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**MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE:  
ANTI-ROMA PREJUDICE IN EASTERN EUROPE\***

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*[The Gypsies] were deemed so marginal that their murder provoked no intra-agency rivalries and thus required no written authorization.<sup>1</sup>*

All nationalities, ethnic groups, or peoples are by definition intrinsically unique, set apart from one another by their cultures, languages, and historical experiences. Yet it can be said confidently that in many respects the Roma (Gypsies) constitute a most unusual ethnic group, not only in Eastern Europe but also in a larger, global sense. The uniqueness of the Roma lies in the fact that they are a transnational, nonterritorially based people that do not have a homeland to provide haven or extend protection. There are, to be sure, ethnic groups who share or in the past have shared some of these attributes: the Kurds are transnational with no homeland, but they are territorial; the Jews are also transnational and were not territorially based until the establishment of Israel; the Berbers of northern Africa are transnational and semi-nomadic, but they too have a homeland west of Tripoli to which they periodically return. This transnational and nonterritorial combination that characterizes the Roma goes far to explain their marginality as well as their relationship to the states and societies of Europe and beyond.

Since their appearance in the Balkans in the 13th century, the Roma have been systematically marginalized in Eastern Europe. Although their exclusion has been constant, it has assumed various forms, depending on the country or region, the political system, prevailing

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societal attitudes, and levels of economic development. This essay will address the Roma's historical predicament by focusing on the multidimensional nature of their marginality. Here my focus will be limited to some aspects of Romani marginality in 20th-century Europe. This is especially evident over the course of the last five decades. To illustrate this argument, the Roma's situation will be examined in three dramatically different sociopolitical and economic environments: in Nazi Germany and Nazi occupied Europe, under Communism, and in the post-Communist era.

### **The Roma in Nazi Germany**

The German Romani community was quite small, perhaps as few as 30,000-35,000 people, representing approximately 0.5 percent of the population in the early 1930s. It was excluded from sociocultural and political life. Yet, unlike the majority of the East European Roma, German Roma (also referred to as *Sinti*) were more likely to reside in urban areas and practice modern vocations. Economically, they were not as severely marginalized as their East European brethren (whose traditional skills became less and less important in the slowly modernizing economies of the region). Despite being somewhat better off materially, the Roma in Germany suffered greater sociopolitical persecution than the Roma did elsewhere in Europe.

After World War I, German state governments transferred control of the Roma to the police, who were instructed to deport foreign Roma and smash "Gypsy gangs."<sup>2</sup> As a result, even though the Weimar Republic extended full citizenship rights to the Roma, the police harassed them and played an inordinately large role in Romani affairs. After the Fascists came to power in 1933, the persecution of the Roma quickly intensified. Initially the campaign focused on the nomadic Roma, but it was soon extended to all Roma residing in Germany. In 1939 the state banned Romani children from schools, and a host of other discriminatory measures were implemented, including a prohibition of the freedom of movement. From December 1938 until mid-1939, the "war on the Gypsies" was centralized. During this period, the Nazi government created the *Reichszentrale zur Beämpfung des Zigeunerwesens*, a police apparatus which also sponsored race-biology research.<sup>3</sup>

The *Reichszentrale* was also instrumental in apprehending the Roma and transporting them to identification centers where they were classified according to blood line. An intricate system of categorization was set up identifying the Roma as belonging to one of various classes: "clean race Gypsies" (*reinrassige Zigeuner*), "mixed Gypsies" (*Zigeunermischlinge*), and "wandering persons after the Gypsy fashion" (*nach Zigeunerart umziehenden Personen*). They were also ranked by the proportion of their German ancestry and the characteristics of their spouses. These data were entered into their identification documents. It is important to note that the mixed-blood classification was much more stringent for Roma than for Jews: if two of a person's sixteen great-great-grandparents were Roma, that person was classified as a "Gypsy-mixture," and from 1943 onward could be sent to Auschwitz based on this categorization.<sup>4</sup> This blood-based classification of the Roma was the product of the Nazi era's large-scale, state-sponsored, race-biology research.

Race-biology research on the Roma received priority in 1936. Dr. Robert Ritter, a psychologist and psychiatrist, began his work that year on the Roma in the Section for Research on Race-hygiene and Population Biology in the Reich Department of Health in Berlin. Until the end of the war, Ritter's research was generously underwritten by the German Association for Scientific Research (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* or DFG). For example, his project on Jews and Roma, "Studies on Asocial Individuals and on the Biology of Bastards," was allocated 15,000 Reichsmarks in 1938.<sup>5</sup> Research on the Roma was also pursued at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut as well as at some universities.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to racial classification of the Roma and others, German scientists spent a great deal of time on sociological and anthropological studies of the Roma. Whereas the Jewish minority was far too large to permit individual anthropological investigations, the relatively small number of Roma allowed for such an undertaking.<sup>7</sup> In a report to DFG in March 1943, Ritter noted that his group had "clarified" 21,498 cases "from the race-biological point of view." Decades later, when German geneticist Benno Müller-Hill interviewed some of the scientists who participated in this work (and/or their descendants), several of them saw nothing wrong with their research. Dr. Adolf Würth, a former assistant to Ritter, noted that "We carried out our investigations in order to make a contribution to anthropological knowledge concerning a minority living in Germany, the Gypsies."<sup>8</sup>

Part of the "investigative" work, however, involved formulating proposals to solve "the Gypsy question," which in reality meant devising ways of exterminating large numbers of human beings using the most economical methods available. Possible solutions included taking the Roma out on ships and drowning them in the Mediterranean; "turning them loose from trains into the open countryside, somewhere in the East in the depths of the winter of 1941-42, and allowing them to freeze to death in temperatures below -20°C;" and a number of similarly low-cost procedures.<sup>9</sup> According to Ritter's research, more than 90 percent of the Roma could be classified as mixed-blood, and in a progress report to the DFG on 20 January 1940, he suggested that: "The Gypsy question can only be considered solved when the main body of asocial and good-for-nothing Gypsy individuals of mixed blood is collected together in large labor camps and kept working there, and when the further breeding of this population of mixed blood is stopped once and for all."<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the Nazi campaign against the Roma was not an afterthought. In Nazi ideology, the Roma were considered an inferior race whose most fundamental attributes were habitual criminality and social deviance. This racial and behavioral categorization made the Roma subject to extermination. Justifying the mass extermination of the Roma was not a source of apprehension for the Nazis for some of the same reasons that anti-Roma persecution in the past could proceed with impunity in a number of diverse settings: quite simply, no person or group with political clout raised its voice in defense of the Gypsies. Although there were cases of righteous gentiles saving Jews, the Roma received no such assistance; no state or international organization expressed concern with their fate.<sup>11</sup>

After digesting the "scholarly debates" about the best way to dispose of the Roma, the Germans utilized the tried-and-true method of concentration camps. This proved to be an effective strategy; all but an insignificant remnant of those Roma who were shipped to the camps perished there.<sup>12</sup> Most of the Roma from Germany and German-occupied Europe were sent to concentration camps in eastern Germany and Poland. Many, to be sure, did not survive the roundups in places such as Budapest, Belgrade, Brno, Kraków, Łódź, Prague, Warsaw, and Zagreb where they were often shot on the spot. Like other Nazi victims, once inside the camps, the Roma population was decimated by epidemics, forced labor, malnutrition, brutality, and medical experiments. In fact, when Josef Mengele became the camp doctor in Auschwitz on 30 May 1943, his first act was to send Roma suspected of suffering from typhoid to the gas chambers.<sup>13</sup> Together with homosexuals, Roma were considered the lowest category of prisoners.

Camp guards sometimes gave Romani musicians the chance to extend their lives and their low prospects for survival by playing for the camp staff. Alexander Ramati may be right in suggesting that "music gave them strength to go on and to hope against hope that they would survive."<sup>14</sup> Roma violinists were also used in remarkably cruel settings. As Eugen Kogon recalled: "It was ghastly to watch and hear the Gypsies strike up their merry marches while exhausted prisoners carried their dead and dying comrades into camp; or to listen to the music accompanying the whippings of prisoners."<sup>15</sup>

The world is relatively ignorant about the Romani Holocaust (*Porajamos* in Romani). This phenomenon has several origins. First, as noted above, since World War II the world has paid the most attention to the persecution of the Jews. Second, the extermination of the Roma was far less meticulously documented by the Nazis and their collaborators than the murder of the Jews. Third, unlike the Jews and other victims of the Holocaust, many of whom were highly educated, Romani survivors did not leave behind diaries, write memoirs, or subsequently research this subject.

Another important factor contributing to the pervasive lack of awareness of the Romani *Porajamos* is a very specific aspect of Romani culture, namely its attitude toward death. As Slawomir Kapralski has observed, in Romani culture the dead are excluded from the world of the living, not only physically but also symbolically; dead people are hardly ever mentioned and their lives rarely become a subject to commemoration.<sup>16</sup> In fact the dead are perceived to have negative power that may be dangerous to the living. As Andrzej Mirga and Lech Mroz have written, "It is inappropriate in this culture to commemorate the time of death, both individual and collective, from the period of World War II."<sup>17</sup>

This cultural obstacle to remembrance and commemoration has been counteracted to some extent by a number of works published by Romani and *gadje* (non-Romani) scholars in the last decade.<sup>18</sup> Just as importantly, in recent years, the media in several European states have recognized the Romani Holocaust by broadcasting radio and television programs and publishing articles on the subject. An increasing number of the Roma themselves have started to honor the victims of *Porajamos* publicly by visiting former concentration camps and by staging meetings,

sit-ins, and commemorative presentations.<sup>19</sup> It still remains to encourage the surviving camp victims to share their memories with posterity.

Unlike the Jews, only a handful of surviving Romani victims ever received restitution from Germany. One reason for this has been the argument of post-World War II German authorities that the Roma were persecuted by the Nazis, not because of their ethnic-racial identity but because of their asocial behavior and habitual criminality. This tenuous claim effectively excluded nearly the entire Romani population from compensation of any sort.<sup>20</sup> For the past several years, some East European Romani leaders have demanded restitution from Germany, thus far unsuccessfully. Perhaps the latest exhibition of the continuing indifference toward Romani suffering occurred in Hungary on 3 July 1996, when the government decided to offer monetary compensation to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust but left the Roma unmentioned.

### The "Numbers Problem" in Romani Studies

In reading the various accounts of the Romani *Porajamos*, one is reminded of the statistical disparities perennially encountered when dealing with Romani affairs. Whether the issue is the size of the Romani population in a given state or region, the number of Roma fleeing Eastern Europe for the West, or the proportion of the population that fell victim to the Nazis, one can only be baffled by statistical inaccuracies and inconsistencies. Roma, Romani activists, and scholars tend to overestimate the numbers, whereas representatives of government authorities generally do the

<b>Range of Estimates of Romani Holocaust Victims<sup>21</sup></b>	
<b>Author</b>	<b>Estimate</b>
1. Bauer, Yehuda (1989)	200,000
2. Kenrick and Puxon (1972)	219,700
3. Gilbert, Martin (1985)	250,000
4. Kenrick, Donald (1994)	250,000
5. Vossen, Rudiger (1983)	275,200
6. Liegeois, Jean-Pierre (1994)	400,000-500,000
7. Fonseca, Isabel (1995)	500,000
8. Stewart, Michael (1997)	500,000
9. Hancock, Ian (1987)	600,000
10. Hancock, Ian (1991, 1995)	1,000,000-1,500,000

opposite.<sup>22</sup> Given the history of the Roma's persecution and the pitiful conditions in which the vast majority of them live, those who study the Roma can easily lose their objectivity and become *de facto* Gypsy activists. This phenomenon is neither surprising nor undesirable. What is disturbing, however, is the purportedly unbiased studies that overlook fundamental principles of scholarly research and presentation. This difficulty in Romani research is demonstrated in the table on page 11.

At the core of the "numbers problem" is the insufficient and unreliable census information pertaining to the Roma.<sup>23</sup> Credible data is hard to come by for several reasons. First, in several countries prior to World War II (and in some, like Bulgaria, even afterwards), censuses simply did not include the category "Gypsy"; therefore, the Roma were accounted for under a different rubric. Second, many Gypsies fearing discrimination have habitually denied their ethnic identity and declared themselves members of another ethnic group. Third, Gypsies with no permanent address—and before World War II this group comprised the majority of Roma in many European states—were simply not counted by census takers. Mirga notes that not only were the Roma unaccounted for by censuses, but they often did not possess any sort of identification papers, making figures all the more suspect.<sup>24</sup> In sum, these estimates are not based on objective, reliable data but on guesswork, second- or third-hand information, and rumors.<sup>25</sup> From a scholarly point of view, short of solid quantitative information there is simply no way to determine accurately the size of the Romani community and the number of its victims.

For this reason, the informed reader must be at odds with Fonseca's statement that wartime deaths of the Roma range in Hungary "from eighty thousand down to ten thousand." This vagueness has allowed "revisionist" historians, such as Laszlo Karsai, to claim that "no more than a few hundred Gypsies 'vanished.'"<sup>26</sup> Unlike Fonseca, Karsai is a historian who followed a rigorous methodology and did years of archival work, allowing him to come closer than anyone to an accurate assessment of the Hungarian Gypsy community's losses.<sup>27</sup>

### **Communist Policies and the Roma in Eastern Europe**

The advent of Communist rule significantly changed the nature of Romani marginality. Whereas totalitarian dictatorship in German-occupied Europe intended to *exclude* the Roma by the most drastic means imaginable, the emerging Communist states aimed at their socioeconomic *inclusion*, by force if necessary.

To some extent, the Communist governments succeeded in their conscious effort to reduce the socioeconomic marginalization of the Roma. However, state policies intended to facilitate the socioeconomic assimilation of the Roma were often ill-conceived and nearly always ignored Romani culture and traditions. The underlying objective of Communist policies toward the Roma was to "civilize" them and make them what the Communists considered "useful members of society." When these policies met with mixed results, decision makers were puzzled by the resistance of Romani communities to change. They did not understand that the Romani conception of a "useful citizen" did not necessarily correspond to their own.

In the late 1940s, the Communist states of Eastern Europe were preoccupied with the task of creating entirely new sociopolitical and economic systems following the physical and social destruction of World War II. Consequently, they were slow to address the "Gypsy question." In addition, during the Stalinist period, conformity to the party line was ruthlessly enforced and there was no room for behavioral diversity. The Roma only became an issue in the mid-1950s, when the diminution of heavy-handed and widespread repression gradually began to permit manifestations of different social and economic behavior. Some of these exhibited by the Roma obviously ran counter to the Communist goal of developing the "new socialist man" and required state intervention. This behavior included the reemergence of internal migration of the Roma from job to job, the preference of many Roma for seasonal employment, the resultant haphazard school attendance of Romani children, and the Roma's general dislike of structured work environments.

The Communist treatment of the Roma shows some remarkable similarities to the "civilizing efforts" of the Habsburg emperors Maria Theresa (1740-80) and her son, Joseph II (1780-90). It was these two monarchs who first turned their attention to the Roma and, rather than enslaving or repressing them like their contemporaries elsewhere (particularly in the Balkans), actually endeavored to "improve" the Roma's lot and encourage their social assimilation. Maria Theresa and Joseph separated Romani children from their parents and coerced them into schools, forbade the use of the Romani language, and prohibited nomadism, all for the sake of social integration and controllability.<sup>28</sup> Nearly two centuries later, their successors in Communist Eastern Europe had identical goals and employed similar means to realize them.

The Roma's traditional skills (such as repairing pots and pans, trading livestock, and weaving baskets) made them compatible with East European economies far longer than with those of Western Europe, where higher levels of development rendered these skills obsolete in the early 20th-century. In the predominantly agricultural economies of interwar Eastern Europe, these skills were still in demand, but the rapid industrialization of the early Communist period made them outdated. Because of this development, the Communists endeavored to improve the educational standards of the Roma, provide them jobs within the framework of the system of full and mandatory employment, and extend to them the benefits of universal health care, selective housing, and social programs. Despite variations across the region, there is little doubt that the employment, educational, housing, health, and overall living standards of the Roma improved, although they remained vastly inferior to those of the general population. But these results were achieved at least in part via coercive methods, and many Roma simply did not consider the 48-hour workweek and mandatory education in the schools of the *gadje* as benefits. Rather, Romani communities across the region came to realize that they paid for these improvements with a significant loss of their culture, traditions, and identity. Although politicians and administrators may have been motivated by desirable objectives, the vast majority of them did not understand even the fundamental aspects of the culture, customs, and traditions which continued to determine Romani behavior. For instance, although the relatively poor performance of Roma schoolchildren was extensively analyzed, the roots of the problem were rarely investigated.



Even though the policies of the Socialist governments in Eastern Europe had some positive aspects, the overall approach to the Roma included discriminatory and coercive elements. In fact, none of the Communist states shied away from institutionalized discrimination and persecution in order to achieve their objectives. In Romania and Slovakia, the horses and wagons of the Roma were confiscated to reduce their mobility; in Czechoslovakia, Romani women were subjected to involuntary sterilization to reduce their birthrate; in Bulgaria, they were forced to Bulgarianize their names; and in every East European state, they were assigned substandard housing in urban areas.<sup>29</sup> In several countries, Romani children, who often spoke no language other than Romani, were assigned to special classes or schools for the learning disabled, and everywhere the Roma were identified by their ethnicity in criminal reports. Although the state prevented the outbreak of anti-Roma violence, it rarely restrained the less tangible but extremely pervasive social discrimination against the Roma manifested in virtually every area of life.

The Roma resisted the assimilation campaign launched by Communist states as much as possible, yet maintaining some of their most important traditions became nearly impossible. Interaction with non-Roma, which posed the constant threat of symbolic pollution (*mahrime* in Romani), was unavoidable given that Roma were in close contact with others at home, school, work, and, frequently, in prison.<sup>30</sup> Living in large apartment blocks also ran counter to several important Romani taboos, such as the ban on a woman living above the dwelling of a man, and the ritual preparation of some traditional meals was frustrated by the unavailability of certain ingredients and the lack of open cooking places.

Although the Roma numbered in the hundreds of thousands in several countries of the region, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, they did not receive the official recognition accorded to other nationalities. In fact, the Roma were considered either as an ambiguously defined "ethnic group" or as a social group characterized by unfathomable customs, anti-social behavior, and vagrancy. Only Yugoslavia's Romani community was acknowledged. In 1981 it was recognized as a nationality and received some of the rights that other national minorities took for granted, such as native language schoolbooks, newspapers, television, and radio broadcasts.<sup>31</sup>

A small Romani intelligentsia developed during the Communist period as a result of state policies. This was a mixed blessing for the Romani population. Promising Romani youths were selected for advanced education and supported by various state programs. The state could then showcase these individuals as examples for the community to emulate. The Romani identity of many new Roma intellectuals vanished in the process, however, and they became increasingly reluctant to identify with and support their people. In some states, especially Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, there were clear signs of increasing social stratification among the Roma. The circle of university educated Roma slowly but consistently expanded, and once limited private enterprise was allowed in the late-Communist period, the number of well-to-do Roma also started to grow. Although the size of the Romani middle class was still extremely small, it did begin to have a social impact on the Romani community.

The assimilation policies of the East European Communist regimes decreased the economic and social exclusion of the Roma. But government officials and the dominant populations of these countries resented these efforts, believing that the Roma benefited at their expense. The Roma's living standards improved substantially through increased educational and literacy levels, free medical care, and subsidized housing. The Roma, however, considered these benefits to be of dubious value because they often conflicted with traditional lifestyles and customs. Overall, the Communist experience signaled the loss of culture, language, and traditional ways of life for a large proportion of Eastern Europe's Romani communities.

### **The Roma in Postcommunist Europe**

The fall of Communism was a mixed blessing for the approximately five million East European Roma and significantly changed the nature of their marginality. Their political exclusion has diminished, but their social and economic situation has clearly deteriorated. Nine years after the beginning of the political and socioeconomic changes caused by the collapse of the *ancien régime*, it can be confidently asserted that no marginal group has been more adversely affected than the Roma.

One of the principal problems of the post-Communist period is the declining participation of Romani children in the education system. In the Communist era, reluctant Romani children in many regions were visited by social workers and educators and often taken to school. Since 1989, there has been neither the political will nor the monetary resources to employ such people.<sup>32</sup> Many Roma and non-Roma activists and scholars believe that education is the key to ending the Roma's socioeconomic marginality. They cite evidence that during the Communist period, when many Roma stayed in school until age 16 or 18, the marriage age among the Roma increased and the birthrate declined. Since 1989, an opposite pattern is clearly observable.

In several East European countries, various initiatives and pilot programs have been introduced to reverse this trend and improve the low educational standards of the Romani community. For instance, in Pécs, Hungary, a new high school was established to educate Romani children; in Nitra, Slovakia, a program was inaugurated to train Romani teachers; and the premier university in Macedonia (Skopje) set aside a number of places for qualified Romani applicants. Although these are welcome developments, they are clearly the exception and cannot hope to bridge the vast educational gap between the Roma and other ethnic groups.

The rationalization of labor demanded by the economic transitions in the post-Communist period has caused Romani unemployment to skyrocket. Most Roma are unskilled workers. This, combined with widespread discrimination against them, has meant that they are often the last to be hired and the first to be fired. In some rural areas with large Romani populations, such as eastern Slovakia, Romani unemployment is nearly universal. In January 1994, when Hungary's unemployment rate was at its highest, 13.8 percent of the *gadje*, but 49.7 percent of the Roma, were registered as unemployed.<sup>33</sup> The Roma's exclusion from the various land distribution and decollectivization schemes of the past several years has also had a negative impact on their

economic situation. Although many Roma worked in agricultural cooperatives and on state farms during the Communist period, they did not own land prior to World War II nor were they in a position to purchase any after 1989. As a result, they have ended up swelling the number of the underemployed and unemployed.<sup>34</sup>

Given this desperate economic situation, it should not be surprising that Romani crime rates have risen substantially in the post-Communist period. The nature of the crimes committed has also changed. Prior to 1989, most of the Roma's criminal activities were property-related; since 1989, however, the number of violent crimes has risen.<sup>35</sup> Many of these have been responses to anti-Roma attacks by local populations and semi-organized racist (mostly skinhead) groups.<sup>36</sup> The socioeconomic difficulties of non-Roma who lack job skills or are living on fixed incomes have led to scapegoating and renewed racism.<sup>37</sup> Because they lack powerful protectors, the Roma have been easy prey. Across Eastern Europe, dozens of Roma have been murdered and hundreds of their dwellings have been destroyed. Between 1990 and 1993, skinhead groups killed 16 Roma in the Czech Republic alone.<sup>38</sup> This problem is exacerbated by the fact that although local police generally pursue Romani suspects and criminals enthusiastically, they are likely to look the other way when Roma and their property are threatened.

Societal attitudes toward the Roma have become even more negative in the post-Communist period. A host of public opinion polls and sociological studies have conclusively shown that the Roma are by far the most intensely disliked minority in every East European state. According to a recent study conducted in Romania, 100 percent of Germans, 77 percent of Romanians, 50 percent of Magyars, 24 percent of Roma themselves, and 63 percent of other nationalities (Ukrainians, Jews, and Lipovanin-Russians) view the Roma unfavorably.<sup>39</sup> Even more disturbing, this study found that the proportion of negative sentiment toward the Roma is highest among respondents 40 years of age or younger.<sup>40</sup> A 1991 study comparing racial attitudes in three East Central European states revealed that 78 percent of those surveyed had negative attitudes toward the Roma, and a 1992 poll in Czechoslovakia showed that 87 percent considered the Roma's behavior "provocative."<sup>41</sup>

The post-Communist East European states have developed different approaches toward the Roma. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have taken the most repressive approach. The Czech Republic's new citizenship law implicitly discriminates against the Roma, and Czech authorities have been lax in prosecuting those suspected of engaging in anti-Roma activities, particularly in northern Bohemia.<sup>42</sup> Slovakia's prime minister, Vladimír Mečiar, has openly castigated the Romani community as "socially unadaptable," a statement that was interpreted by local authorities as an endorsement of anti-Roma prejudices.<sup>43</sup>

Hungary and Macedonia have adopted the region's most enlightened policies toward them.<sup>44</sup> Hungary's July 1993 law on minorities (Act LXXVII/1993) forbids assimilation policies as well as legislation altering the ethnic composition of a region. The Hungarian government also established the institution of ombudsman in 1993, an office that has been instrumental in upholding the Roma's constitutional rights. Moreover, minorities living in Hungary have been

able to govern themselves through self-administrative bodies.<sup>45</sup> The approximately 50,000-strong Romani community in Macedonia has fared well compared to Roma communities elsewhere in Eastern Europe because of its small size, the presence of the Albanians (a much larger and far more politically assertive ethnic minority), and the enlightened views of Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov.<sup>46</sup> Romania's human rights record has been widely and justifiably criticized, and living conditions for the Roma there are perhaps the worst in the region. Nevertheless, the Bucharest government has created an institutional structure and initiated or participated in programs that have the potential to improve the situation.<sup>47</sup>

It is also important to note that different branches of East European politics have differing attitudes toward ethnic minorities in general and the Roma in particular.<sup>48</sup> Presidents of East European countries are generally sympathetic toward the Roma and have supported policies targeting solutions to their problems. Central governments are often less sensitive to minority issues, in part because they have more regular contact with the often-prejudiced local authorities and are more cognizant of the magnitude of the gap between the Roma's needs and their own political imperatives and fiscal limitations. Local government officials tend to be the least educated and most prejudiced. They often claim that the national officials' more enlightened views are naive and idealistic because they are not based on actual experience with the Roma. Although many local officials are genuinely concerned about improving the situation of the Romani community, poor working conditions, inadequate resources, and low material rewards frequently overwhelm good intentions.

Since 1989 tens of thousands of Roma, particularly from Balkan states, have taken advantage of the relatively open borders to migrate to Western Europe. Many of them have found that anti-Roma prejudice in Germany, France, or Switzerland is just as intense as in the countries they left behind.<sup>49</sup> Although the living standards of those Roma who manage to leave refugee camps, avoid deportation, and successfully find jobs may be higher than in Eastern Europe, their social circumstances are scarcely superior. The work they do is usually illegal and is often rejected even by Western Europe's *Gastarbeiters*. In August 1992, a refugee hostel in Rostock, Germany, housing 200 Romanian Roma was firebombed by hundreds of German youths. The results of recent British polls show that the Roma are by far the most despised ethnic minority in the United Kingdom as well.<sup>50</sup> Several states, including Germany, France, and Sweden, have forcibly returned Roma requesting asylum to their countries of origin. Because they lack political rights, East European Roma in the West are exceedingly vulnerable.

In Eastern Europe, by contrast, politics is the one important area in which Romani marginality has noticeably diminished since 1989. New laws on association and political parties allow the Roma and other ethnic minorities to establish political, cultural, and other organizations. East European Roma have established hundreds of political organizations, although they have not succeeded in gaining representation proportional to the size of their communities. The Romani minorities in Eastern Europe are diverse and disunited; they lack both a tradition of political activism and material resources; and most of their leaders have failed to devise workable political platforms and effective means of communicating their demands to the state. The seemingly

perpetual infighting within Romani parties has led to a proliferation of parties and the consequent frittering away of the Romani vote. Romania's 17 Romani parties, for example, are organized primarily along tribal lines and consider each other rivals, not allies. Their ineffectiveness gives the Romanian government an excuse for not paying more attention to Romani concerns.<sup>51</sup> Although some East European Romani leaders blame *gadje* politicians for their political problems, the Roma themselves are largely responsible for the weak performance of their political parties. Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings of their political organizations, the Roma's parties and political activities have dramatically increased the importance of their community in national politics.

Another important and very positive development in the post-Communist era has been the increased publicity about the Roma and their situation. Since 1989 international organizations, human rights groups, foreign and domestic foundations, and the academic community have become far more interested in and knowledgeable about Romani issues. Western-based organizations such as Helsinki Watch, Minority Rights Group, and Amnesty International have done a great deal of important work to publicize the abuses of the Roma's human rights. Domestic and foreign foundations and organizations, such as the Autonomía Alapítvány in Hungary, Romani CRISS in Romania, the U.S.-based Soros foundations, and the Project on Ethnic Relations, among others, have shown that practical programs and initiatives can succeed in making a marked difference in the lives of more and more Romani families. In the post-Communist era, a number of international Romani organizations have become increasingly active and responsive to the needs of the Romani community while other international institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, have pressured East European states to respect minority rights.

## Conclusion

This essay has attempted to explain the changing nature of Romani marginality in 20th-century Europe. In Nazi-occupied Europe, the lives of the Roma were in constant danger, and their only realistic objective was survival. The Communist states of the region attempted to alleviate the socioeconomic marginality of the Roma, but did so insensitively, often with heavy-handed tactics. In the post-Communist era, the political marginality of the Roma has diminished, but for a number of reasons, some of them inherent in their culture, the Roma have been unable to make significant improvements in their lot. At the same time, the dynamics of marketization and economic restructuring have considerably increased their economic and social marginality.

In many ways, the Roma are in the most vulnerable position of all East European ethnic groups. In contemporary Europe, they are dependent on their own meager political and socioeconomic resources and on the benevolent attitudes of the states and societies where they live. The available evidence suggests that they should not rely on such sympathies and that, thus far, their resources have proved largely inadequate. This means that the United States and other democracies must pay more attention to the plight of the East European Roma. Foundations and NGOs that have been successful in providing practical help to the Roma ought to receive further

support. Especially worthy are those that have devised and administered programs that alleviate harmful societal attitudes and their manifestations, such as police violence. Politicians and governments that recognize the state's ability to change negative societal attitudes toward marginal groups through patient, long-term, comprehensive programs should be encouraged. Unfortunately it appears that many East Europeans still equate democracy with equal rights and freedoms for the majority. They may need some help in understanding that one of the best measures of a democracy is the way it treats its minorities.

## NOTES

1. Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 285.
2. Friedlander, 248-250.
3. Michael Zimmermann, *Verfolgt, vertrieben, vernichtet: die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik gegen Sinti und Roma* (Essen: Klartext, 1989), 23-24.
4. Betty Alts and Sylvia Folts, *Weeping Violin: The Gypsy Tragedy in Europe* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson Press, 1996), 19.
5. Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others—Germany 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 57.
6. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was reconstituted after the war in the Federal Republic of Germany as the Max-Planck Institute.
7. Friedlander, 253.
8. Müller-Hill, 144.
9. *Ibid.*, 59.
10. Cited in *Ibid.*, 13.
11. Some recent examples of the growing literature on righteous individuals are Carol Ritter and Sondra Myers, eds., *The Courage to Care: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Gay Block and Malka Drucker, *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992); and Günther B. Ginzel, *Mut zur Menschlichkeit: Hilfe für Verfolgte während der NS-Zeit* (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag, 1993).
12. Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949), 39.
13. Müller-Hill, 18.
14. Alexander Ramati, *And the Violins Stopped Playing: A Story of the Gypsy Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986), 197.

15. Kogon, 129.
16. Sławomir Kaprański, "The Roma and the Holocaust: Inventing Tradition as Identity Building Process" (paper prepared for the Colloquium "Reappraising the Force of Tradition," University of Kent at Canterbury, 7-8 April 1995, 30-31).
17. Andrzej Mirga and Lech Mroz, *Cyganie: Odmienność i nietolerancja* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994), 31, cited in Kaprański, *ibid.*, 31.
18. Aside from the works already cited, see Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); I. Friedman, *The Other Victims: First-Person Stories of Non-Jews Persecuted by the Nazis* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1990); Ian F. Hancock, "'Uniqueness' of the Victims: Gypsies, Jews, and the Holocaust," *Without Prejudice* 1:2 (1988): 45-67; Henry Huttenbach, "The Romani Porajamos: The Nazi Genocide of Europe's Gypsies," *Nationalities Papers* 19:3 (1991): 373-394; Sybil Milton, "Gypsies and the Holocaust," *The History Teacher* 24:4 (1991): 375-387 and "Nazi Policies Towards Roma and Sinti, 1933-1945," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (5th series) 2:1 (1992): 1-18.
19. See, for instance, Leonid Mlechin, "A Gypsy Ballad," *New Times* (Moscow), 13 August 1991, 32-34; "Roma weiter vor Hamburger KZ-Gedenkstätte," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 May 1993; "The Forgotten Holocaust," *Budapest Week*, 18-24 August 1994, 12-13.
20. Grattan Puxon, "The Forgotten Victims," *Patterns of Prejudice* 11:2 (1997): 24.
21. On this point, see Andre Liebich, "Minorities in Eastern Europe: Obstacles to a Reliable Count," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1:20 (15 May 1992), 32-39.
22. Estimates 1-5 are at least partially documented and attempt to explain the methodology yielding the figure. Estimates 6-10 entirely lack supportive evidence. (1) Yehuda Bauer, "Gypsies," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan 1989, 4 vols.), 637; (2) Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (London: Chatto, 1972), 184; (3) Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 824; (4) Donald Kenrick, "Romanies in the Nazi Period," *Cigany Neprajzi Tanulmányok, 1994* (Budapest: Mikszath Kiado, 1994), 70; (5) R. Vossen, *Zigeuner* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 85-86, based on a country-by-country analysis. Cited by Fraser (268) who, rather than making his own estimate, wisely points out that "it is impossible to be categorical about numbers of casualties"; (6) *Ibid.*, 134; (7) *Ibid.*, 243; (8) *Ibid.*, 5; (9) Ian F. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma, 1987), 81; (10) Ian F. Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighboring Lands: A Chronology Leading to the Holocaust and Beyond," in *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, ed. David M. Crowe and John Kolsti (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 20; quoted in Judith Ingram, "Letter from a Gypsy Ball: A Shared Tragic Legacy," *Forward* (National Edition), 17 February 1995, 12.
23. I am grateful to Professor Henry R. Huttenbach for discussing this issue with me.
24. Author's interview with Andrzej Mirga (Kraków, 29 July 1996).
25. Many of those writing on the Roma feel compelled to include a numerical figure in their discussion of the Porajamos. They often base their figures on second- or third-hand sources, hearsay, and unreliable estimates. For instance, in their classic work, Kenrick and Puxon freely admit that their data on the deportation of Hungarian Roma came from "personal conversations," yet they feel confident to publish "precise" numbers. See Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (London: Chatto, 1972), 125. In 1994, Kenrick conceded that "in fact at each revision the figure goes down, not up. This is a reason for relief—the number of

- Gypsies killed was lower than at first thought." See Donald Kenrick, "Romanies in the Nazi Period," *Cigany Neprajzi Tanulmányok*, 1994 (Budapest: Mikszath Kiado, 1994), 70.
26. Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 253.
  27. Laszlo Karsai, *A ciganykerdes Magyarorszagon, 1919-1945: Ut a cigany Holocausthoz* (Budapest: Cserepfalvi, 1992), 7.
  28. See Archduke Joseph with Henrik Wislocki, *A cigányokról* (Budapest: Pallas, 1894); and Willy Guy, "Ways of Looking at Roms: The Case of Czechoslovakia," in *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers*, Farnham Rehfish (London: Academic Press, 1975), 208-210.
  29. See, for instance, Elena Marushiakova and Vaseli Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, unpublished manuscript (1995), 40.
  30. For an excellent study on this issue, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1966).
  31. Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1993), 87.
  32. Interview with Catalin Zamfir, former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs (1990-1991), in Bucharest, Romania, 1 June 1996.
  33. "Aránykülönbőség," *Amaro Drom* (Budapest) 6:3 (March 1996): 15.
  34. On this issue, see Alaina Lemon, "No Land, No Contracts for Romani Workers," *Transition* 2:13 (28 June 1996): 28-31.
  35. See, for instance, Zoltan Barany, "Living on the Edge: The East European Roma in Post-Communist Politics and Societies," *Slavic Review* 53: 2 (Summer 1994): 331.
  36. This phenomenon has been widely chronicled in the literature. For comprehensive treatments, see Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*; and Paul Hockenos, *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
  37. See, for instance, Iona Tomova, *The Gypsies in the Transition Period* (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 1995), 81-84.
  38. Zoltan Barany, "Grim Realities in Eastern Europe," *Transition* 1:4 (29 March 1995): 5.
  39. Ilie Badescu and Dorel Abraham, "Empirical Ethnomorphology: The Ethnic Groups Cohabiting Territory in Romania," in Dorel Abraham, Septimiu Chelcea, and Ilie Badescu, eds., *Interethnic Relations in Romania: Sociological Diagnosis and Evaluation of Tendencies* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Carpatica, 1995), 103.
  40. *Ibid.*, 106, 111.
  41. "Democracy, Economic Reform, and Western Assistance in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland: A Comparative Public Opinion Survey," prepared by Penn and Schoen Associates, Inc., Washington, DC, April 1991; and Jifí Pehe, "Law on Romanies Cases Uproar in Czech Republic," *RFE/RL Research Report* 2:7 (12 February 1993): 20.



42. See, for instance, Fredrik Folkeryd and Ingvar Svanberg, *Gypsies (Roma) in the Post-Totalitarian States* (Stockholm: Olof Palme International Center, 1995) 34-38.
43. See, for instance, Klara Orgovanova's testimony and prepared statement, *Human Rights Abuses of the Roma (Gypsies)*, hearing before the Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations and Human Rights of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 7-8, 26-28.
44. See the interview with Andras Biro, "Helping Self-Help," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 36:140 (Winter 1995): 70-77; and author's interview with Nicolae Gheorghe, Bucharest, Romania, 31 May 1996.
45. "On the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities," *Kisebbsegi Ertesito* (Budapest: Office for the National and Ethnic Minorities, 1993).
46. See Zoltan Barany, "The Roma in Macedonia: Ethnic Politics and the Marginal Condition in a Balkan State," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18:3 (July 1995): 515-31; and Mirjana Najcevska and Natasha Gaber, "Survey Results and Legal Background Regarding Ethnic Issues in the Republic of Macedonia," Center for Ethnic Relations of the University "Sts. Cyril and Methodius" (Skopje), October 1995.
47. See Zoltan Barany, "Favorable Trends for Romania's Roma," *Transition* 1:19 (20 October 1995): 26-31.
48. On this issue, see Barany, "Grim Realities in Eastern Europe," 3-4.
49. See, for instance, Luise Rinser, *Wer wirft den Stein: Zigeuner sein in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1985).
50. "Anti-Gypsy Feelings in Britain," *New York Times*, 25 October 1993, A5.
51. Laura Bruni, "Living on the Edge," *Index on Censorship*, 25: 4 (August 1995): 10.

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