" – while this is the core element of the other texts. Obviously, the fact that the museum is *in situ*, at the site where over 16,000 Roma were killed, today obliges the museum to address their story, but with far fewer individualizing elements and less empathy than is shown for other victim groups.

**Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest**

At the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest the recent trend to focus on the individualized victim[49] is clearly visible at the permanent exhibition from 2006, while at the same time the responsibility of Hungarian politicians, administration, gendarmes and population is displayed without restraints. The exhibition is dedicated to the Jewish and Roma victims. Yet the sections focussing on Roma were not developed by the main curators' team, but by another group led by Péter Szuhay from the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest. The initial plan did not include the Roma victims and was changed due to an intervention of Roma activists.[50]

One element of the individualization of the victims are the stories of five families, four Jewish and one Roma, from Nagybicsérd in Baranya county. Together with the Jewish families, the story of István Kolompár's family accompanies the visitors from room to room. We learn that his daughter Aranka survived while many others including her eighteen-month-old sister Ilona

[47] Lengel-Krizman, "Genocid nad Romima," 170.
[48] Ibid., 166.
[49] Katja Köhr, *Die vielen Gesichter des Holocaust. Museale Repräsentationen zwischen Individualisierung, Universalisierung und Nationalisierung* (Göttingen: V&R, 2013), 74.
[50] Éva Kovács, András Lénárt and Anna Lujza Szász, "Oral history collections on the Holocaust in Hungary," *S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation* (2014), accessed 28 March 2021, http://simon-previous-issues.vwi.ac.at/images/Documents/Articles/2014-2/2014-2_ART_Kovacs-Lenart-Szasz/ART_Kovacs-Lenart-Szasz.pdf.

did not.[51] Of the three exhibitions, this one has the most visible representation of Roma, starting off with six photographs and referring to Roma on numerous text panels.




FIG 1: Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest / Photo copyright Ljiljana Radonić.

Hungarian Jews and Roma are introduced in the first room, showing Roma "working, countering a common prejudice that perceives Roma as work-shy or criminal".[52] Three of the photographs show Roma at work: making bricks, a coppersmith carrying pots, tub maker artisans and a band leader and his son playing violin. The last photo shows a family of boilermakers in front of a tent. The first displays the subtitle: "Roma women wandering and begging somewhere in Hungary, 1910s" and portrays a self-confident woman smoking a pipe, and behind her, among others, there is a girl wearing only a long shirt and walking barefoot on a dusty road. This combines a depiction of poverty, wildness and a sexual element represented in the challenging look of the smoking woman – the pipe typically being attributed to a fortune teller.[53] While the locations for the photographs of Jews are indicated – even giving the name of the street or the square – three of the six photographs of Roma are attributed to an unknown place "somewhere in Hungary". There is a long tradition of

[51] For an overview of the historical events, see: János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi, *Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma during the Holocaust* (New York: Idebate Press, 2008); and Laszlo Karsai, "Zentrale Aspekte des Völkermords an den ungarischen Roma," in *Ungarn und der Holocaust. Kollaboration, Rettung und Trauma*, ed. Brigitte Mihok (Berlin: Metropol, 2005).
[52] Birga Ulrike Meyer, "Difficult displays. Holocaust representations in history museums in Hungary, Austria and Italy after 1990" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2014), 185.
[53] Gerhard Baumgartner and Éva Kovács, "Roma und Sinti im Blickfeld der Aufklärung und der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft," in *Roma & Sinti. "Zigeuner-Darstellungen" der Moderne*, eds. Gerhard Baumgartner and Tayfun Belgin (Vienna: Kunsthalle Krems, 2007), 21.

depicting Roma as standing outside the civil society,[54] outside of towns, markets and villages. They are often shown wandering around in anonymous landscapes without a clear regional reference point.[55]

The first panel on "the Roma in Hungary" says: "Many Gypsy[56] musicians were famous nationwide, indeed all over Europe. As artists, they were held in high esteem and rewarded handsomely. Those vagrant Gypsies who kept to their traditional way of life were subject to often forced efforts by authorities to be settled and integrated into Hungarian society." The distinction between settled and vagrant "Gypsies" becomes even more central as the narrative continues. While the high grade of assimilation is stressed when it comes to Jews, Roma are depicted as "the others", although some were "welcome". Later, we find a stereotype description of Roma who "clung to their nomadic way of life and permanently lived in tribal, clannish circumstances. … It was these people that the authorities kept trying to settle or drive to the territory of neighboring countries." Such a distanced and even depreciative phrase as "these people" or the statement that "the job of the authorities was not made easier by the fact that the law never defined who was to be regarded as a Gypsy" seems impossible in relation to the representation of Jewish victims at this museum.

While photos of Roma are prominent in the first, introductory room, they are scarce in the rest of the exhibition and in the guidebook. The latter includes more than 50 photographs of Jewish victims, but only two of Roma and one of a Dutch Sinti girl. Furthermore, the artifacts in the introductory room can be associated with "Jewish" professions and Judaism, whereas there are no objects of Roma. When it comes to video testimonies on the multimedia stations, the testimonies of four Roma women have the caption "Persecution of Roma" without giving the names of the survivors as is the case with testimonies of Jews.[57] There is one longer section dealing with tangible fates of Roma in connection with the culmination of persecution in Hungary at the Komárom fortress:

> In Hungary, in autumn 1944, many Roma children and the old and sick froze to death in the open air or died of hunger and thirst in the collecting camp at Komárom. … The brutality of the guards, the lack of food, and various diseases caused the death of large numbers of Hungarian Gypsies. Hundreds of them were shot into mass graves by Arrow Cross thugs and gendarmes at

[54] Anton Holzer, "Faszination und Abscheu. Die fotografische Erfindung der 'Zigeuner'," *Fotogeschichte*, 110 (2008): 48.
[55] Baumgartner and Kovács, "Roma und Sinti," 19.
[56] The exhibition uses the terms "Roma" and "Gypsy" alternately without any comment about pejorative terminology.
[57] Meyer, "Difficult displays," 194.

> Szolgaegyháza, Várpalota, Lajoskomárom, Nagyszalonta, Lengyel and other places.

In contrast to the visual elements, the text is very precise about locations. Still, after the introductory room, the parts on Roma victims appear to have been added afterwards. In fact, there was far less information about Roma in the original concept, but a public debate in summer 2004 led to the recommendation to either extend this part or to completely skip it.[58] At the end of long paragraphs on Jewish victims, Roma are often mentioned in two sentences, saying that Roma were "also" humiliated: "the racist Nuremberg Laws of 1935 covered Gypsies *as well*"; "Roma *also* fell victim to pseudo-medical experiments" [emphasis added]. This peaks in the statement that "in the concentration camps death harvested among Roma *as well*. … Gypsies died by the thousand in that camp, *too*".[59] In other cases, the fates of Roma are displayed in self-contained panels and chapters of the exhibition's guidebook. The chapter on "'Life' in Auschwitz" deals only with Jewish inmates, while the "massacres of Roma" are covered later. In rare cases, the suffering of the Jewish and Roma victims is parallelized in a way that evokes empathy with both groups: "Roma imprisoned in Komárom, which functioned as the largest collecting camp, had to undergo ordeals very much like those suffered by the Jewish victims of the summer deportations: their provision was poor, they often had no latrines at all, and their captors beat them".[60] The comparison gets especially interesting when dealing with the effort to introduce forced military labour for Roma: "The organization of the Gypsy forced military labour companies was rendered difficult by the fact that unlike Jews, Gypsies did not enroll obediently, and if they were captured and pressed into service, they escaped at the first opportunity".[61] This is the only sentence in the three museums in which resistance of Roma is explicitly addressed.

This museum is also the only one that deals with "anti-Gypsy views", although not as comprehensibly as it does with anti-Semitism. Regarding the treatment of Roma in the inter-war period it says:

> Under the pretext of disinfecting, delousing Gypsy settlements, the authorities sometimes acted with brutal force, making sure that Roma men and women were shorn of their hair, including body hair. The occasionally bitterly anti-Gypsy views and suggestions of low-level public officials and local civilians

[58] J. Molnár, "Pictures at an exhibition. The story of the permanent Holocaust exhibition from deprivation of rights to Genocide, 2004−2011," *Forum Geschichtskulturen* (2012), accessed 28 March 2021, www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de.
[59] Ibid., 52.
[60] Ibid., 34.
[61] Ibid., 33.

were usually not supported by competent authorities in the Ministry of the Interior.[62]

Although the pronounced assimilationist policy is not discussed in the context of Central European inter-war developments here, the fates of Roma throughout Europe are mentioned – in Germany (which is also the case in the Jasenovac publication), Eastern Prussia, Burgenland in Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Crimea, Serbia, France and Belgium.[63]

One might argue that there are hardly any private photographs of Roma from before the Second World War which can be attributed by name, or that most Roma simply were either musicians or vagrants. In order to challenge such arguments, the next section of this chapter will look at a best practice exhibition devoted exclusively to Roma victims of the genocide.

**An Exhibition on Roma Genocide at Auschwitz**

The Documentation and Culture Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg curated this permanent exhibition which opened at the former Auschwitz main camp on 2 August 2001. It explicitly differentiates manifold realities of life of Roma in their home countries from clichés of "Gypsies".[64] Photographs of Roma musicians are shown, but also "neutral" private portraits from the inter-war period as well as unexpected shots of Roma as box-champions or officers in the First World War – which challenge thinking in stereotypes.

Names of the victims fill a huge part of the exhibition space, thus providing a dominant individualizing element which is rounded off by many private photographs and short biographies. Parts of the exhibition are sorted by country and make clear that private photographs which can be attributed by name could not be found from all countries. The exhibition does not show any photographs of Roma victims from Romania, while the private photos from Hungary stem from the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest and the names were not conveyed. This material from Hungary at least can be attributed to a certain date, and it does not show only craftsmen and musicians, but also "neutral" photos of wedding couples or families. Artists speak for themselves here, like the Polish Roma Bronisława Wajs who wrote the autobiographical ballad "Bloody Tears", in which she describes how her family hid from German murder commandos in the forests of Woljynia.[65] The poem and her private photographs stand in stark contrast to perpetrator photos of dirty women "somewhere"

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 34.
[64] Romani Rose, ed., *Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma. Katalog zur ständigen Ausstellung im Staatlichen Museum Auschwitz* (Heidelberg: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2010), 12.
[65] Ibid., 140.

in the countryside at the other museums. Furthermore, Roma are introduced as active protagonists in the Second World War; resistance fighters, exiled members of Allied armies – not only as victims. A whole chapter of the guidebook is devoted to survival and resistance at the "*Zigeunerlager*" in Auschwitz-Birkenau.[66] The exhibition shows smuggled letters, tells of attempts to escape and especially the armed resistance in Auschwitz.



FIG 2: Virtual Tour through the Block 13 Exhibition on the Genocide of Sinti and Roma at the Auschwitz-Museum (screenshot): https://www.romasinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/block13. / Copyright: Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma / Association of Roma in Poland.

Romani Rose, the director of the Documentation Center substantiates in the guidebook's introduction that the biographies and testimonies of the victims are confronted with dehumanizing perpetrators' documents.[67] Frank Reuter from the same institution, who published a benchmark book on the photographic construction of the "Gypsy" in 2014[68] and significantly contributed to the exhibition, elaborates that the effort to make the formerly anonymous victims visible as individuals and to break the power of the perpetrators' gaze is an essential counterweight to the dominance of Nazi photographs. He proposes to contrast private photographs with official Nazi propaganda shots in an exhibition. The intimacy of the familial gaze disavows and delegitimizes the dehumanizing perpetrators' gaze and raises

[66] Ibid., 282–89.
[67] Ibid., 8.
[68] Frank Reuter, *Der Bann des Fremden. Die fotografische Konstruktion des "Zigeuners,"* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014).

awareness for the Nazi's visual stigmatizing strategies.[69] Corresponding Saul Friedländer's concept of an "integrated history",[70] the exhibition includes perpetrators' photographs of the mass murder. The perpetrators (only men) are portrayed individually and their crimes are described. Given the location of the exhibition, the focus lies on the perpetrators at the "*Zigeunerlager*" in Birkenau. According to Reuter, it would be problematic to focus only on the private life of the victims before their persecution due to the danger of one-sided emotionalization and over-identification with the murdered, which by no means guarantees historical education. A deeper understanding of the Nazi crimes needs to involve the structure of the perpetrators' society as well as the motives of the perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders.[71] Finally, the exhibition also deals with continuities of anti-Gypsyism after 1945, perpetrators' carriers in state agencies and the economy, as well as the justification of the genocide as preventative measures against criminality.

**Recent Developments & Conclusions**

Roma victims were basically completely omitted in the first group of museums considered in this chapter. The House of Terror represents the growing historical revisionism of the Fidesz party (since 2010, combined with cuts in democratic checks and balances) and has not changed since 2002. In contrast, all three Baltic museums have changed in recent years, also to a small degree when it comes to inclusion of Roma. The Museum of Occupation of Latvia moved to a temporary location in 2012 due to renovation and expansion plans. This smaller exhibition now includes a Nazi document with the parole that "Entering Limbaži is forbidden for Gypsies", but again no visual representations of Roma. The new exhibition in the initial building is planned for 2021. The Museum of Occupations in Tallinn was renamed the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom, and established a new permanent exhibition which mentions Roma, albeit not on a very visible spot. The info-screen on "Victims" says: "The Nazis also targeted the Romani people"; and under "Estonian lives lost": "Nearly all local Jewish people (some 1000 people) and more than half of the Romani (an estimated 500 people) were murdered as a result of racial repressions."

[69] Ibid., 254.
[70] Saul Friedländer, *Den Holocaust beschreiben. Auf dem Weg zu einer integrierten Geschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007).
[71] Reuter, *Der Bann*, 254.

Interestingly enough, it is the one Baltic museum which completely omitted the Nazi past of the building in which it is located – the Museum of Genocide Victims[72] in Vilnius – that not only added a small exhibition on the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust in 2011, but also a small exhibition on the Roma genocide in 2015 in another cell in the cellar. This room now deals with the "Lithuanian Roma persecution during the Nazi occupation (1941–1944)". Yet, the main exhibition text board is highly ambivalent. It combines addressing Nazi perpetrators and Lithuanian collaborators; an individualizing survivor's testimony from "Jonas Brižinskas, the Roma of Seredžius" about the deportation of his family to the Nazi camp Pravieniškės close to Kaunas; and a scandalous passage: "In general, the registration and control of the Roma people remained an unsolved problem of the Nazi occupation." The Lithuanian original introduces the term Roma in the title, but the rest of the exhibition uses the word "*Čigonas*" ("Gypsy") without quotation marks.

The core of the exhibition is 36 photographs. Private portraits are now included and attributed by name, e.g. to the "Gypsy Karolis Aleksandravičius" in Žagarė 1919–20 and several Roma victims and survivors, individuals and families; but others show an anonymous "fortune-teller, young Gypsy with cards" from the 1930s, while another "Gypsy fortune-teller" is shown breastfeeding her naked baby – only the name of the photographer is given in both cases. Several photos depict anonymous people in a "Gypsy tabor" or pitching up a tent. Hence this small exhibition is a questionable mix of the first inclusion of individualizing private photographs that allow for empathy with the persecuted; naked female breasts of "Gypsy fortune-tellers" (needless to say that the Gadje Lithuanian women are not portrayed in this way); and a problematic language that elaborates on difficult-to-control "Gypsies, a problem even the Nazis could not solve".

To conclude, we still seem to be in an "anything goes" phase when it comes to representations of Roma in post-communist memorial museums: the "difficult to adopt people" for whom not even the Nazis were able to find a "solution", who "know the value of gold" and still "like to wear colorful clothes", and for whom being locked up in a concentration camp is claimed to have been more difficult than for Jews because Roma are "the people of freedom and unlimited travel". On the visual level, there is a mix of individualizing biographies and private photographs on the one hand, and a corpse hanging upside down in a ditch and bare breasts of "Gypsy fortune-tellers" on the other. A transformation can be observed, but I do not dare to

[72] Since its opening in 1992, the term "genocide victims" in the museum's name meant exclusively the victims of Soviet crimes, a fact harshly criticized by domestic and international activists and scholars. In May 2018, it was renamed: the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights.

call any inclusion of Roma – no matter how stereotypical – a "progress". Yet, I have shown that in post-communist museums the "universalization of the Holocaust" has first led to the inclusion of Jewish and later of Roma victims. By trend, the individualizing approach copied from "Western" Holocaust museums is first applied only to "one's own" victims, then to Jews and only then to Roma – but most exhibitions have not arrived there yet.

The first group of post-communist memorial museums which has included Roma in their exhibitions (in Slovakia, Croatia and Hungary) did so in order to fulfil informal, internalized (rather than mandated) "European standards" in the context of EU accession, when the "universalization of the Holocaust" and the Roma genocide became a European agenda. Those three museums whose aesthetics and rhetoric were the first to allude to international archetypes are also the ones to have included the Roma into their exhibitions most extensively. In the exhibitions, we learn about humiliations like the shaving of body hair and forced military labour service even before the Second World War; about deportations, hunger, freezing to death and mass liquidations; and sometimes lethal, sometimes successful resistance of Roma. Still, it became clear that there is a hierarchy of victims' representation: Roma are marginalized in the Slovak case, not individualized in the Croatian exhibition and seem as a kind of distanced afterthought in the Hungarian Holocaust museum. The Roma are completely absent when it comes to artefacts in these three museums. This is quite a contrast to ethnographical museums like the permanent exhibition titled: "Gypsy history and culture in Poland within the framework of their European history" in the southern Polish town of Tarnów, where objects like music instruments, harnesses for horses or scarves dominate the scenery.[73] So there seems to be no lack of artefacts connected to the history of Roma. The question is whether there is enough information about the former owners in order to tell their story.

The best practice example – the Roma genocide exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – proves that individualization of Roma victims is possible in the case of most countries. It consciously confronts the expected photographs of Roma musicians with those of Roma box champions and officers; humiliating perpetrator shots with private photographs, biographies and poems which evoke empathy. At the same time, it contextualizes the victims' perspective including anti-"Gypsy" motivations for the persecution, continuities from before and after the war, as well as the responsibility of individual perpetrators.

In the last four years, Baltic museums went from no representation of Roma whatsoever to a first inclusion, but one that again reproduces several problems already encountered at the

[73] Adam Bartosz, *Katalog zbiorów cyganologicznych* (Tarnów: Muzeum Okręgowe w Tarnowie, 2007).

exhibitions from 2004–06. This shows that the "Europeanization of the Roma Genocide" is still often mostly about the mention of Roma as some kind of homework exercise to tick-off for an international audience, not about empathy-evoking remembrance. Since the author of this text was born and raised in a country whose museum is analyzed here (Jasenovac Memorial Museum) I hope that this critique of the partially racist stereotypes will not be disposed as some kind of judgmental "Western" gaze when it comes to a topic that allows no alleged "scholarly neutrality".

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