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# The Memory and Historiography of the Porrajmos

Making a Transnational National Site of Memory

## Abstract

This article investigates the memory and historiography of the Roma Holocaust/Porrajmos. It examines the stages and actors in the process through which the Porrajmos became a 'site of memory' within Roma minority communities living in different nation states, and how later, this 'site of memory' played a role in the making of a unified, common narrative of Roma history and in the transnational process of Roma national identity building. The Porrajmos, as a site of memory of shared Roma history, has played a significant role in the local, ethnic, national, as well as transnational identities of the Roma, and through this also the creation of ties among different Roma communities.

This study is not concerned with the Roma Holocaust/Porrajmos. In the following, I will examine the memory and historiography of the Porrajmos and their role within the Roma nation-building process.

The memory of the Holocaust undoubtedly played an important role in the formation of Jewish and Roma national identities.<sup>1</sup> The construction of the collective memory of the Roma Holocaust began later in time, which, in my interpretation, led to decisive differences between the memory constructions of the Shoah and the Porrajmos. The other important difference to be emphasised is that the Roma do not have their own nation state, and consequently no nation state framework of memory could be developed in their case, either. According to Jeffrey Alexander, narratives about the Holocaust changed in the 1960s and 1970s. The earlier narrative, which he called "progressive", was primarily aimed at reshaping society by remembering the Shoah and combatting prejudice and served the purpose of Jewish nation-building in Israel as well.<sup>2</sup> The new "tragic narrative" that emerged from the 1960s presented the Holocaust beyond national histories as an exceptional global historical event, the universal of evil.<sup>3</sup>

The collective commemoration of the Roma Holocaust did not begin until the 1960s and 1970s, i.e. the era of the "tragic narrative", at a time when most depictions already showed the Holocaust as a global historical event. Due to this, as well as the lack of a Roma nation state, memory was already connected to transnational space and the universality of the event. Thus, the Roma civil rights movement could al-

1 David Novak, *Zionism and Judaism. A New Theory*, Cambridge 2015, 225-250; Sławomir Kapralski, *Identity Building and the Holocaust. Roma Political Nationalism*, in: *Nationalities Papers*, 25 (1997) 2, 269-283.

2 Jeffrey Alexander, *On the Social Construction of Moral Universals. The "Holocaust" from War Crime to Trauma Drama*, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002) 1, 5-85, here 39-43; Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory*, Cambridge 2012; Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Culture, Trauma, Morality and Solidarity. The Social Construction of 'Holocaust' and Other Mass Murders*, in: *S.I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*, 1 (2014) 2, 156-166.

3 Alexander, *On the Social Construction of Moral Universals*, 43-46.

ready be linked to a transnational historical discourse at the time when it presented the Roma Holocaust. Nevertheless, the narratives of the Porrajmos, like the early discourses concerning the Shoah, had a progressive character since, as I will show later, besides other social goals, they also, over time, served the goal of nation-building. Thus, they simultaneously had the characteristics of a 'tragic' and a 'progressive narrative'. My hypothesis is that in Roma collective memory, politics, and historiography, the Porrajmos became a national site of memory, appearing as a tragic historical event in transnational space, and consequently independent of the history of nation states. In terms of recalling national history, it thus became a unified point of reference, which also existed independently of various smaller sites of Porrajmos memory.<sup>4</sup> This paper outlines the historical genealogy of this development. Due to the limited scope of this study, however, I will only touch upon events and texts that seem to be of utmost importance below.

According to Pierre Nora, memory in contemporary society no longer exists in its real environment (*milieux de mémoires*), as in traditional societies, but instead exists in sites of memory (*lieux de mémoires*). Geographical locations, historical figures, events, texts, and concepts can constitute or mediate cultural memory, thus becoming places of memory. Such sites of memory are not constant but always changing. On the basis of his writings on sites of memory, every site of memory is in fact a product of memory policies. The original aim of Nora's work was to explore the phenomena representing national (French) history at the end of the twentieth century. The notion of sites of memory, as posited by Nora, refers to all the phenomena in which this memory takes shape. From the perspective of French history, in the 1980s it seemed that the national past, still seen in unity in modernity, could only be grasped in fragments and details. The conceptual frameworks through which historians had previously created national history were no longer sustainable. Instead of the former national history, which seemed unified, it was the diversity of the past that could be presented through the sites of memory. All this called into question the unity of the former national tradition as well. At that time, positivist history also served to create a unified national past, and it seemed to Nora that this was no longer possible.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, however, numerous studies have addressed the topic of transnational nationalisms, i.e. national movements that are organised in transnational space.<sup>6</sup> The Roma national movement and the aspirations of Roma elites and organisations were also described as "transnational nationalism", which – as Sławomir Kapralski has pointed out – represents a specific form of nation-building<sup>7</sup> and can be

4 Today, memory research also applies the concept of a site of memory in connection with historical traumas in general. According to Pierre Nora's original definition of events described as a site of memory, the judgement of a site of memory is not directly related to its true significance. At the same time, historical tragedies can also be considered sites of memory in that the passage of time has added symbolic meanings to them. Having become universal as a historical symbol, the Holocaust has by now – at least partly – become detached from its contemporary historical meanings. Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History. Les Lieux de Mémoire*, in: *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 7-24.

5 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols., Paris 1984–1993. For a critical review of Nora's work, see: Stephen Englund, Review. *The Ghost of Nation Past*, in: *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), 299-320.

6 Riva Kastoryano, *Transnational Nationalism. Redefining Nation and Territory*, in: Seyla Benhabib/Ian Shapiro/Danilo Petranovic (ed.), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, Cambridge 2007, 159-180.

7 Sławomir Kapralski, *Memory, Identity, and Roma Transnational Nationalism*, in: Chiara De Cesari/Ann Rigney (ed.), *Transnational Memory. Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, Berlin/Boston 2014, 195-218. Jewish nationalism could also be regarded as a transnational movement in the beginning. See for example: Kerstin Armbrorst-Weihs, *The Formation of the Jewish National Movement through Transnational Exchange. Zionism in Europe up to the First World War*, in: *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz, 15 August 2011, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/armbrorstweihsk-2010-en> (8 April 2021).

considered a typical example of that.<sup>8</sup> In what follows, I will make an attempt to explore how different memory policies and the related historiography used the Roma Holocaust/Porraimos to depict the national history of the Romani people. Related to this, I examine mainly the early period of this process, the effects of the Roma civil rights and national movement, and the works written then. These endeavours also seem to be comparable with the activities of those entities and actors who invented – or constructed – the national traditions and created the national historiographies of nation states in the era of modernity.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly to the Shoah, one can analyse the Porrajmos as a cultural trauma. According to the theory of cultural trauma, trauma is created by social actors; without their actions, no historical event could have become traumatic in the collective memory.<sup>10</sup> When I examine the tragedy of the Porrajmos as such, i.e. as a construction, I do not, of course, intend to relativise the results of the activities of Roma and Non-Roma activists, historians, and other actors, but rather to point out its significance. In fact, without it, the Porrajmos could not have become a traumatic event, a trauma in national or transnational histories, and for Roma and non-Roma communities, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

When investigating Roma history, external categories and names on the one hand, and current and historic self-definitions on the other hand, must be distinguished. In the following, I use the label ‘Roma’ as a generic term used internationally by the Roma, instead of the many other names, categories, and identities, such as Sinti, Gypsy, or Gitane. In this study, I generally adopt the most widely used Romani term, ‘Porrajmos’ (Porajmos),<sup>12</sup> for the tragic historical event of the Roma Holocaust, as I primarily analyse the ‘internal depictions’ of the event based on possible common aspects of Roma communities.<sup>13</sup> Compared to other names, the ‘Porrajmos’ – as an internal category of Roma historiography – could perhaps best represent the struggle of Roma communities and activists for the recognition of the Roma as one of the victim communities of the Holocaust.

8 See: Balázs Majtényi/György Majtényi, A Transnational Nation. Roma National Identity in the Making. In: Aline Shierp/Jenny Wüstenberg (ed.), *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics*, Oxford 2020, 284-306.

9 Eric Hobsbawm/Terrence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983.

10 Sławomir Kapralski described the memory of the Porrajmos as such a trauma construction where the collective trauma becomes a significant marker of collective identity. Sławomir Kapralski, *The Genocide of Roma and Sinti. Their Political Movement from the Perspective of Social Trauma Theory*, in: S.I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation, 2 (2015) 1, 39-46.

11 Gergely Romsics, *The Roma Holocaust and Memory Games. The Clash of Governmentalities and Roma Activism in an Imperfectly Europeanized Arena*, in: Evelin Verhás (ed.), *Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in Its Aftermath. Collection of Working Papers*, Tom Lantos Institute, (8 April 2020).

12 Ian Hancock recommended the use of the term “Porrajmos”. Ian Hancock, *Responses to the Porrajmos. The Romani Holocaust*, in: Alan S. Rosenbaum (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, Boulder 1995, 39-64. This is critically analysed in the following: Michael Stewart, *Remembering without Commemoration. The Mnemonics and Politics of Holocaust Memories among European Roma*, in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10 (2004) 3, 561-582, here 564. Other names or spellings are found in Claire Auzias, *Samudaripen. Le Génocide des Tsiganes*, Paris 1999; János Bársony/Ágnes Daróczy, *Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma during the Holocaust*, New York 2008.

13 In Roma historical writing, the term Porrajmos exists in other forms (Porajmos, Pharrajimos, Parajmos), and there are also other names for this collective tragedy (Samudaripen or Kali Trash/Kali Traš). Anna Wylegała/Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (ed.), *The Burden of the Past. History, Memory, and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine*, Bloomington 2020, 224.

## The Context of Forgetting and Remembering

It often seems in history as if remembering had been the defining phenomenon. Without remembering, local or national culture, different group identities, or many collective activities could not have survived. However, forgetting is in fact as natural a phenomenon in modern societies as remembering. This is because remembering generally presupposes resources, organisation, and institutions that are not available to all social groups. There were also social situations in modern societies in which forgetting was natural, and the possibility of collective memory was considered almost exceptional.<sup>14</sup> The beginnings of the remembrance of the Porrajmos also show that in order to make it possible to remember the tragedy of the Roma people, the institutional conditions had to first be created, initially at the level of nation states and then in transnational space as well. Consequently, the efforts of activists – linked to the Roma civil rights and political movements – necessarily preceded those of historians. In fact, they had a significant role also in the creation of the historiography of the Porrajmos.<sup>15</sup>

Academic historians usually emphasise their expert status in contrast to that of activists and often question the value and objectivity of the latter's research. It is characteristic that even Peter Novick – who published a fundamental book on the issue of objectivity in historical writing and generally emphasised the necessary subjectivity (or relativism) of the genre of historiography – was critical toward African American or women historians for ostensibly being political activists rather than scholars.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that while academic historians often criticise the usage of sources and methods by 'activists', they also employ similar criticisms at academic historians of other nation states in their debates with them, also questioning their expert status.<sup>17</sup> This seems to be a common narrative pattern of academic historians, portraying their authorial act in creating their own narrative as objective history. Generally, it can be stated that activist researchers have initiated research into many important topics in history, especially with topics related to the history of minority groups. That is also true regarding research on the Porrajmos.

The late exploration of the Porrajmos may have several explanations, which exist side-by-side, but which also complement each other. The first is silencing, which has accompanied discrimination against excluded minorities.<sup>18</sup> Second, it was not only that Roma communities, because of their peripheral social status were unable to express their views in public social discourse before, during, and after the Second World War, but also, because of their perceived lack of social solidarity from the perception that they were outside of society, others were also not able to represent their interests. Third, the crimes committed against the Roma were less well documented by authorities at the time than those of the Jewish Holocaust, and there are fewer

14 Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete. The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, Princeton 2009; Iván Székely, *A felejtés joga [The Right to Forget]*, in: *A személyiség burkai. Írások, tanulmányok a 60 éves Majtényi László tiszteletére [The Sheaths of Personality. Writings and Studies in Honour of László Majtényi's Sixtieth Birthday]*, Budapest 2010, 257-274.

15 Kapralski, *The Genocide of Roma and Sinti*, 41.

16 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge/New York 1988, 510-521.

17 See for example the sharp historic debates of Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian historians on the issues of the shared history of East-Central Europe.

18 Karola Fings, *Sinti und Roma. Geschichte einer Minderheit*, München 2019, 2. Ausgabe, 92-100.

opportunities for their reconstruction based on archival sources. This may have hindered the historical exploration of these events.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, as is clear from the above, 'forgetting' did not mean that survivors, relatives of the victims, or local communities had forgotten the tragic events, but that their experience remained isolated. For a long time, they did not have the opportunity to create, narrate, and remember the collective experience of the trauma together with others.<sup>20</sup> One of the achievements of the Roma civil rights movement was that it created this opportunity first in individual countries and then at the European and transnational level, and through this created the traumatic construction of the Porrajmos as a historical event in the collective memory. One of the primary goals of the struggle was to end the silence and create an institutional framework for remembrance.

### Civil Rights and National Movements for Recognition

The collective commemoration of the Porrajmos has been linked to the Roma's fights within specific states for recognition as a national minority, and, on the transnational level of European and world politics, for recognition as a nation. The roots of the Roma civil rights movement are linked to the memory of the Porrajmos. The birth of the current Roma civil rights movement can be dated to the 1950s, when the first relevant organisations appeared in Germany, although these had antecedents in East and Central Europe.<sup>21</sup> They demanded justice and reparations for the Roma in relation to the genocide committed against them during the Second World War. To this end, in 1956 two Roma (Sinti) brothers and civil rights activists, Oskar and Vinzenz Rose, founded the Verband rassisch Verfolgter nicht-jüdischen Glaubens (Association of Racially Persecuted People of Non-Jewish Belief). The parents of the two Roma leaders were killed in a Nazi extermination camp, and as survivors, they decided to fight for justice for themselves and their parents. Besides historical justice, they also advocated for educational, labour, and residential integration. We can see that the discourse on the Porrajmos created a progressive narrative formulating the social goals of different Roma communities.

In 1971, Vinzenz Rose founded the Zentral-Komitee der Sinti West-Deutschlands (Central Committee of Sinti in West Germany).<sup>22</sup> In 1974, Vinzenz Rose erected a monument for the Roma and Sinti victims in Auschwitz-Birkenau from private donations.<sup>23</sup> The words of the Roma civil rights leader Romani Rose (son of Oskar Rose) from a book on the Roma genocide became symbolic: "that we are one nation" (*dass wir ein Volk sind*).<sup>24</sup> In 1979, Romani Rose took over the leadership of the association

19 C. R. Sridhar, Historical Amnesia. The Romani Holocaust, in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41 (August 2006) 33, 3569-3571.

20 Kapralski, *The Genocide of Roma and Sinti*, 45.

21 Majtényi/Majtényi, *A Transnational Nation*, 21.

22 Margalit Gilad, German Citizenship Policy and Sinti Identity Politics, in: Daniel Levy/Yfaat Weiss (ed.), *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship. German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, New York/Oxford 2002, 115. An important incident for the civil rights movement occurred in 1972, when Anton Lehmann, a Roma/Sinti man, was shot by the police in Heidelberg, and as a response Roma staged a demonstration evoking the African American civil rights movement.

23 Katrin Reemtsma, *Sinti und Roma. Geschichte, Kultur, Gegenwart*. Munich 1996, 136-138.

24 Romani Rose, Vorwort. *Sinti und Roma im ehemaligen KZ Bergen-Belsen*, in: *Dokumentation der Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker*, Göttingen 1981, 15. This could have referred to the famous 200-year-old words of an author who wrote – under the Pseudonym of Fürchtegott Leberecht Christlieb – about the German Jews: "Wir Deutsche [...] wir ein Volk sind." Fürchtegott Leberecht Christlieb, *Warum versagt ihr den Juden das Bürgerrecht?*, in: *Nemesis* 8 (1816), 50.

founded by his father and in 1982 he became the head of the Zentralrat deutscher Sinti und Roma (Central Council of German Sinti and Roma) in Heidelberg.

In 1980, a group of Roma held a hunger strike at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site to demand justice and recognition of their suffering during the Nazi era. Their spokesman was Romani Rose.<sup>25</sup> A major political achievement for the West German Roma movement came in 1982, when the president of the Federal Republic, Karl Carstens and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt formally recognised the persecution of Roma during the Second World War as a racial genocide.<sup>26</sup> The two German political leaders welcomed a delegation of the Central Committee, led by Romani Rose, on 17 March, when the acknowledgment took place.<sup>27</sup> In November 1985, the next chancellor, Helmut Kohl, supported this position in the Bundestag and in a speech that became renowned.<sup>28</sup> In 1987, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma established a Kultur- und Dokumentationszentrum (Cultural and Documentation Centre), which was supported by the government after 1989. With this, the collection of documents that chronicled the collective culture and history of the German Roma, and the history of the Porrajmos was created.<sup>29</sup> In 1997, German President Roman Herzog also confirmed that crimes committed against the Roma during the Second World War were considered to be an act of racially motivated genocide, similarly to the case of the Jews.<sup>30</sup> The first historical works, publications of sources and data, exhibitions, and monographs on the Porrajmos were directly related to the civil rights movement of the German Sinti. In its fight for recognition, the Central Council wanted to represent the interests of the families and communities of all Roma victims, and not only those of the German Sinti victims.<sup>31</sup> The transnational Roma entities also had similar aims, as did Roma organisations of other countries which made similar efforts in this direction.

It should be noted that internal conflicts and controversies have burdened this process within Germany. The representatives of the Sinti identify as an ethnic German minority and often emphasised their ‘Germanness’ following from this identity. According to critics, they have not aspired/sought to form stronger ties with the non-Sinti Roma in Germany. The Sinti have historically been institutionally and legally separated from Eastern European Roma immigrants and refugees living in Germany, who mostly had to live in Germany without minority rights and citizenship. The National Socialist authorities not only persecuted the Sinti/Roma as ‘Gypsies’ and ‘asocials’, but also the Yenish communities. Their historical experiences are very close to the Sinti/Roma’s persecution and therefore could have formed the basis for a common identity construction. However, they have recently declared themselves as a separate ethnic minority group in Germany. The text of the 2012 Memorial to the Sinti

25 Yaron Matras, *The Romani Gypsies*. Cambridge, MA 2015, 254.

26 Stephanie Wolfe, *The Politics of Reparations and Apologies*, New York 2014, 75, 90.

27 See for more: “Aufruf des Zentralrat-Komitees der Sinti” (Deutschland, 1972); “Zentralrat-Komitee der Sinti an Bundeskanzler, Willy Brandt” (Deutschland, 1972); “Memorandum einer internationalen Delegation von Vertretern der Romani-Union und des Verbands Deutscher Sinti” (Deutschland, 1979); “Presseerklärung des Verbands Deutscher Sinti” (Deutschland, 1980); “Presseerklärung des Verbands Deutscher Sinti” (Deutschland, 1982); “Pressemitteilung der Bundesregierung” (Deutschland, 1982). RomArchive. <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/i/?section=civil-rights;collection=collection-jan-selling&term=> (8 April 2021).

28 Reemtsma, *Sinti und Roma*, 139-140.

29 Reemtsma, *Sinti und Roma*, 142; Julia von dem Knesebeck, *The Roma Struggle for Compensation in Post-War Germany*, Hatfield 2011.

30 Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies. Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*, New York 2002, 266.

31 Nadine Blumer, *From Victim Hierarchies to Memorial Networks. Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial to Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism*, Toronto 2011, Dissertation, 64.



and Roma Victims of National Socialism in Berlin also mentions the Yenish people separately as a persecuted group. Not only have the Roma in general fought for recognition as a victim group of the Holocaust, but the different communities of the German or European Roma have fought for the same status within the victim community.<sup>32</sup> In general, the nation-building processes of the Roma could result in a shared Roma national identity at least on the transnational level, but different ethnic groups historically regarded as 'Gypsies' may have different relationships to this process, to each other, as well as even to the constructed shared national history.

It should be mentioned that, similarly to the German example, exploring the events of the Porrajmos and doing justice were important elements in the development of the civil rights movement in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe where the Roma had to face specific forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and social exclusion in the past and the present.<sup>33</sup> Enforcing claims for compensation in Central and Eastern Europe also required an organisational framework, and, since the 1980s, this has provided a means and opportunity to assert particular interests. In Hungary, it was János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi who raised the public's awareness of the tragedy of the Porrajmos. They were among the first to publish a volume in English on the events of the Porrajmos in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary. For linguistic reasons, they called the Roma Holocaust 'Pharrajimos'.<sup>34</sup> In Poland, Andrzej Mirga, one of the founders of the Association of the Polish Roma after the democratic transition, organised several events commemorating the Roma Holocaust on the national and the transnational level, and published essays on the Porrajmos as well.<sup>35</sup> The events, explored through the work of activists and historians in Central and Eastern Europe, also provided a new, broader perspective on Porrajmos research in general, as they portrayed this not only as the tragedy of the Sinti but also from the perspective of other Roma communities. In general, the activity of Central and Eastern European activists provided a major impetus to the transnational Roma movement from as early as the 1970s onwards. They often dominated the first international organisations of the Roma as well. In several Central and Eastern European countries, their status as a national minority was ensured earlier than in Germany.<sup>36</sup>

The impossibility of remembering the Porrajmos, and the long period of oblivion, are also symbolised by tragic and iconic stories in Central and Eastern Europe. Although the local and national authorities were familiar with the crimes committed against the Roma, the stories show they did nothing to establish a framework for the remembrance of Roma victims. Instead, almost everywhere, it was the initiative of activists, NGOs and, eventually, as a result of the work of historians that remembrance occurred. In the 1970s, in Czechoslovakia, for example, a pig farm was established near the former Gypsy camp in Lety, and a hotel was built at the site of the

32 Blumer, *From Victim Hierarchies to Memorial Networks*, 74-76; Gilad Margalit/Matras Yaron, *Gypsies in Germany – German Gypsies? Identity and Politics of Sinti and Roma in Germany*, in: Roni Stauber/Raphael Vago (ed.), *The Roma: A Minority in Europe. Historical, Political and Social Perspectives*, Budapest 2007, 203-216.

33 On the historical roots of the tragedy of the Porrajmos in Central and Eastern Europe, see: Gerhard Baumgartner, *The Road towards Genocide*, in: S.I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation, 1 (2014) 1, 5-18.

34 János Bársony/Ágnes Daróczi (ed.), *Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma During the Holocaust*, New York 2008.

35 Andrzej Mirga, who organised commemorative events in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Cracow in 1993 and 1994, was the Roma representative at the Days of Remembrance in Washington, D.C. in 1995. Andrzej Mirga, *For a Worthy Place among the Victims. The Holocaust and the Extermination of Roma During World War II*, in: Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs/Leszek Hondo (ed.), *Why Should We Teach About the Holocaust?* Cracow 2005.

36 Majtényi/Majtényi, *A Transnational Nation*, 288.

camp in Hodonin.<sup>37</sup> Ctibor Nečas conducted research on the history of these camps and the persecution of the Roma during 1970s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> In 1989, the American writer Paul Polansky's volume of documents – containing interviews with Lety survivors, entitled *Black Silence* – raised more public awareness on the crimes committed against the Roma in the Czech territories.<sup>39</sup> Although the Czech government decided to liquidate the pig farm in 2005 and 2006, it was only abolished in 2015. This took place on the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, upon request of the European Roma Travellers Forum (ERTF), the Czech Slovo 21, and other European NGOs. In Hungary, in the late 1950s, a small amusement park operated at the scene of the largest mass killing of Roma at Lake Grábler near Várpalota. After the change of regime, the area fell under private ownership and has been used as a fishing lake ever since. In 2006, only a modest headstone was erected at the scene of the mass killing. In 2015, the librarian József Harmat revealed the details of the events in his volume of published documents, but even to this day not all the names of the victims could be identified.<sup>40</sup> It is important to emphasise that the first known publications – both in Western and East-Central Europe – consisted almost exclusively of source publications, which primarily sought to document the crimes committed against the Roma, and thus to prove their occurrence and to confront public opinion with the tragedy of the Roma.<sup>41</sup> Porrajmos monuments erected in many countries became essential symbols of remembrance and reminders of the tragic events.<sup>42</sup> Not only origin stories, but further discussions and working through of collective traumas play a role in the strengthening – or creation – of Roma nationality or national identity in every country. Of course, other memorial spaces (such as fine art, film, and literary works, usually the creations of Roma artists) also defined the frameworks of commemoration and the Porrajmos narrative, and the construction of the trauma in the collective memory.<sup>43</sup>

In general, remembrance of the persecution and annihilation of Roma was an important building block for the birth of the Roma civil rights movement and has since become a major element of shared Roma (national) identity, as a unifying negative historical reference point. The Porrajmos has become an important memory site, and since the 1970s also a historical symbol of the transnational (national) Roma movement. Various Roma organisations and politicians have long proclaimed their political goals of nation-building, with the hope of achieving rights, equality, and better advocacy from their recognition as a nation. These political movements fight-

37 Helena Sadilková, Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti on the Territory of Czechoslovakia, [http://romafacts.unigraz.at/view\\_pdf.php?t=history&s=h\\_5\\_6&l=en](http://romafacts.unigraz.at/view_pdf.php?t=history&s=h_5_6&l=en) (8 April 2021).

38 Ctibor Nečas, *The Holocaust of Czech Roma*, Prague 1999.

39 Paul Polansky, *Black Silence. The Lety Survivors Speak*, Prague/New York 1998.

40 József Harmat, Roma holokauszt a Grábler-tónál, a székesfehérvári és várpalotai cigányok tömeges kivégzése Várpalotán 1945-ben [The Roma Holocaust at Lake Grábler. The Mass Execution of Gypsies in Székesfehérvár and Várpalota in 1945], in: *A Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Veszprém Megyei Levéltára kiadványai*, Vol. 34, Veszprém 2015.

41 See for example: *Dokumentation der Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker*; Bársony/Daróczi, Pharrarajmos; Milena Hübschmannová (ed.), "Po židoch cigáni." Svědectví Romů ze Slovenska 1939–1945 [“Gypsy Jews”. Testimony of Roma from Slovakia 1939–1945], Prague 2005.

42 See for example the cultural events titled 'Denkmal Weiter', held when the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism was officially opened in Berlin on 24 October 2012, Presseinformation. Denkmal Weiter: Kulturveranstaltungen zur Einweihung des Holocaust-Denkmal in Berlin 19.–25. Oktober 2012. [https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/121005\\_PM\\_Denkmal\\_Weiter\\_ZWEI.pdf](https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/121005_PM_Denkmal_Weiter_ZWEI.pdf) (8 April 2021).

43 Anna Lujza Szász, *Memory Emancipated. Exploring the Memory of the Nazi Genocide of Roma in Hungary*, Budapest 2015, Dissertation.



ing for these goals can be referred to generally as Roma nationalism.<sup>44</sup> As emphasized above, this movement can be described as a transnational nationalist movement that has also created for itself and used the traditional symbols of modern nationalisms (a flag, and anthem, and so on). The Roma elites ‘invented’ such traditions as the Indian homeland and the shared history of Roma communities.<sup>45</sup> Later, the transnational organisations of the Roma functioning in the transnational space seemed to diverge from symbols of traditional nationalisms, and from the Roma nationalism of the 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

The first powerful step towards establishing the Roma transnational movement was the foundation of the Communauté Mondiale Gitane (Global Gypsy Community, CMG) in France in 1960,<sup>47</sup> known after 1967 as the Comité International Tsigane (International Gypsy Committee, CIT), which aimed to unite Roma communities worldwide. In April 1971, the CIT, in collaboration with the British Gypsy Council, organised the first World Romani Congress in Orpington in London, funded by the World Council of Churches and the government of India. Since that 1971 Congress, Roma organisations from various countries and the Roma elites have established the transnational institutions of nation-building, namely sites of memory of Roma nationalism, and the political language of this nationalism, linked to transnational memory sites and symbols, by which they could speak to all Roma. From then on, the Porrajmos also appeared as a relatable transnational reference point of shared Roma history. Based on the decision of the World Romani Congress, starting in 1972, the more than 3,000 Roma victims who were exterminated by the SS in the Auschwitz death camp on 2 August or the early morning of 3 August 1944 were to be commemorated. This day became the memorial day for all Roma victims of the genocide during the Second World War. A new permanent body, the Romano Ekhipe, better known as the International Romani Union (IRU), was established during the second congress, whose goal was to represent the interests of Roma in various international organisations, such as the UN, UNESCO, and OSCE. The IRU, which was formed in 1979, received a consultative status within the UN Economic and Social Council and often dealt with the issue of the Porrajmos. In 1981, the third World Romani Congress was held in Göttingen, Germany.<sup>48</sup> It was supported by the *Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker*, a German NGO that campaigned against “all forms of genocide and ethnocide”. The focus was once again on the Porrajmos and restitution, and included Simon Wiesenthal, one of the most authoritative fighters for Holocaust justice, among the speakers. Wiesenthal showed solidarity with the Roma victims and maintained contacts with Roma organisations.<sup>49</sup>

44 László Fosztó, Van-e cigány nemzettudat? [Is There A Gypsy National Consciousness], in: Fedinec Csilla (ed.), Társadalmi önismeret és nemzeti önazonosság Közép-Európában [Social Self-Knowledge and National Identity in Central Europe], Budapest 2002, 207-224, here 208.

45 Majtényi/Majtényi, A Transnational Nation, 294-295.

46 Kapralski, Memory, Identity, and Roma Transnational Nationalism, 212.

47 Initially, one of the main figures was Ionel Rotaru, who after escaping from Romania to France crowned himself in France in 1959 and used the title Vaida Voevod III, wanting to be a Roma leader. Traditionally, he considered himself the ruler of the Ursari tribe in Romania. In 1960, he founded the CMG. Its basic idea was to set up an independent state, Romanistan (Romanestan). The French government banned his organisation in 1965. Jean-Pierre Ligeois, Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Strasbourg 1994, 250.

48 Thomas Acton/Ilona Klimová, The International Romani Union. An East European Answer to West European questions? Shifts in the focus of World Romani Congresses 1971–2000, in: Will Guy (ed.), Between Past and Future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe, Hatfield 2001, 158-160.

49 ‘Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma an den Bundesminister der Finanzen’ (Germany, 1982), Simon Wiesenthal Archive (SWA), U-Post 7/9/82; World Banjara-Roma (Gypsies) Brotherhood Fostering and Cultural Research Foundation’s letter to Simon Wiesenthal (India, 1981), SWA, U-Post 3/9/81.

The discourse, later developed at the European level – in a dialogue with international organisations and institutions – directs attention to the experience of social exclusion, constructs a shared identity, and puts forward several unresolved public policy issues, such as the socially disadvantaged situation of Roma or minority laws in general.<sup>50</sup> The Porrajmos also occurs as a symbol of historic marginalisation and exclusion of the Roma in this human rights discourse.

### The Path of Institutionalisation

After the fall of communism, when Europe became more united and the presence of Roma communities became even more visible at the European level, there were more opportunities for the goals and memories of different Roma communities to be connected in transnational space. In 1989/1990, a new era had started, which Huub van Baar described as the “Europeanization of Roma representation”, and which meant that the transnational Roma network could connect more strongly to the local and national phenomena around Europe and vice versa.<sup>51</sup> The reunification of Western and Eastern Europe and the divided European memory culture,<sup>52</sup> symbolically reunited at this time, also impacted the ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ European Roma.

There were also common frameworks for the remembrance of the Holocaust. The Roma exhibition, which opened in Auschwitz in 2001, became one of the most important common sites of memory presenting the tragedy of the Roma. The date of the liquidation of the Auschwitz Gypsy Camp, 2 August 1944, as mentioned above, became a common day of remembrance in European states, also following a decision of the World Roma Congress.<sup>53</sup> It was on that day in 2001 that a permanent exhibition on the Porrajmos was opened at the site of the Auschwitz camp, in the Polish State Museum Auschwitz Birkenau.<sup>54</sup> The Cultural and Documentation Centre of German Sinti and Roma initiated the creation of this memory site, but other Roma organisations also collaborated in this work.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the Roma became the second victim group to receive a permanent exhibition in the central memory site of the Holocaust. The opening was a symbolic event in the Roma’s transnational fight for recognition, as van Baar noted: “[...] it could be claimed that the Roma are not in the periphery of holocaust memory anymore.”<sup>56</sup> However, this is true primarily in the transnational sphere, but does not mean, for example, that all of the East-Central European countries educational curricula or textbooks deal in detail with the tragedy of the Porrajmos.<sup>57</sup>

50 Majtényi/Majtényi, *A Transnational Nation*, 298.

51 Huub van Baar, From ‘Time-Banditry’ to the Challenge of Established Historiographies. *Romani Contributions to Old and New Images of the Holocaust*, in: Michael Stewart/Márton Rövid (ed.), *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Romani Studies*, Budapest 2010, 158.

52 Aleida Assmann, *Europe’s Divided Memory*, in: Alexander Etkind/Julie Fedor/Uilleam Blacker (ed.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, Basingstoke 2013, 25-42.

53 European Parliament resolution of 15 April 2015 on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II, European Parliament document P8\_TA (2015) 0095, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0095\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0095_EN.html) (8 April 2021).

54 Romani Rose (ed.), *The National Socialist Genocide of the Sinti and Roma. Catalogue of the Permanent Exhibition in the State Museum of Auschwitz*, Heidelberg 2003.

55 Van Baar, From ‘Time-Banditry’ to the Challenge of Established Historiographies, 160-161.

56 Huub van Baar, *Romani Identity Formation and the Globalization of Holocaust Discourse*, in: Anette Hoffmann/Esther Peeren (ed.), *Representation Matters. (Re)Articulating Collective Identities in a Postcolonial World*, Amsterdam/New York 2010, 116.

57 Mátás Binder/Pálos Dóra, *Romák a kerettantervekben és a kísérleti tankönyvekben [The Representation of Roma in Curricula and Schoolbooks]* 2016. <http://cfcf.hu/sites/default/files/Binder%20P%C3%A1los%20-%20ROMA.TK.KUT.%202016.pdf> (8 April 2021).

The tragedy of the Roma and the remembrance of these events also became part of a common European culture of remembrance and historical perspective, which was, for example, laid down in the various documents of transnational European organisations on the rights of European Roma minorities, on education, or on the Porrajmos itself. Transnational textbooks, websites, and monographs with a European perspective, published and funded by European organisations, also processed the Porrajmos as a collective European tragedy.<sup>58</sup>

With the interpretation of the Porrajmos partly becoming independent of the goals of the Roma civil rights movements, the 'tragic narrative' of the event was gradually created as well. There are a number of facts that show that by the 2000s, the Porrajmos, like the Shoah, had become a universal – though not so widely known – historical event, and its interpretation seemed to be independent not only of the specific goals of the Roma movements, but many times also of the nation state contexts of the events. One iconic example of this is the "Forgotten Genocide" project, launched by an NGO called the Finnish Drom Association in 2010. The project was sponsored by the Finnish president and the Goethe Institute, while the embassies of the Czech Republic, Austria, and Sweden were also involved in its implementation. The final scholarly meeting was held in Helsinki.<sup>59</sup> It can be considered an important moment that the event was organised by a 'neutral country', to whose history the Porrajmos was not directly linked, and which could thus provide a suitable scene for both the 'tragic' and transnational depictions of the Porrajmos.

At the same time, the tragic narrative of the Porrajmos did not recede into the background, but further reinforced the progressive narrative, which could also refer to the Porrajmos as an exceptional event in global history. The Roma national movement, as mentioned above, had both a nationalist and, due to the lack of a nation state, a transnational perspective. The fact that the Porrajmos became a global historical event, largely as a result of the struggles of the Roma civil rights movement, created an opportunity for the transnational Roma national movement to refer to it as a collective historical trauma that connects all Roma communities and individuals all over the world, and which also symbolises the history and presence of the Roma community in the world. Consequently, the international recognition of the Porrajmos as a national tragedy, as a collective trauma, is also evidence of the recognition of the Roma as a nation for the Roma political elites. As emphasized above, the Porrajmos thus became a national site of memory of the Roma movement organised in transnational space, and at the same time the Porrajmos is also a universal symbol of the persecution of the Roma and the crimes committed against them.

The remembrance of the Porrajmos developed its own (national) characteristics that were related to the Roma's own traditions, experiences, and current struggles. On the one hand, they distinguished it from the memory of the Shoah while on the other, linking remembrance to the Roma communities living in different nation

58 On the European legal recognition of the Roma Holocaust, see: European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union (EU, 28 April 2005); European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2017 on fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU: fighting anti-Gypsyism (2017/2038 INI). On the 'promotion of the teaching of Roma and Traveller history and the Roma Holocaust and inclusion in school curricula and textbooks' see: the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020–2025), approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 22 January 2020 at the 1365<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

59 Tiina Kinnunen/Markku Jokisipilä, "Shifting Images of our Wars". Finnish Memory Culture of World War II, in: Tiina Kinnunen/Ville Kivimäki (ed.), *Finland in World War II. History, Memory, Interpretations*. Leiden/Boston 2012, 435–482, here 474–475.

states. An example of this is that in Poland, during the commemorations, a caravan (the Caravan of Memory/Tabór Pamięci) visited the various sites of memory relating to the Porrajmos since 1996.<sup>60</sup> In Hungary, the victims of a racially motivated series of killings against the Roma in 2008–2009 are also commemorated on Holocaust Remembrance Day in August. Another iconic story, showing the importance of the Porrajmos memorials, was the occupation of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin in May 2016 by Roma protesters, demanding rights for non-citizen Roma immigrants in Germany.<sup>61</sup> It is also characteristic that memory practices in general, which are essentially current constructions, are often bound by their goals to the present rather than the past. This is especially true of the Porrajmos, which, as a site of memory, also represents the unity of Roma history and Roma communities and that of the Roma nation in general. As Slawomir Kapralski noted, it has a “history making function”, as the discourse on the Porrajmos is “oriented towards the future and has a pragmatic, political significance”. All in all, the Porrajmos discourse created by the Roma can be described as a fundamentally progressive narrative within the framework of the Roma political movements, that at the same time occurs as a tragic narrative in the transnational space.<sup>62</sup>

### Historiography on the Porrajmos

The institutionalisation of ‘Roma studies’ and later that of ‘Critical Romani studies’ took place in the background, not independently from the results of the civil rights movement. The establishment of Roma archival, museal, and art institutions also strengthened the shared collective identity and cultural memory of Roma communities.<sup>63</sup> This process can be understood as part of the fight for recognition, and the representations of the Porrajmos as a traumatic historical event of shared (national) Roma history also played a central role.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the civil rights movements, the academic sphere, such as the University of Hertfordshire *Centre for Gypsy/Roma Studies*, the Heidelberg Centre, and related journal and publications had a particularly important role in this institutionalisation. These published significant treatises on the Porrajmos.<sup>65</sup> There have also been historians whose works have become of almost institutional significance in themselves, such as Ian Hancock, who produced the first high-impact summaries of

60 The first Caravan of Memory setting out from Szczerowa, RomArchive / Roma civil rights movement / collection of Anna Mirga / poland <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/collection/the-first-caravan-of-memory-setting-out-from-szczerowa-poland/> (8. April 2021). Martin Kraft, Caravan of Memory Celebrates Poland’s Roma Community. The Krakow Post. July 2, 2009. <http://www.krakowpost.com/1406/2009/07> (8. April 2021).

61 At that time, the German government wanted to force the refugee Roma to go back to Kosovo and Macedonia, which were considered safe. Gergely Romsics, The Meaning of Occupation. The Ambiguous Productivity of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism in Berlin, in: *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 6 (2020) 1, 84–114.

62 Kapralski, Identity building and the Holocaust, 281; Slawomir Kapralski, The Aftermath of the Roma Genocide. From Implicit Memories to Commemoration, in: Anton Weiss-Wendt (ed.), *The Nazi Genocide of the Gypsies. Reevaluation and Commemoration*, New York 2013, 229–252.

63 Huub van Baar/Angéla Kóczé, Introduction: The Roma in Contemporary Europe. Struggling for Identity at a Time of Proliferating Identity Politics, in: Huub van Baar/Angéla Kóczé (ed.), *The Roma in Contemporary Europe. Struggling for Identity at a Time of Proliferating Identity Politics*, Oxford 2020, 7.

64 Wolfgang Wippermann, ‘Auserwählte Opfer?’, *Shoah und Porrajmos im Vergleich. Eine Kontroverse*. Berlin 2005, 75.

65 Herbert Heuss/Frank Sparing/Karola Fings (ed.), *The Gypsies during the Second World War. Vol. 1: From “Race Science” to the Camps*, Hatfield 1997; Donald Kenrick (ed.), *The Gypsies during the Second World War. Vol. 2: In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Hatfield 1999; Donald Kenrick (ed.), *The Gypsies during the Second World War. Vol. 3: The Final Chapter*, Hatfield 2006.

both transnational and national Roma history, presenting the history of different Roma communities in unity all over the world.<sup>66</sup> More recently, the Romani Studies Program at the Central European University and the related journal *Critical Romani Studies* have also played a similarly important role. A new generation of researchers wants to put more emphasis than before on the so-called internal perspective, the aspects of the Roma while processing Roma history. Researchers with a Roma identity also have made an attempt to create a shared (national) history of the Roma, similarly to other national histories. In general, the tragedy of the Porrajmos seems to have become a crucial, iconic event in Roma historiography, which is in itself capable of representing the history of the persecution of communities torn apart in different countries.

The memory and historiography of the Porrajmos, as emphasized above, is largely related to the memory and historiography of the Jewish Holocaust, the Shoah. When the exploration of the Porrajmos began in the 1960s,<sup>67</sup> the fundamental question that arose for various authors was whether, similarly to the Shoah, the crimes committed against the Roma could be considered a genocide. This first era of the remembrance of the Porrajmos can thus be described as a struggle for recognition. Initially, its actors were almost without exception Roma and Non-Roma activists. Then they were historians, who on the one hand wanted to explore and reconstruct the events, while on the other hand wanting to enforce their own truth against the majority. The only way to do this was to compare the Porrajmos to the Shoah, which was generally recognised as an unquestionable historical event at that time. The first scholarly studies on the Porrajmos were conducted in the 1970s.<sup>68</sup> The basic aim of the first source publications, studies, and monographs – in connection with the civil rights movement of the era – was to document the crimes committed against the Roma by the authorities of certain nation states. Then institutionalised academic historiography had to reflect on the works of authors who often had a Roma identity and those of activists and the events presented by them in ‘scientific’ publications on the issue. Initially, it was characteristic, as mentioned above, that several historians emphasising the primacy of their own position as representatives of academic historiography, confronted the activist authors who reconstructed the history of the Roma Holocaust/Porrajmos. It also must be noted that the events of the Roma Holocaust did not fit in with the Holocaust discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. Some historians questioned the applicability of the concept of a Roma Holocaust, emphasising the differences of historical events considered to be cognisable and reconstructable, according to the positivist view, and proclaiming the hegemony of written sources in many cases.<sup>69</sup>

According to descriptions, mostly based on written archival sources often not reflecting the victims’ viewpoints and experiences, public explanations of the persecution of citizens considered to be Jews created by the Nazis were based on ‘race’. By contrast, according to this approach, the Roma were mostly considered criminals and shirkers. Furthermore, their various communities seem to have appeared in different ways and not uniformly as ‘Gypsies’ in the eyes of the Nazi authorities. As a result, although most of the measures leading to the Roma Holocaust were imple-

66 Ian Hancock, *We Are the Romani People. A me Sam E Rromane Džene*, Hatfield 2002.

67 Hans-Joachim Döring, *Die Zigeuner im nationalsozialistischen Staat*, Hamburg 1964.

68 Donald Kenrick/Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe’s Gypsies*, New York 1972.

69 János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi – who had an initiating role in the research of the Roma Holocaust in Hungary – analyses also the Hungarian historiography of the ‘Pharrajimos’ in the following study, János Bársony/Ágnes Daróczi, *A Forbidden People Has No History*, in: Anna-Mária Bíró (ed.), *Populism, Memory and Minority Rights. Central Eastern European Issues in Global Perspective*, Leiden 2018, 1-19.

mented by the will of the Nazi state and its allies, they were mostly linked to the local authorities representing it rather than to the Nazi state directly. Most Roma victims are believed to have lost their lives in raids and executions, and not in concentration camps. By contrast, it was appropriate to claim that the fact that the Nazi system was based on race theory and that the Roma were regarded as 'criminals' or 'shirkers' was racism in itself, and that it was, in fact, the commission of crimes and not their 'modality' that determined the applicability of the concepts of genocide and the Holocaust.<sup>70</sup>

In this respect, five distinct positions amongst researchers can be identified. First, there were authors who claimed that the crimes committed against the Roma cannot be considered genocide because they were, in their view, essentially non-racially motivated.<sup>71</sup> Second, others argued that although there was a genocide, it could not be called a Holocaust, thus emphasising the uniqueness of the Shoah.<sup>72</sup> Third, in the beginning, several authors, primarily those of Roma origin, fighting for the recognition of the Roma's tragedy, stated that both the term genocide and Holocaust could be applied to this tragic historical event.<sup>73</sup> Fourth, there were some who, accepting this, stressed that in addition to Jews, the Roma were the only group who were persecuted by the Nazis on a racist basis.<sup>74</sup> Finally, there is the perspective that incorporates the former position and, emphasizing the universality of the Holocaust, discusses the history of the Holocaust in a unified framework, uniting the aspects of all persecuted minorities.<sup>75</sup>

The first period of the works dealing with the Roma Holocaust can be described as part of a struggle for recognition from the viewpoint of Roma communities, whose discursive frameworks were essentially shaped by examining whether parallels between crimes committed against people considered to be Jewish or Roma could be justified. In connection with this, a 'numbers war' broke out between the activist authors and other researchers, which was essentially about the number of victims and, related to this, the intensity of the two genocides. In many cases, this has resulted in formulations and relativising statements that hurt the sensitivities of the victims' relatives and those belonging to the Roma community in general.

From the mid-1980s, published works put this tragic historical event in the context of Roma history, depicting it as a collective tragedy within the common history of the Roma, at that time mainly at the level of the nation states. Later the remembrance of the Porrajmos created by civil rights movements seemed suitable to become the basis of a common historical consciousness and an important element of narrating the Roma national history of a unified structure. In the 1990s, Roma authors declared that the Roma Holocaust was part of the common past of the Roma nation living in the diaspora and, as such, it deserved international recognition. That was followed by the appearance of the first historical analyses from an internal perspective presenting the Roma Holocaust as a national tragedy. Roma representations

70 See for more: Wippermann, 'Auserwählte Opfer?'

71 Jehuda Bauer, Jews, Gypsies, Slavs. Policies of the Third Reich, in: UNESCO Yearbook on Peace and Conflict Studies 1985, Paris 1987, 73-100; Jehuda Bauer, Whose Holocaust?, in: *Midstream* 26 (1980) 9, 42-46. See also: Jehuda Bauer's letter to the editors of *The History Teacher*: Jehuda Bauer/Sybil Milton, Correspondence. "Gypsies and the Holocaust", in: *The History Teacher*, 25 (1992) 4, 513-521, here 513-515.

72 Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, Oxford/New York 2000.

73 Mirga, *For a Worthy Place among the Victims*.

74 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, New Haven 2003; Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, London 2000, 74-77.

75 Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide. From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, Chapel Hill/London 1995.



of the Porrajmos are significant in a variety of ways. First, for Roma minorities living in nation states, exploring and portraying the Porrajmos plays an important role in identity- and community-building. Second, from the point of view of the Roma nation imagined to be unified, as the collective trauma of the Roma communities, the Porrajmos is an important element of the Roma national identity as well.

As a result of the above described efforts, while the Roma Holocaust features in works depicting Roma national history as a collective tragedy for Roma communities it may have also come to be seen in works summarising European or global history, as well as works summarising other national histories.<sup>76</sup> This study focuses mainly on the ‘inner’ representations of Roma history, however the Porrajmos can be analysed in other historical contexts as well. Within other national histories it can be presented as a collective tragedy of the society of a given nation state, such as for example crimes committed by Germans against Germans or Hungarians against Hungarians, since Roma communities and individuals traditionally/mostly have identified themselves with the majority national community. Consequently, the Porrajmos can be interpreted as a national tragedy of the given nation state as well. From a European perspective, it can be described as a crime committed by European citizens against European citizens, i.e. as a collective European tragedy. Finally, it can be depicted from a transnational perspective in light of the fact that it is such a universal tragedy, an important part of the history of all mankind.

As mentioned above, historians and activists tried from the outset to create a specific memory of the Roma Holocaust that emphasised the parallels between the Jewish and the Roma Holocaust. However, according to memory studies, Jewish and Roma memories of the Nazi genocide originally had an “asymmetrical” relationship. The archives of the Shoah preserved mainly the memories of Jewish survivors, and historians analysed Roma life and family stories in the context of the experiences of Jewish survivors.<sup>77</sup> Later, as the event of the Roma Holocaust was treated as a fact at both the nation state and transnational level, researchers started to present and depict the unique features of the Porrajmos, but also from a comparative Roma/Jewish perspective.<sup>78</sup> Today, related to this, the most effective analyses are those which are concerned with the ‘Roma resistance’, with how Roma individuals and communities fought against the fate that befell them during the Holocaust. These depictions show Roma victims in active roles, and interpret the Roma uprising in the ‘Gypsy family camp’ of Auschwitz II-Birkenau on 16 May as the symbolic event of the Roma resistance during the Porrajmos.<sup>79</sup> This reconstructed historical event seems to have become one of the transnational symbols of the potential for Roma autonomy and solidarity with each other and resistance against racist suppression.<sup>80</sup>

76 Riem Spielhaus/Simona Szakács-Behling/Aurora Ailincăi/Victoria Hopson/Marko Pecak, The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks. Analytical Report. A joint report commissioned by the Council of Europe to the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in partnership with the Roma Education Fund. Council of Europe 2020, <https://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/306/COE%20-%20The%20Representation%20of%20Roma%20-%20web%20version.pdf?sequence=10&isAllowed=y> (8 April 2021).

77 Ari Jaskowicz, Separate Suffering, Shared Archives. Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution, in: *History and Memory*, 28 (2016) 1, 110-140.

78 Anna Lujza Szász, Is Survival Resistance? Experiences of Roma Women under the Holocaust, Saarbrücken 2012; Szász, *Memory Emancipated*.

79 Van Baar, From ‘Time-Banditry’ to the Challenge of Established Historiographies, 153-171; Ethel Brooks, Remembering the Dead, Documenting Resistance, Honouring the Heroes. The Sinti and Roma. The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, in: *Discussion Papers Journal*, 3 (2015), 47-60.

80 See for example: Pierre Chopinaud’s speech on 16 May 2015 at the Romani Resistance Day celebration in Paris: Pierre Chopinaud, A Romani Resistance Manifesto, in: Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka/Esteban Acuña C./Piotr Trojański (ed.), *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide*, 195-200.

Research on the Porrajmos linked the tragedies of different Roma communities to each other and made them understandable as part of a collective 'cultural trauma' by proving that Roma were murdered on racist grounds not only in Germany, but in all the Nazi-allied countries and in the states occupied by the Nazis. They created a shared common knowledge of the reconstructed events, facts, and experiences and constructed a shared framework of the interpretation of the Porrajmos. When researching the Roma Holocaust/Porrajmos, historians investigated numerous tragic historical events like the deportations to Nazi death camps in Germany and in other countries, the deportation of Roma from Romania to Transnistria from 1942 to 1944,<sup>81</sup> and mass killings committed by local authorities in East-Central European countries. The persecution of Roma groups living in other states, for example in Italy, also showed parallels to the commonly reconstructed history of the Porrajmos.<sup>82</sup> Focusing more on the micro level of historical experiences and the current methodology of historiography, recent research has adopted new methodologies from memory studies,<sup>83</sup> narratology, and ethnology,<sup>84</sup> resulting in more reflective analyses of archival sources and oral histories.

It should be noted that there have been numerous actors and agencies that have played a role in the research of the Porrajmos, not only activists and researchers, but also NGOs and national or international governmental organisations. The editors of a 2015 volume attempted to represent the characteristics of various actors of memory and historiography of the Porrajmos among the authors of the book as follows: "We invited to contribute to this book Roma and non-Roma scholars of various disciplines, senior and youth Roma activists, organisations and institutions, and, most importantly, Roma Holocaust survivors. The chapters included in this book have diverse formats – scholarly articles, manifests, personal testimonies, speeches and an interview. Our aim is to provide an inclusive space which uplifts non-academic knowledge to ranks of equal importance with academic discourse."<sup>85</sup> It can perhaps be stated generally, that one of the endeavours of Roma actors and organisations is now to preserve their own 'voices' and their emphatic participation in the discourses and historiography of the Porrajmos, for instance by presenting the Porrajmos as the tragedy of a shared Roma national history as well.

In sum, the activists and researchers who explored the history of certain local events played an important role in making the Porrajmos a universally accepted historical fact, linking these with each other by asserting first the aspects of the Roma minority communities and then those of the Roma nation. From the 1990s, also as a result of this research, several works were published that showed the Roma Holocaust as a national and universal human tragedy in a transnational historical perspective. The Porrajmos as a collective tragedy of the Roma, and as a European and universal tragedy, respectively, became a historical event also recognised in works on the history of science presenting European and global history. The recognition of the Porrajmos in the historiography is not independent of the goals of

81 Michelle Kelso, *Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria, 1942–44*, in: Kenrick (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, 95–130.

82 Paola Trevisan, *The Persecution of Roma and Sinti in Fascist Italy*, in: *Trauma and Memory*, 6 (2018) 3, 48–55.

83 Andrej Kotljarchuk, *World War II Memory Politics. Jewish, Polish and Roma Minorities of Belarus*, in: *The Journal of Belarusian Studies*, 7 (2013) 1, 7–37.

84 Paola Trevisan, *'Gypsies' in Fascist Italy. from Expelled Foreigners to Dangerous Italians*, in: *Social History*, 42 (2017) 3, 342–364.

85 Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka/Esteban Acuña C./Piotr Trojański, *Introduction*, in: Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka/Esteban Acuña C./Piotr Trojański (ed.), *Education for Remembrance of the Roma Genocide. Scholarship, Commemoration and the Role of Youth*, Cracow 2015, 15.

Roma civil rights and national movements either and can generally be considered part of the process during which the institutional conditions for remembrance were created.

## Conclusions

In this study, I analysed the memory and historiography of the Porrajmos in terms of the Roma civil rights movement and nation building. The analyses that contextualise the Porrajmos as a historical event offer multiple perspectives for comparison. On the one hand, this tragic event is analysed in the context of Roma history, or from a minority/nationality or national perspective, as an event which can be compared with other earlier periods and events of the persecution of the Roma. On the other hand, it is discussed from a transnational perspective, in the context of the history of genocides and, more specifically, in that of the history of Second World War genocide (comparing the event mainly with the Shoah). However, the combination of these two perspectives seems the most decisive. Today one of the main characteristics of memory and historiography of the Porrajmos is that the 'cultural construction of collective trauma' connects and unites the national and transnational perspective. The representations of the Porrajmos is also defined by the fact that the collective identity of the Roma is more and more strongly and closely connected to a transnational space. The Roma (national) movement, organised in a transnational space, which has become less and less connected to the symbols of traditional nationalisms, allows for the tragedy of the Porrajmos, now portrayed as universal, to be presented in accordance with its own progressive nation-building/national goals, within Roma national history. Discourses about the Porrajmos can therefore be tragic and progressive, universal and national at the same time.

In the era of globalisation, certain sites of memory may become independent of specific geographic areas, becoming transnational sites of memory and part of a global discourse, overstepping localities and the borders of nation states. Sites of memory are generally intended to interpret the past in the present and can often place local experiences in a transnational context. In the case of the Roma Holocaust, this was largely the result of the Roma civil rights movements and, related to this, of the work of activists and researchers. It was largely Roma and non-Roma activists and civil movements which carried out the memory work by which the experiences and memories of individuals and the local community were preserved and reformulated again and again, so that they could be combined first at the level of nation states and then at the transnational level. Meanwhile, the memory of the Roma Holocaust/Porrajmos, as a result of these actors' struggles of identity politics, has also become a cornerstone of the process of building a Roma national identity. This is why we can regard the Porrajmos as a transnational national site of memory, as suggested in the title of my study. The Porrajmos as a site of memory is an emblematic example of the fact that such forms of nation building and nationalism also exist that do not connect to the traditional frameworks or ideologies of modern nation states, but primarily to the phenomena beyond and above those.

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