PANEL 6: Memory and Identity (II)

MARTIN HOLLER (Berlin / Germany)

Memory and identity: The perception of the Nazi persecution of Romanies (Gypsies) in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia

My investigation deals with the ways and functions of commemorating the Nazi genocide of Gypsies on the political, cultural and scientific level in Soviet and modern Russia:

The racially motivated persecution and extermination of Gypsies was – like the holocaust – no subject of the Soviet memory of the Second World War. Moreover, the Soviet treatment of the last itinerating Gypsies changed from an arbitrary integration program of the Stalin period to a policy of forced settlement, decreed in 1956.

Today’s federal organization named “National and Cultural Autonomy of Gypsies in Russia” explicitly connects the demand of political rights with the memory of the wartime persecution. The cultivation of memorial places (like in Smolensk), and the forms of self expression through memoirs of survivors, lyrics, songs and movies, both serve as first steps to the creation of a common identity of the ethnically and culturally heterogenic Gypsy community.

Although still underrepresented in public consciousness and mass media, the Gypsy activities nevertheless already reached the state level. In a debate on “The Genocide of the Gypsy people in the Years of the Second World War”, in June 2004, the Duma of the Russian Federation discussed the possibility of additional claims to German compensation for Gypsy survivors of Russian citizenship.

Meanwhile, historians started to work on the reports of the special commission of the NKVD, which allows a new and more detailed insight into the dimension of German atrocities in the occupied Soviet territories from 1941 to 1944.

My presentation is based on new publications in historiography, oral history and journalism, as well as on my own archival research and meetings with Gypsy representatives.

MARTIN HOLLER studied history and Slavic (Polish and Russian) literature in Heidelberg, Moscow, Warsaw and Berlin. At the moment I’m preparing my PhD dissertation in modern history on the “Soviet Politics of Nationalities, using the example of the Romanies (Gypsies), 1923-1939”, which is going to be finished in March 2006. During my archival research in Moscow, Smolensk and Saint Petersburg, I’m also collecting materials on Gypsy history in the Soviet Union during and after the war, and preparing a new project in 2006.

ELENA MARUSHIAKOVA (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences / Bulgaria)

VESELIN POPOV (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences / Bulgaria)

Holocaust and the Gypsies. The reconstruction of the historical memory and creation of new national mythology

The paper will present the processes of rethinking from nowadays point of view of the Holocaust of the Gypsies during the Second World War. The question is not about the individual rethinking from the Holocaust survivors, but about new type of constructing of the historical memory of the whole community, connected with the
processes of it's identity changes in new, ethno-national paradigm. Based on the attempts to create “new collective memory” several odd cases appear in the “secondary” edition of the historical memory of the Holocaust in different countries of Eastern Europe. Parallel with this we are witnessing creation of internal division in the borders of the Gypsy community itself in terms how different layers of Gypsy communities estimate the history of the Holocaust.

In the new collective memory the Holocaust of the Gypsies during the Second World War turns to be key event from their past, together with the migration from India and their slavery in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova during the Middle ages, reaching the nowadays violation of human rights of Roma. Through these main milestones in history the parameters of the image of the Roma as the “eternal victim” in the world history are outlined, and on this base the contemporary Roma activists, working mainly on international level, try to set the accents in the All-European policy towards them. On the other hand, a huge part of the common Gypsies and the activists, working on country level prefer different "reading" of the history and another image of them and often also different terminology. Thus two different visions about the future development of the Gypsies/Roma are formed, and the attitude towards the Holocaust during the W.W.II is one of the main lines of division between them. These two different visions have their place as in the contemporary Roma literature, press, internet pages, so in education materials, prepared in the separate countries and on common-European level.

ELENA MARUSHIAKOVA and VESSELIN POPOV work at the Institute of Ethnography and Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov have a number of publications about Gypsies in Bulgaria, Balkans and Eastern Europe. They major publications include the first monographic research on history, ethnography, social structure and culture of the Gypsies in Bulgaria (1997) and book on Gypsies in Ottoman Empire (2000). They are publishing Series of Collections on Roma folklore “Studii Romani” (vol.1, 1994; vol. II, 1995; vol.III-IV, 1997; vol.V-VI, 1998).

After 1989 they founded the Minority Studies Society STUDII ROMANI. They created also Roma Heritage Museum Fund at National Ethnographical museum in Sofia (1995) and initiated the first museum exhibition about Gypsies in Bulgaria and also the First international museum exhibition “Roma/Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe” in 1998/1999 in Budapest.

From 2001 till 2004 they conducted research of Gypsies in Former Soviet Union in framework of the Complex Research Programme "Difference and integration" of the Universities of Leipzig and Halle. Currently they are involved in establishing of specialised Romani Studies Library with Archive at the Institute of Ethnography and Museum in Sofia.

EVE ROSENHAFT (University of Liverpool / UK)

‘The Gypsy’s Revenge’: Betrayal and personal retribution as themes in the post-Holocaust experience and memory of German Sinti

Issues of trust and breach of trust were central to the trauma suffered by German Sinti between 1933 and 1945. This reflects two peculiarities of their Holocaust experience. First, the context in which they were confronted by the power of the Nazi state was a project of Erfassung carried on in the name of scientific research. What ended as harassment, physical abuse and deportation began with the attempt to learn what both Sinti and Gadje regarded as their ‘secrets’ – their genealogy and
their language – and in order to achieve this the Zigeunerforscher were quite explicit about the need to win the trust of their research subjects/objects. Second, the reversal of expectations of solidarity and of social and generational hierarchy implicit in the kapo system was particularly strongly felt in situations where whole families and communities were incarcerated together (as in the Birkenau Familienlager). To these specific features of the persecution of the Sinti may be added the role of the Sprecher appointed under Himmler’s selection policy to identify ‘pure-blooded Gypsies’ and ‘good Mischlinge’, a role (arguably) analogous to that of the Judenräte. The accusation of betrayal (as distinct from simple collaboration) is thus a recurrent one in post-War Sinti discourse, and it is often associated with reports of denunciation and individual acts of revenge on the part of Romany survivors. This paper will explore this phenomenon and its implications, as a topos of cultural memory and a documented reality. The paper draws on archival research in progress towards a case-study of relations between Sinti families and non-Sinti researchers and sympathisers in Central and Northwest Germany, ca. 1930-1964, and on published sources for the Romany Holocaust experience, including memoirs.

EVE ROSENHAFT is Reader in German Studies at the University of Liverpool (UK). She studied at McGill University and the University of Cambridge, and has held fellowships in Britain, Germany and the United States. She has published widely on aspects of German social history since the eighteenth century, including labour, gender, urban culture, cultures of finance and issues of race and ethnicity.

MICHAEL ZIMMERMANN (University of Bochum / Germany)

Collective memory of German Sinti (Gypsies) after National-Socialist policy of persecution and genocide

Persecution, enforced sterilisation and genocide policy were experiences which remained generally incomprehensible to German Sinti. The death of a beloved family member was unbearable to the extent of de-realising, of suppressing the horrible facts. Family relationships being very close in Sinti-families, the death of a relative or - in the worst case – the survival as sole member of a whole family led to unendurable emotions of guilt and abandonment.

Jewish and political survivors of persecution perceived National-Socialist extermination policy, harassment and humiliation as consequences of anti-Semitism, violent capitalism or totalitarian dictatorship. These patterns of more or less rational explanations enabled action as a consequence of experiencing and surviving persecution. The fight for a socialist revolution, a Jewish state or a non-authoritarian democracy were examples for such activities. Those kinds of interpretations could help to alleviate extreme traumas of imprisonment in concentration or even extermination camps. The majority of Sinti however were unable to develop such patterns of interpretation. The only interpretation left was to point out the dichotomy between Gypsy and non-Gypsy culture. Auschwitz was then interpreted as an attempt to extinguish both life and culture of Gypsies.

Efforts to alleviate feelings of guilt were vital for restoring self-consciousness, and so several ways of reconstructing memory can be stated aiming at giving relief to the overwhelming feeling of having survived ‘at the cost of others’. Nevertheless, there remains a considerable number of survivors incapable of constructing reasonable explanations for unbearable traumatising experiences. They are trapped in dreadful and threatening anguish. They suffer from the stigma of the ‘anti-social’ and ‘inferior’ Gypsy, constructed by their persecutors as a weapon against them.
**Michael Zimmermann** studied history, social sciences and Latin. He wrote his dissertation on the historical transformation of a miners’ village between 1880 and 1980, and has published for years on the history of Gypsies and Gypsy policy in Germany and Europe, with an emphasis on the National Socialist regime’s genocidal policy. He has also published on the history of German Jewry, and on National Socialism and racism in general. Currently he is working as a historian with the city of Essen (directing an exhibition project on Essen under National Socialist rule), as Privatdozent at Bochum University, and as visiting professor at the Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna. His book, *Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische ‘Lösung der Zigeunerfrage’* received the University of Jena’s academic award in 1997.