

**RECOGNIZING THE ROMA: A STUDY OF THE  
HOLOCAUST AS VIEWED IN ROMANIA**

by

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## **Dedication**

In memory of my grandmother Irene Earnest

To my daughter Calia Alexe

My two loving and lovely women of May.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Forgive us, brothers and sisters, for what was, since we will construct the future of Romania together.  
– Romanian President Traian Bănescu<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation aims to clarify how some Romanian Roma, a virtually unknown class of victims of the Holocaust, make sense of their persecution experiences that occurred under the regime of pro-Nazi leader Ion Antonescu during WWII, when hundreds of thousands of Jews and tens of thousands of Roma were deported to camps in occupied Soviet territories.<sup>2</sup> It also aims to analyze how non-Roma Romanians think about of the Holocaust and its victims in light of their national narrative that for decades had denied that Romania was a perpetrator in the Holocaust. The central tenet of the Romanian narration was that ethnic Romanians were the primary victims of the war, thus excluding the victimization of Jews and Roma from historiography and thus from public consciousness.

While the Holocaust seems to loom ever larger in American and European conceptualizations of the ultimate genocide, for the most part it continues to do so without incorporating the story of the Romani victims.<sup>3</sup> Why has there been so little scholarship on the fate of the Roma during the Holocaust? As we shall discover in the

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<sup>1</sup> Speech given by Traian Bănescu on 22 October 2007 when he award three Romani survivors the Order for the Faithful, one of the highest civilian honors given, for having survived the horrors of Transnistria.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the word *Roma* or *Gypsy* is often politically charged, and a plethora of opinions exist regarding which term should be used, with activists and elites claiming that the term *Gypsy* has derogatory connotations and advocating instead for using *Roma*, which means *people* in the Romani language. Historically, Roma tended to self-identify based on traditional occupational categories, such as miner, wood carver, bear trainer, musician, etc., and not on the generic terms of *țigani* or *romi*. Many self-identify as *țigani* and not as *romi*, and this was the case with most of my Romani respondents as well, but the term *Roma* is becoming more common in academia. In my dissertation, I will use the word *Roma* to refer to the Romani peoples, and *țigan* or *Gypsy* when a speaker or a document refers to Roma with those terms.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the evolution of the definition of Jewish Holocaust survivors, see Tim Cole (1999). *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold*. New York: Routledge.



following pages, the answers are complex, as the omission of the Romani genocide is linked to post-war history, current politics, the low socio-economic status of Roma, and ethnic tensions among compatriots. The image of the Roma as victims also does not fit with long-held, negative stereotypes about this group as ‘victimizers’ of majority groups, schemata that contributed to their wartime tragedy and still lie today at the root of discrimination against Roma.<sup>4</sup>

I wrote this dissertation in hopes of contributing to a better understanding of the Holocaust as a phenomenon as well as of its consequences today by including the past and current plight of Roma. The event, while fairly distant in time, is still relevant today on many levels as racism and violence against Roma are not abetting in a more unified, human rights driven Europe.<sup>5</sup> In fact, some countries have seen an increase in anti-Roma attitudes as economic troubles once again prompt ultra-nationalists to scapegoat Roma as ‘outsiders’ in their own societies and their weakness as a marginalized and stateless ethnic group makes them a much easier target for populists and xenophobes than other, better organized groups who enjoy higher socio-economic status and can rely on the structures and influence of a state to promote their cause.<sup>6</sup> These anti-Romani sentiments can and do turn into attacks on Roma, and they are not just confined to new European Union member states that have traditionally larger populations of Roma. Italy and Ireland, alongside the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, have witnessed anti-Roma violence, sometimes turning deadly.<sup>7</sup> It is the very placement of Roma as externally

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<sup>4</sup> A World Bank study found that Romanians held negative perceptions of Roma considering them to be “troublemakers, sources of conflict and social deviation,” as quoted in the Opinion Research Project Commissioned by the World Bank. Final Report: Qualitative Survey (Focus Groups) Attitudes Towards the Roma in Romania July 2005, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> See Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe Resolution 1740 (2010) The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe, accessed on July 5 2010 at: <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/eRES1740.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> For example in Hungary, the extremist Jobbik party campaigning on anti-Jewish and anti-Gypsy platform won 17% of the vote in 2010 elections. According to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), nine Roma have been killed over the past two years in violent attacks in Hungary. In the Czech Republic, the now banned Worker’s Party also stirred up anti-Roma sentiments. In 2009, neo-Nazis in the town of Vitkov burned a 3-year-old Roma girl in an attack on Romani peoples living there. Although only 7% of Czechs voted for extremists in the last elections, the EU is closely monitoring anti-Gypsy actions there. Slovakia as well, has had problems with nationalists targeting Roma. In 2007-08, Italy was grappling with migration issues, where Romanian Roma were at the center of disputes on political policy for migration with anti-Roma sentiments running high.

<sup>7</sup> Even as I write, Europe is conflicted on what to do about Roma migrants. Reuters New Agency has reported that French President Nicholas Sarkozy “ordered the dismantling of 300 illegal camps of travelers and Roma across France as part of a fight against crime and urban violence.” French officials announced on

excluded other in almost all European societies that prompted me as a sociologist to investigate the history of Nazi-era policies toward Roma, and the continuing legacies of inequality that affect Roma today as Europe's largest transnational minority.

There are several questions that animate this dissertation regarding the place of Roma in history and in contemporary Romanian society. First and foremost, I ask: How do ethnic Romanians and Roma understand and represent the Holocaust? Why have Roma in Romania been left out of the country's collective memory? What is the Holocaust history of the Romani minority and why have their oppressions been silenced? Furthermore, do Roma remember and recount their genocide experiences, or have they engaged in collectively forgetting, as many scholars purport in their analysis of Roma and the Holocaust (Grigore 2007, Clendinnen 1999, Fonseca 1995)? The second set of questions that intrigues me revolves around the possibility of changing the national narrative. Given the absence of Roma in historiography and thus in the national narrative, alongside pervasive negative sentiments of non-Roma towards them, what can be done to change misrecognition of the Romani suffering? To what extent will the addition of Roma in historiography create a greater understanding of them as an ethnic minority? Will it assist in increasing tolerance toward Roma and re-shaping inter-ethnic relations in Romania? How does the inclusion of Roma suffering improve the understanding of the Holocaust?

These particular questions and their answers are important for two reasons. First, they allow for an investigation of societal inequalities that over 60 years ago ultimately led to genocide of a vulnerable ethnic minority, which, because of its low social status in European societies, was easily victimized by the Nazis and their collaborators. The attempted genocide of Romani peoples in some countries irrevocably altered the landscape of cultures, and in the case of Romania, the Holocaust nearly destroyed the

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29 July 2010 that Roma who are illegally in France will be fingerprinted at the border and then deported to their respective countries. This policy flies in the face of EU rights, such as the right to free movement among EU citizens. Human rights groups are protesting the targeting of one ethnic group, the Roma, as racist. The policy smacks of Italian influence, as two years ago the government run by Silvio Berlusconi began fingerprinting Roma in Italy as part of a get-tough-on-crime platform after Roma immigrants were accused of fueling crime sprees. The deportations have fueled accusations of Nazi-like behavior enacted by French and Italian governments. For more on this, see Gerald Bond, "France to dismantle Roma camps, expel offenders," July 28, 2010 available at [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), and Richard Owen, "Italy gypsies find echoes of Nazism in fingerprinting move," July 5, 2008. *The Times*, available at: [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk).

nomadic Roma population and gravely affected the lives of its surviving victims. I believe that investigation of this absconded history and its dissemination can lead to a re-evaluation of the relationship of Roma and their compatriots. The current relationship is precariously strained, in part, by an exclusionary national narrative that omits Roma from it and works to maintain current power relations where Roma are the least privileged group in society. As Stacey and Thorne argued in the “The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology,” many times the gaps are in the record for a reason and adding a group overlooked in general theories is a step toward more effective accounts of societies in general. The authors called for “a process of paradigm shifting” to change the orienting assumptions about a discipline (Stacey and Thorne:1985:302). Following in their steps, I would propose that adding the narratives of Roma survivors will also help gain an insight into today’s issues of discrimination, racism, inequality.

The second reason that the study of Romani genocide victims is sociologically interesting is because it adds historical dimensions and complications to the narrative of the Holocaust. It also gives the possibility of a comparative look at victimization experiences both in Holocaust and in genocide studies, and may substantially inform us about the role that social status plays in the acknowledgement of mass atrocities. Additionally, Romani accounts may allow for the discovery of patterns in genocide denials based on historical constructions of the national events, regardless if the deniers are Romanians, Turks, or Poles. I am especially focused on the role that education plays as a site of remembrance and as a vehicle driving it, and how those memories might be recast in different periods depending on the political structures of the countries. This provides me then with an opportunity to examine how recognition functions and what social boundaries frame it.

### **Research Philosophy, Methods and Chapter Directions**

I employ a variety of research methods from social science disciplines that have allowed me to develop further my primary interests in Romani memory, and the conceptualizations of non-Roma of it. While qualitative methods – interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, are employed throughout the dissertation, each

chapter will explore its own research questions and methods used to address those, alongside relevant literature. Without a doubt, at the center this dissertation are the Romani testimonies, as told to me by over 150 survivors, who graciously gave me hours of their time to share some of the most devastating and traumatizing experiences that human beings can suffer. Roma survivors were typically over the age of 65 when I interviewed them, most living in isolated areas across Romania, a country of almost 22 million people that like many of its neighbors experienced the allure of fascism, the shackles of communism, and the struggles of democracy. These survivors are, and historically have been, marginalized in Romanian society, just like the rest of the Romani population. They are the poorest of the poor, the disenfranchised, who battle daily poverty and often discrimination. And I have been privileged and enriched by knowing them.

While I felt passionately about my research, many of the Romanians I met over the years of fieldwork were not only disdainful regarding my conversations with Roma, but their remarks were also replete with prejudice. Comments ranged from dangers of the ‘criminal’ element of Romani communities: “Be careful,” “Watch your wallet,” to the more extreme and common expression of a desire to rid the country of Roma: “Too bad Antonescu didn’t finish what he started.” After years spent in fruitless arguments about human rights and tolerance for all minorities, I decided that redressing these attitudes would take more than collecting information and publishing it.<sup>8</sup> I had to figure out how to disseminate it, transferring my knowledge for larger public spheres.

I was figuring out how to engage in public sociology, to bring the story of the Romani genocide to Romanian and international audiences. Perhaps best defined by Michael Burrowoy (2005), public sociology enables academics to put their research out for general audiences and to participate in public conversations about the nature of society, illustrating gaps between the reality and the promises of what could be. According to Burrowoy, public sociology often involves discussions of “values or goals that are not automatically shared by both sides so that reciprocity, or as Habermas (1984) calls it ‘communicative action,’ is often hard to sustain. Still, it is the goal of public

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<sup>8</sup> In 1999, I published a book chapter “Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria 1942-44” in Donald Kenrick, ed. *In the Shadow of the Swastika*. Hatfield [UK]: University of Herfordshire Press.

sociology to develop such a conversation” (p.9). Drawing from the strengths of our discipline, as Burowoy notes, public sociology is positioned to inform public discussions of issues such as class and racial inequalities, as well as on state and non-state violence. Teaching is a central tenet for Burowoy, since students can then go forth and explore the conversations that are on-going and perhaps inform them with their own work, down whatever path they may chose in life.

In 1999, I started filming a documentary, transforming my research into an audio-visual medium meant for wider audiences, or what sociologist Michael Schudson’s (1989:153) might label as a ‘discrete symbolic object’ of culture. With *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies*, I hoped to impact national consciousness about the Holocaust by starting public conversations about the unexamined role of the Romanian state in the wartime persecution of Roma, and by extension, the legacy of those atrocities on today’s society. Once the film was completed in 2005, screenings of it began across the country at schools, cultural centers, museums, festivals and even on public television. While feeling gratified that the film was provoking public dialogues, which I judged by the media attention it received in print, television and radio stories, I knew those were fleeting and I wanted more. I became interested in types of discussions that were happening around *Hidden Sorrows* among non-Roma audiences, so I held post-screening dialogues with viewers. I soon discovered that the film revealed not only Romanians’ knowledge of the Holocaust, but also exposed their current perceptions of the Roma minority. The next step for me was achieving Schudson’s sense of “retrievability,” by making the film accessible to many through schools. I wanted institutional retention, which Schudson (1989) argued is powerful because it allows cultural objects to enter school classrooms, thereby entering “into the knowledge formally required for citizenship...” (p170). Civil society provided this access for me, as I formed a non-profit organization with Romanian colleagues that focuses on civic education. We produced educational materials around the film about Roma and the Holocaust for distribution in the school system, with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Research, and began working with history and civics teachers in training sessions on Holocaust education to ensure that the reproduction of knowledge about this subject would continue.

Each of the following chapters, summarized in the next paragraphs, will detail more precisely my academic engagements focusing on the recognition of Roma as survivors and teaching about their genocide. I bring in several analytical tools from sociology to break down my primary questions. After this, I will outline the position of sociological research regarding the Holocaust, discuss Romania as a case study, before clarifying the wartime fate of Romanian Roma, post-war Holocaust consciousness, and majority attitudes regarding the Roma minority. Once the cultural context is known and implicitly held assumptions are unveiled, the substance of the dissertation will emerge in the following pages.

In Chapter Two, I shed light on how Roma understand their Holocaust experiences, from their arrest and deportation from Romania to concentration camps in occupied Ukraine by drawing upon qualitative interviews conducted with over 150 Roma survivors of Transnistria. As Roma have been marginalized in studies of the Holocaust, by providing representations of Romani memory we can begin to conceptualize the transformative experience for those who survived genocide and the impact that it had on their lives. In doing so, the transmission of their accounts is essential for re-inserting Romani voices back into the history of the Holocaust in Romania. This, in turn, provides a means of fostering change in the misconceptions that most Romanians hold about the fate of the Roma during WWII. Testimonies allow for a personalization of experience that is accessible for ordinary Romanians. By focusing on one case study that is buttressed with other interviews, a vivid image emerges of how the policy of deportation and internment played out for Roma in Transnistria. Themes around the narratives, such as hunger, disease, and escape from camps provide insights into how Romani prisoners attempted to maintain their agency and social structure given the structural and power constraints that governed life in the Romanian-run concentration camps. The narratives also allow for a comparative perspective with other sufferers of genocides.

In Chapter Three, I look at transforming the Romani narratives into a cultural product, a documentary film I co-produced about the Romani genocide that acts as a memory-object, or a representation of the Romani experiences during WWII that bases its storyline on survivor testimonies. The making of the documentary is an attempt to create a tool that can be used to change collective memory among Romanians, as it has

acquired institutionalized status having been introduced into the Romanian school system in 2005. To gauge the film's reception among students and to see if it assisted in changing misconceptions of Roma, empirical work among students was undertaken. I analyze the patterns of conceptualization of Roma and the Holocaust, some of which demonstrate grounds for optimism that the myths of Holocaust denial and Antonescu cult are not entirely inculcated yet in Romania's youth, while others illustrate grounds for pessimism as a number of young people are unable to reconcile the victimization of Roma with their own with racist attitudes toward them at present. Thus the materials delve into the difficulties present to inculcate a change in the dominant historical narrative regarding the Holocaust.

In Chapter Four, the last substantive chapter, I look at how the Romanian education system has re-structured to incorporate Holocaust education into its curricula over the past twelve years, and by extension, the space that has been allotted to the fate of the Roma, which has only been recently focused upon. This analysis provides an overall assessment of the understanding of the Holocaust among educators with an emphasis on the need for further professionalization in this subject area. Empirical data were collected from teacher training seminars as well as focus groups, providing insight into the perceptions of educators of both the Holocaust and Roma as a former victim category. Those discussions permit a break down in substantive areas, including what enables learning for teachers, and where foundations for resistance to that learning may sit. Through a comparative look at European educators who are also relatively new to incorporation of Roma into Holocaust education problems, a deeper profile emerges around methods to change the misrecognition of the Romani tragedy.

### **Romania as a Case Study**

Romania makes for a powerful case study for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, until 2003 Romania had an official policy of denying that its wartime regime had a role in the Holocaust. After Nazi Germany, its wartime ally, the Antonescu regime perpetrated the largest massacres during the Holocaust, a well-concealed and horrible distinction that few know about, even in academia (Ioanid 2009). Since 2004, however,

the country's administrations have gone through major attitudinal shifts in recognizing the past atrocities, a development that has had a vital impact on memory-work in public institutions and especially in the field of education where Holocaust history is now mandatory. I believe that analysis of teaching the Holocaust provides rich insight concerning the evolution of public memory as it affects national consciousness. I situate Romania's attempt to re-claim a portion of its absconded history and place it back in the classroom within the wide spectrum of Holocaust education programs internationally, in line with those of Poland and Hungary, two other former communist states that are now dealing with their corroded pasts, and with similar efforts in the U.S. or the U.K. as they attempt to use the history as part of civic education.<sup>9</sup> It is the intersection of these two relatively new subjects in the Romanian curricula, the Holocaust and civic education, which fascinates me. It is noteworthy that the crimes of the Holocaust, rather than the more recent and perhaps all too raw crimes of communism, are put forth as ways of shaping morality in youth and developing their commitment to a democratic (and implicitly tolerant) society. Conversations with teachers reveal that this is a main goal in their teachings about the Holocaust, however as my investigation will show, little of this moral element is implied through teaching materials or their classroom reception.

The second reason that the Romanian case is a powerful one for analysis is because of the country's large Roma minority. Romanian historiography on past atrocities that affect Roma, such as slavery and the Holocaust, is nearly silent.<sup>10</sup> Anthropologist Bernard Cohn, as cited in Sider and Smith, argued that anthropologists and historians "cannot deal with history only as the reconstruction of what has happened," but they "must also deal with the fact that events have consequences for those people who are our 'subjects' up to and including their total destruction" (Sider and Smith 1997:4). What drew me as a sociologist to this topic was not the silence of history regarding Roma, because the documents and relics are available in public archives detailing their long presence in Romanian spaces, but rather the erasure of Roma *in*

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<sup>9</sup> For more on Holocaust education in the United Kingdom and Canada, see Geoffrey Short and Carole Anne Reed (2004). *Issues in Holocaust Education*, Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd

<sup>10</sup> Historian Shannon Woodcock writes that some 75% of Romanian respondents in a recent internet poll did not know that Roma were enslaved in Romania, and some 45% said that they did believe it. See Shannon Woodcock (2008). "The Țigan Other as Catalyst for the Creation of Modern Romania," in *Anuarul Centrului de Studii Rome*, Vol. 1, pp.41-72.



historiography that intellectual elites produced and continue producing, that then gets translated into classroom materials.<sup>11</sup>

Experts on Holocaust education are generally in agreement that teaching the topic is beneficial for a variety of reasons, from making students better citizens through studying history to preventing future genocides by sensitizing students to individual and governmental responsibilities (Totten and Feinberg 2001, Totten 2002, Short 1991, Schweber 2004). Although not all agree on which lessons should be extracted, many focus on the mechanisms behind the Holocaust and morality lessons that can be produced in a post-Holocaust world (Short and Reed 2004, Schweber and Findling 2007). Anti-racist education is also a strong motivator for many teachers to educate their students about the Holocaust (Brown and Davies 1998, Short 2000, Schweber and Findling 2007). If, as Karlsson and Zander (2004) argue, the growing base of European identity is grounded in the Holocaust, then lessons such as those mentioned above could be essential in structuring an informed citizenry that is actively cognizant of the dangers of prejudice and discrimination. By looking at the Romanian case, we shall see that learning about the Holocaust, even when “done right” as outlined by methodologists, is a challenge for fostering deeper understandings of racism and prejudice, and strengthening notions of inclusive citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sociology Confronts Genocide**

While the topics of mass killings, genocide, and the Holocaust pertain to multiple levels of sociological analysis, far too few sociologists have pursued research on these issues. Are the subjects too unpleasant? Does the comparative aspect inherent in sociology seemingly delegitimize or demean the suffering of certain groups? Are the answers of why and how too horrific or too banal for contemplation? These are the questions also posed by Zygmunt Bauman (1988) over twenty years ago as he probed the reasons for sociology’s failure to adequately tackle the subject of the Holocaust. When

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<sup>11</sup> See *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*. (2005). Iași: Polirom.

<sup>12</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe protocols, the Council of Europe, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, etc.

Bauman examined works of historians and theologians, who delved deeply into the Holocaust, he pointed out that the absence of sociological inquiry made the discipline look as if was engaging in “a collective exercise in forgetting and eye-closing” (p.477). Bauman went on to note:

By and large, we need not bother with the challenge of the Holocaust in our daily professional practice. As a profession, we have succeeded in all but forgetting it, or shelving it away into the ‘specialist interests’ area, from where it stands no chance of reaching the mainstream of the discipline (p.478).

By confining the study of the Holocaust to the experience of Jews and those who killed them, sociology left the event and its aftermath virtually untouched, according to Bauman. He argued that if the Holocaust was covered in Sociology, it was exemplified as a sad example of human aggression left untamed, the solution to which was further increases in the civilization process.<sup>13</sup> Sociological thinking, according to Bauman, should focus on modernity, which he argued, in its bureaucratic, technological, and structural forms, or in a Weberian “modern administration” imbued with efficiency and devoid of ethics, was the necessary condition that allowed for the Holocaust to occur (Bauman 1988:481).

As disturbingly more incidents of genocide occur, it seems appropriate that sociologists take up researching these accounts.<sup>14</sup> Even though increasingly more of us are looking at genocides, there still is a lot of work to do yet in the discipline. It is hard to comprehend why sociology hasn’t investigated more seriously genocides, since one of its burgeoning specialties, criminology, examines elements of crime and deviance at the macro and micro levels. The distribution of power, the dynamics of race, ethnicity and religion, and social inequalities that often are components of genocides are key themes in our discipline. However, it appears that when states become perpetrators of the most violent of crimes, mass murder, which delineates the ultimate form of exclusion a society

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<sup>13</sup> Bauman labels the civilization process a ‘myth’ that is repeated taught in courses, in which the elevation of society from barbarity occurs through the ongoing process of civilization.

<sup>14</sup>In 2007 for the first time at the American Sociological Association Conference, there was a panel on comparative genocides that included the prominent genocide scholar Helen Fein. The panel organizer opened the session by telling us how difficult it had been to convince the ASA organizers to sponsor the first panel of its kind, one that was dealing with Darfur among other genocides.

can perpetrate, sociology still lags behind other disciplines in their investigations.<sup>15</sup>

William Gamson (1995) pointed out that the politics of exclusion need to be addressed in our field. He noted that active exclusion (such as genocide) is separation of a group from what Helen Fein calls the ‘universe of obligation,’ as people who “must be taken into account, to whom obligations are due, by whom we can be held responsible for our actions (p.7). American sociologists generally have not engaged the study of genocide in ways that they have studied slavery or other forms of inequality. The reasons for this are various (Kennedy and Centano 2007) and beyond the purpose of this dissertation.

In 2007, sociologists Judith Gerson and Diane Wolf co-edited a book, *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diaspora* that basically re-animated the issues that Bauman had questioned some twenty years before: why is it that sociologists generally do not study the Holocaust? In doing so, the authors open up the volume with a virtual invitation to the topic of my dissertation. Much like Bauman, Gerson and Wolf note the strides made in sociology toward Holocaust and genocide studies,<sup>16</sup> but find that the Holocaust, in particular, remains pigeon-holed as a subject for ethnic studies. They appeal to the academic community to widen the grid of Holocaust studies to spur more generalizable and sophisticated understandings of the Holocaust (Gerson and Wolf: 2007:3). They also advocate for the inclusion of Roma, gays, and others into the study of the Holocaust, writing that:

more inclusive scholarship stands to complicate a unified narrative and promises to yield more sophisticated and nuanced knowledge of the subject. That said, the existing scholarship on Gypsies and the Holocaust in the social sciences remains sparse, and an apparent void exists in sociology” (p.29).

My work attempts to fill a void in the social sciences by increasing empirical knowledge of the genocide against Roma. In particular, I focus on what the victims themselves

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<sup>15</sup> Very few sociological conferences deal with genocide as a topic. As a discipline, anthropology has done a much better job of studying genocide, and historians are, by far, the most prolific writers on this topic.

<sup>16</sup> For just a few of those who have worked on these topics, see Talcott Parsons (1993) Hein Fein (1979;1993), Barrington Moore (1978), Leo Kuper (1981), Zygmunt Bauman (1989;2004), William Brunstein (1998, 2003), Chalk and Jonassohn (1990), Ronald J. Berger (2002) Jeffrey Alexander et al., (2004), Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder (2006), Fatma Muge Gocek (2006), Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley (2006) Judith Gerson and Diane Wolf (2007), Jeffrey Olick (2007).

contribute to our understanding of this genocide and on the discourse surrounding it in Romanian society today.

My research builds on the works of authors such as Irina Carolta Silber, Arlene Stein and Diane Wolf, who emphasize the importance of the victim account for understanding genocide and its social consequences. Silber concentrates on how stories of personal, familial, and communal violence work outside of social movements in the reconstruction of the nation post-event (Silber 2007: 176). She argues that context of telling and retelling is important because it provides us with an understudied dimension of the Holocaust. This approach seeks to write against the prototypical survivors by giving voice to a range of experiences that she marks as historically silenced. Silber writes that using narrative leads us to a de-centering of a master narrative of the Holocaust. She believes that larger themes such as diaspora, the politics of memory, and the terrain of social justice, strongholds of sociology, then are opened for study. Susan Vromen explores in her work on hidden Jewish children in Belgian convents during WWII aspects of collective memory and cultural politics around the acts of hiding and the rescuing those children. She stresses that narratives examine “how collective memories emerge, how they are institutionalized, and how gendered memorial trajectories are constructed” (Vromen 2007: 134). Arlene Stein takes a different approach in her research by examining which stories become tellable, and under what conditions those narratives then are told. Stein suggests that the opening of cultural space for narratives can sometimes work as a “politicization of trauma” that can be used for “progressive political ends” (Stein 2007:91). Author Diane Wolf also looks at the way collective memory can inform identity through linkages between Holocaust testimonials by employing a case study of one survivor to trace the construction of narrative in identity.

Additionally to working on survivor narratives, I am also looking at scholarship that demonstrates that evidence of genocide is not enough to inspire recognition; one needs additionally to place the narrative into the story of the country's own history, which constitutes a deconstruction of the previous historiography and its ties to nationalism. Authors Geneviève Zubrzycki and Fatma Muge Gocek adeptly enrich informing on these issues in their research. In her book *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, Geneviève Zubrzycki

develops a re-articulation of the relationship of religion and nation through the prism of a contested recognition of genocide in Poland. Among other variables, Zubrzycki examines how the dominant narrative of Auschwitz was Sovietized during the communist period, placing those who suffered in the camp systems as “victims of fascism” who were saved by the Red Army (Zubrzycki 2006:105). Post-communism, the dominant narrative of Polish victimization of the war is broken open by pivotal events, such as the War of the Crosses, that challenge the Polish collective memory of Auschwitz being a place of predominantly Polish citizens' suffering to one of predominantly Jewish suffering, which Zubrzycki labels “narrative shock” (Zubrzycki 2006:214). It is the battle over place and memory that ignites a debate over Polish identity that is played out in the intersecting fields of religion and nationhood.

The research of Fatma Muge Gocek on the Armenian massacres and its complicated history with the Ottoman Empire and Turkish nation-state illustrates how another country has been dealing with conflicting accounts of its history. Gocek assists in developing further the politics of recognition through the study of nationalism. She argues that the perspective of the dominant group's narrative is central to understanding the deep rift that goes from act of violence to act of acknowledgment (or rather lack thereof) in the Armenian case. Using gender and subaltern studies as frameworks for inspiration, Gocek writes that adding an alternative narrative of the account is a way to broaden the Turkic paradigm of events. Gocek argues that the Turkish state, through its coercive techniques of labeling dissenters as traitors and casting doubt on their character, attempts to “coax its all its citizens into supporting tacitly an imagined interpretation of the Armenian issue” which it then “prevails on citizens not to challenge the state's contention as to what happened” (Gocek 2006:109). This is neither a fruitful nor healthy environment in which to expand scholarship on the transfer and murder of Armenians. Gocek's contribution to this debate is to frame it in the larger picture of Ottoman/Turkish historiography as she looks for both rhetoric and silences in texts that articulate the master narrative (Gocek 2006:110). Gocek stresses that the study of nationalism, both Turkish and Armenian, needs to be reintroduced into the scholarship of the Armenian massacres to derive a more complete understanding of it.

## Historical background: Roma and the Holocaust

The Nazis, their allies and subordinates killed between 100,000 and 250,000 European Roma. Biology was the basis of persecution of the Roma, just as it was for the Jews (Burleigh and Wiperman 1991, Milton 1991, Friedlander 1997, Hilberg 2000). The Nazis perceived Roma and Sinti as being “alien to the community” and subjected them to sterilization, isolation, deportation and extermination (Zimmermann 2001:415).

Designated as “racial inferiors” “spies” “asocial” and/or “criminal,” Roma and Sinti became targets of the genocidal campaign. Historian Henry Friedlander (1995), in his evaluation of Nazi eugenics, stated that: “The final solution applied to Gypsies as well as Jews” and he went on to note that the SS *Einsatzgruppen* shot them in the East alongside their killing sprees of Jews. Friedlander also stated that “just as the European Jews were either deported to the East by the Germans or killed locally by Germany’s allies, Gypsies everywhere faced death at the hands of the Germans or their local collaborators” (p.290).

Preeminent Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg (2000) believed that the fates of Jews and Roma were intertwined during the Holocaust, and they had to be studied together as the similarities in Nazi policies towards them outweighed the differences.<sup>17</sup> Hilberg remarked that both groups had similar historical positions as diasporatic peoples who were persecuted for centuries, and both were misunderstood by majority populations living alongside them. According to Hilberg, before the Nazis came to power, Jews living in Germany felt they were fairly assimilated. The Roma, however, were far from reaching the same state of integration. Their low status made Roma particularly vulnerable to persecution as Hilberg noted that even prior to the outbreak of the war the Nazis didn’t have to be very careful in their “surgical separation” of Gypsies, as they did with the Jews who Nazis had “difficulties in killing off” because “they had a place in society.”<sup>18</sup> The separation and killing of the Roma was different because they were considered by Germans as “the lowest of the low,” meaning that “one could already begin to say: ‘Get

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<sup>17</sup> Raul Hilberg, a political scientist and historian, was one of the first scholars in the U.S. to write seriously about the Holocaust, and his work *The Destruction of the European Jews*, originally published in 1961, is considered still the backbone of Holocaust studies.

<sup>18</sup> The audio recording of the seminar on 21 September 2000 held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, including Hilberg’s speech, is available at:  
<http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/symposia/symposium/2000-09-21/>.

out of your home.’ ‘Go to some little place in the city near the railroad track, some undesirable part in your carts, live in a shack.’” He went on to draw the parallel that both ethnic groups were on the lists of Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and the Gypsies “were gassed in the same gas chambers as the Jews.” He asks rhetorically: “And what other ethnic group was subjected to gassing? What other ethnic group?”

In Romania, a part of the Romani population was subjected to deportation to camps, and this tragedy must be placed in the context of the larger devastation of Roma across Europe. Although the particulars of the deportation and internments were homegrown in Romania, as Radu Ioanid (2009) eloquently articulated, the pattern of persecution against Roma was replicated through part of Nazi-controlled Europe. As Nazi ideology made its way through the region, there was growing concern by some Romanian eugenics proponents that the purity of the Romanian ethnicity was being threatened by rising inter-marriage with Roma, especially in the bulging periphery of cities where ex-peasants, Roma and small merchants were rapidly settling as the country was urbanizing and industrializing (Kelso 1999, Achim 2004). Backed by Nazi Germany, the Antonescu regime, which came to power in 1940, was encouraged to rid Romania of “undesirable populations,” primarily Jews and Roma.<sup>19</sup> The policy began with a part of the Jewish population in 1941, and expanded to Roma a year later. In 1942, the Romanian government dictated that two categories of Roma were to leave immediately: all the nomads and settled populations of Roma deemed “dangerous” by the regime.<sup>20</sup> The latter category included Roma with criminal records and supposedly indigent families. Some 25,000 Roma, or around 12% of the total population in Romania, were deported to concentration camps in Transnistria.

Upon their arrival in the region, authorities dispersed deportees into remote areas to be used as forced laborers. Shortages of housing, food, petrol, medicine and other necessities translated into abysmal living conditions for the deportees. The Roma disintegrated from the forces of hunger, cold, disease and wretchedness. In 1944 when the Eastern front fell the camp prisoners were liberated, a little over half of those Roma

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<sup>19</sup>General Ion Antonescu came to power after King Carol II abdicated his throne in 1940. Antonescu briefly formed a government with the Iron Guard Party, a Romanian pro-fascist movement, and then became sole dictator in January 1941 after Guardists attempted to oust him from power. Antonescu allied with Hitler, joining the war on the side of the Axis on 22 June 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Romanian National Archives, IGJ, 126/1942, p.209

deported had survived. Roma who returned to Romania after the liberation from camps had little to no opportunities to represent their traumatic experiences.<sup>21</sup> Roma strove to settle back into some semblance of their pre-war life, which was difficult as the country transitioned from fascism to communism, another major and disruptive upheaval. While survivors recall having told their non-Roma neighbors of their experience upon returning home, they also were attempting to blend into the crowd, so to speak, to avoid being targeted once again for their skin color and lifestyle, by 'Romanianizing' as much as was possible.

In 2003, the Romanian government stirred up international outrage when it officially denied that the Holocaust took place in Romania, despite the deportations by the pro-Nazi regime led by Ion Antonescu. In the wake of this scandal, then-President Ion Iliescu bowed to international pressures and created the International Commission for Studying the Holocaust in Romania, headed by Elie Wiesel, a Romanian-born Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize laureate. In November 2004, the Commission presented its conclusions to Iliescu, stating in its Final Report that the Antonescu regime was responsible for the deaths of at least 280,000 Jews and over 11,000 Roma. Noting that its report came after six decades of Holocaust denial, the panel urged authorities to disseminate materials on the Holocaust and to organize public debates to raise awareness of this hidden history.

The foreign pressure on Romania to acknowledge the atrocities committed by its wartime regime was intense as the country was trying to solidify its Euro-Atlantic ties through admission into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and accession talks with the European Union (Shafir 1997, Chioveanu 2003, Kelso 2007). For decades, the official narrative promoted by the Communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu was one of omission and/or denial about the country's role as a perpetrator in the Holocaust and re-assessing its role meant that a major shift in the national consciousness would have to occur. As it had in many Eastern bloc countries, communist-era dominance of the Soviets had influenced the Romanian apparatchik to construct its collective memory of the Holocaust so that Nazi Germany bore the burden of genocide (alongside its Hungarian henchmen in

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<sup>21</sup> Jews were not granted a public space either until the war trials, however by 1945 the Jewish Federation began collecting their testimonies as evidence.



the Romanian case) while Romanian involvement was minimalized, if it was covered at all (Braham 1997, Cioflâncă 2003).<sup>22</sup> Post-communism Romania, like Poland, was forced into a repositioning of the national narrative about the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup> In a major blow to the dominant narrative that Romanians were victims of the Second World War, the officially sanctioned Wiesel Commission's Final Report produced a counter-narrative that the Romanian regime perpetrated genocides against Jews and Roma, which has added complexity and new meanings to the Romanian conceptualization of WWII victimhood and to their national identity.<sup>24</sup>

As we know, the presence or absence of genocide narratives shapes peoples' identities (Young 1993, Gocek 2006, Zubryzcki 2006, Olick 2007). Even though the Final Report produced relatively little new knowledge (it had basically brought together already published works and re-edited them), its immediate impact was that it sent a clear message to all institutions that the "official history" had changed and began forcing Romanians to reconfigure, in part, their national self-image. The report also freed Romanians to explore other past injustices, including those perpetrated under communism, setting a precedent for examining previously 'dark' periods of history.<sup>25</sup> One of the features of the report was that it mentioned that not only Jews were victims of the Holocaust in Romania, but also that a portion of the Romani population was also subjected to persecutions. The addition of Roma as a victim category was also a major counter-narrative since it departed from dominant views that 1) the Holocaust didn't

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<sup>22</sup> On the Hungarian deportations to Auschwitz from occupied Transylvania, see *Final Report, op.cit.*

<sup>23</sup> In the case of Poland, the narrative shock was more severe than in Romania, where debate and dialogue were less intense. The data here demonstrates that for Romanians, the reconfiguring of Holocaust history is also a narrative shock. For more on Poland's coming to terms with its Holocaust history, see Jan T. Gross (2001). *Neighbors: The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; Anthony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds. (2004). *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press; Geneviève Zubryzcki, *op.cit.*

<sup>24</sup> In interviews, Romanian teachers told me that Romanians were victims of WWII because some Romanian soldiers had suffered in Soviet POW camps, hundreds of thousands died at the frontlines, and countless civilians became war refugees when the Soviet army invaded Bessarabia and Bukovina in 1940. They were also victims because even though Romania switched alliances in 1944, Western allies let the USSR take over the country, setting up a repressive communist regime.

<sup>25</sup> In 2006, Romanian President Traian Băsescu set up a commission to investigate the crimes of communism, which was headed by University of Maryland Professor of Political Science Vladimir Tismăneanu. In December 2006, the commission finished its task. The report is accessible online at <http://www.presidency.ro>.

happen in Romania, 2) the Holocaust was a uniquely Jewish experience and 3) Roma were asocial victimizers of Romanians.

Few Romanians know that Roma were enslaved for 500 years in the Romanian territories (14-19<sup>th</sup> centuries) and that they were targeted for genocide. The historical narrative which became dominant in the 1960s and was promoted by scholars holding key positions in academia and public institutions, even well after the collapse of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, was part of a plan to redesign national identity at a time of Soviet domination, with the final goal of bolstering the dictatorship and its distinct, nationalistic brand of Communism which at times collided even with the Soviets (Livezeanu 2003, Tismăneanu 1997).<sup>26</sup> This narrative covered up the genocidal actions of Antonescu's administration and thus denied an important part of Roma's history, which would have collided with the idea that Romania was a victim during the war.<sup>27</sup> Thus the (re)awakening of Romanians to the Holocaust provides an excellent starting point to discuss the state's recognition of former Jewish and Romani victims, an act that calls upon us to look at the historical inequalities that led to genocide, and the subsequent consequences that contribute to the present inequalities affecting Romani populations. While scholarship has seriously addressed the fate of Romanian Jews, the same cannot be said for the Roma (Ioanid 1997, Achim 1998, Kelso 1999, Woodcock 2008 are some exceptions). Academic inquiry into the persecution of the Roma by the Nazis, their allies and subordinates has grossly lagged behind investigations into the plight of other victims (Milton 1992).

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<sup>26</sup> In 1968, Ceaușescu stunned the world by giving a firm anti-Soviet speech, protesting the invasion of Czechoslovakia and affirming countries' right to have their own type of socialism and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another state.

<sup>27</sup> History textbooks from the Ceaușescu era also blamed the Soviets for collecting huge damages from Romania after the war, causing famines and hardships (some of which were actually caused by the collectivization of farm land), and emphasized that Romania only attacked the Soviet Union a year after it occupied two Romanian provinces in 1940, under a pact between Hitler and Stalin which also allowed the Soviets to capture part of Poland and the Baltic States. History textbooks criticized, however, Ion Antonescu for not withdrawing the country from the war immediately after Romania recaptured its territories and continuing the war beyond the Dniester River, into undisputed Soviet territory. The texts keenly adapted thus the official historiography to reflect the political perspectives of the new regime, which, especially after 1968, tried to use nationalism to create support from outside the box for Ceaușescu as a way to counterbalance the Soviet influence.

## **The Contemporary Situation of Roma**

Roma have become the largest transnational minority in Europe, numbering around 8 million and facing similar situations of marginalization and discrimination in nearly every country where they live. Post-communist transition in Eastern Europe has most negatively affected Roma communities due to their low levels of education, social isolation, and widespread prejudice against them (Tomova 1995, Barany 2002, Troc 2002, Ladányi and Szelényi 2006). Exclusion of Roma occurs in almost all social sectors of European societies, and Roma rank behind the general populations in terms of income, employment, education, access to social services, and other measurements of social welfare (UNDP 2002, Eurobarometer 2008, EU MIDIS Survey 2009). One United Nations report stated that Roma in Southeastern Europe lived in conditions similar to those found in Sub-Saharan Africa, with malnutrition being a predominant feature for some Romani children (UNDP 2002). Even though preoccupation with the “Roma problem” as it is often mislabeled has been on national and international policy making agendas for the past decade, as mega-institutions like the European Parliament and the United Nations have taken interest in Romani issues, only slight improvement has been made locally in Romani communities.

Roma consistently rank as the least tolerated minority in Europe (Eurobarometer 2008). Some 77% of Europeans associate being Roma as a disadvantage in society, and statistics may prove them right (p.44). Discrimination against Roma is widely practiced, yet grossly underreported. According to the EU MIDIS Survey 2009, which looked at immigrant and ethnic minority groups’ experiences with discrimination and criminal victimization, “on average, every second Roma respondent was discriminated against at least once in the previous 12 months” (p.3). The study also found that between “66% and 92% of Roma, depending on the country surveyed, did not report their most recent experience of discrimination in the last 12 months to any competent organisation or at the place where the discrimination occurred.” Roma believed that “nothing would happen or change” even if they knew where to report incidents. An overwhelming 86% of respondents said they did not know of any organizations to assist them. Nearly 70% of European Roma thought that discrimination in their country was widespread based on

one's ethnic or immigrant background.

Elections across Europe demonstrate the popularity of nationalist parties, some of which brand a neo-fascist discourse. In recent years, outbursts against Roma communities have increased in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ireland, and Hungary, sometimes resulting in Roma deaths and property destruction. Italy and France have grappled with issues around Romani migration, which have resulted in closures of Roma encampments and home-country deportations. In April 2009, several international agencies came together to issue a joint statement against the continuing abuse of Romani human rights. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) called upon governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society groups to increase efforts to halt human rights violations of in Europe. The missive read:

In times of economic crisis, communities such as the Roma, along with migrants and other vulnerable groups, tend to become easy 'scapegoats' for extremist movements and populist politicians. Such 'scapegoating' has already resulted in damaging inter-ethnic relations and an increase in the number of violent hate crimes in some countries. As the economic crisis deepens, political leaders in any State need to unequivocally and publicly condemn all forms of violence targeting the Roma.<sup>28</sup>

Picking up where this communiqué left off, The Parliament Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2010 reiterated the dangers facing Roma, and likened the growing tensions as "reminiscent of the darkest hours in Europe's history."<sup>29</sup>

Romani Holocaust survivors, just as Roma elsewhere in Eastern Europe, occupy a precarious position in society in terms of their age, class and ethnic status. As elderly members of an impoverished group, they are particularly vulnerable. According to a press release from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an inter-governmental organization affiliated with the United Nations, which works with Roma:

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<sup>28</sup> OSCE-FRA Joint statement on the occasion of the International Roma Day (8 April 2009).

<sup>29</sup> See Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe Resolution 1740 (2010) "The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe," accessed on July 5 2010 at: <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/eRES1740.htm>.

Many Roma live in squalid settlements without any services and which don't appear on any map. Even in countries which have now joined the European Union, the Roma are often living in destitution and lack access to education, health care and housing.<sup>30</sup>

For Romani Holocaust survivors, the IOM reported that “there is no pension or benefits, only uncertainty and despair as they near the end of their lives.” It also states that they have “sometimes appalling living conditions” and are “once again struggling for their lives” since after the fall of communism Roma face “resurgent discrimination, hostility and violence towards them.”

Romania is home to Europe's largest Romani population, an estimated 2 million Roma reside there, comprising some 8% of the country's population that makes them the largest minority group.<sup>31</sup> The overall situation of Roma resembles that of the Romani populations across the region, with significant levels of societal exclusion. According to a UNDP 2005 report, Romanian Roma have the “most complicated and even alarming in some aspects” marginalization across the region (p.15). Some 69% of Roma live in poverty (below \$4.30 per day), as compared to 22% of the rest of the population, a state that contributes to a host of other problems for Roma. Infant mortality rates, measured from 0-4 years, are four times higher than the average for Romania, and nearly double that of Roma living in other East European countries. A staggering 68% of Roma have no running water and sewerage in their houses, and households are two to four times more likely to be devoid of basic goods such as washing machine, stoves, televisions, etc., as compared to Romani populations elsewhere. The report notes that “the number of school dropouts is the highest in this country due to poverty or the labour commitments of households” (p.15). Furthermore, the functional illiteracy rate for young people is over 32 percent by the time they enter the labor market.

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<sup>30</sup> See the IOM press release “Desperate Plight of Roma Holocaust Survivors Set to Worsen Without Further Assistance,” IOM, 8 April 2006, accessed at [http://www.compensation-for-forced-labour.org/english\\_home.html](http://www.compensation-for-forced-labour.org/english_home.html).

<sup>31</sup> Census data from 2002 report that the majority of Romanian nationals are ethnic Romanians (89.5%), followed by ethnic Hungarians (6.6%), Roma (2.5%), ethnic Ukrainians (0.3%), ethnic Germans (0.3%), etc. While official statistics report the Romani population to hover around half a million, nearly all experts agree that the figure is too low and given the census methodology of self-reporting of ethnicity, it is highly likely that many Roma and especially those who are more integrated in society, would not self-identify as such due to fear of discrimination.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI), a Washington-based non-profit that works on strengthening democracy, also reported that Roma are the “most impoverished and socially marginalized group” in Romania (2009:vii). They found that Roma are not yet considered “full and active participants in Romania’s political system” (p.iii). The study revealed that some of the problems are institutional, while the others are social as “attitudes toward and among Roma present more significant barriers that inhibit robust party outreach and policy debate as well as civic engagement on the part of Roma themselves” (p.vii). Focus groups among Roma conducted by NDI for the study illustrate that Roma are aware of the negative perception that Romanians hold of them (p.10). When Roma feel marginalized, it is hard for them to want to integrate. These findings coincide with similar conclusions drawn from a 2005 World Bank study on public opinion toward Roma in eight former communist countries as part of a campaign to push for Romani inclusion.<sup>32</sup> The study concluded that in Romania, representations of Roma were negative, as Roma were depicted as “troublemakers, sources of conflict and social deviation” (p.5). Roma were also viewed as “contributing to an increasing deterioration of human relations and behavior,” and that Roma were jockeying for advantages at the expense of non-Roma.

Tolerance studies also show a lower threshold among the majority populations for Roma. Ioana Petre (2004) at the University of Bucharest, working with some Hungarian and French colleagues, did a study on tolerance among youth towards people of other nationalities and ethnicities. A commonality among Hungarian and Romanian youth groups was the staggering figures of intolerance towards Roma: 85% of Hungarians and 79% of Romanians reported having no ability to trust Roma. These figures were nearly one fourth higher than the lack of trust reported about other ethnic or national groups in the survey. In returning to the EU MIDIS Survey 2009, for Romania results indicated that discrimination of Roma was lower than in other countries, however that was most likely due to issues of high residential segregation. Simply put, Romanian Roma lived in more isolated communities; therefore they came into less contact with non-Roma, which decreases acts of discrimination. Historian Maria Bucur (2002) in her work on the

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<sup>32</sup> For more on the World Bank and the Open Society Institute’s initiative The Decade for Roma Inclusion, see the project website at <http://www.romadecade.org/>.

Romanian eugenics movement found in contemporary Romanian society that attitudes remain predominantly anti-Roma:

The Roma, who many Romanians define along biological lines and wish to isolate, have become favorite scapegoats for the new radical parties. Many blame the Roma population for the economic and social problems in Romania today...many individuals in positions of authorities have [this attitude], while even more individual citizens act in accordance with such prejudices (p.231).

This prejudicial attitude is also found in media outlets as well as on internet sites (S.P.E.R. 2009). Full inclusion of Roma seems decades away given the current situation.

It is my goal in this dissertation to challenge the way that we approach the Holocaust and education about it by exploring the genocide of Roma as another case study of the racial-biological policy of the Nazis and their allies, linking their fate through present day as a continually marginalized “other” in Romanian as well as in many other European societies. Through empirical research using the tools of sociology, I aim to broaden the interpretive perspective of Roma as a former victim category and as a disenfranchised trans-national minority today to illustrate that the vulnerability that once led to the ultimate extreme in racism, extermination, still affects Roma populations throughout Europe as evidenced in the deep poverty and marginalization of this group. The contribution of this research to collective memory of Roma, I hope, will continue to influence the changing landscape of memory work in Romania about the Holocaust, as well as spotlighting that Roma as a national minority with a history worthy of more intensive investigation.

## Chapter Two: Representations of Romani Memory of the Holocaust

Death in the Nazi concentration camps and forced labour camps requires no explanation. It is survival that requires explanation. It is the survivors of the destruction that astonish us.

-H.O. Bluhm<sup>33</sup>

Memory is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral, or written, it is the living source from which historians draw.

- Jacques LeGoff<sup>34</sup>

### Introduction

Over the past three decades, researchers, archivists, and interested others have intensively collected narratives of Holocaust survivors. The narratives have provided invaluable insight, and have clarified and improved conceptualizations about the Holocaust. They also have informed the workings of collective memories and identities of survivors, and the narratives of dominant groups. This explosion of information about the Holocaust can assist in better understanding genocide phenomena and history and also shed light on how societies process today past atrocities and how such processes are influenced by issues such as race and ethnicity, identity, socio-economic factors, etc. As a discipline that studies inequalities, identities and social change, sociology can bring a new perspective, alongside that of other disciplines such as history, education or psychology, into how genocides happen, who remembers them, and who is recognized as victim and who is recognized as perpetrator.

In this chapter I focus on a selection of qualitative interviews done with Roma survivors, who are often left out of public memory work, to further our understanding of

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Dina Wardi (1992). *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*. London: Tavistock/Routledge, p.7.

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Le Goff (1992). *History and Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.xi.



the Romani genocide in Romania and to bring Roma voices into the study of the Holocaust. From 1942-44 the Romanian regime of pro-fascist leader General Ion Antonescu (1941-44) deported over 25,000 Roma to Transnistria, a territory that Romania occupied during WWII.<sup>35</sup> Roma were put in concentration camps as slave labors where many died due to starvation, brutality, disease, and exposure to elements.<sup>36</sup> Antonescu, an ally of Hitler, enacted a ruthless ethnic cleansing campaign that began with the Jews in 1941, extended to include Roma a year later, and was only staunch in 1944 when Romania joined the Allied forces. I turn to testimonies as an exploration of the event since Romanian Roma didn't keep diaries, journals, or write memoirs of their experiences post-war. Instead, they told their children and grandchildren about their Holocaust experiences, and this transmission of oral history has acted as a bulwark against forgetting.

The Romani narratives reveal not only ethnic identification and socio-economic status prior to, during and after persecution, but also in a comparative perspective alongside Jewish experiences, they denote aspects of the universal victimization experience. Through analysis of testimony and its place in historiography I propose answers to the following issues: How do Roma remember and make sense of a history of Nazi persecutions? How are collective memories of genocide or persecution experienced, erased, or transformed by persecuted and dominant groups? What do Roma narratives have to add to the rich literature already assembled about the Holocaust?

In essence, Roma have kept counter-memory active in their communities, resisting the erasure of historians who ignored them. Through their words, corroborated with archival sources, we will discover the tragic events that they faced from the onset of the brutal separation from their homeland as Romanian authorities forced them at

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<sup>35</sup> Transnistria was awarded to Romania by Hitler for shared victories on the Eastern Front in 1941. The area from the Rivers Dniester to the Bug was under Romania control, while the Germans controlled the area from the Bug to the Dnieper. The Romanians ran a civil administration and the Germans controlled the entire area militarily. From 1941-44, Romania deported portions of its Jews and Roma to the territory.

<sup>36</sup> On the deportation and murder of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in Transnistria, see, for example, *Final Report, International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*; Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, and Mihail Ionescu (eds.). Iași, Polirom. 2005; Jean Ancel, the German-Romanian Relationship and the Final Solution, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19:2 (2005) 252-75; Dennis Deletant, Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18:1 (2004) 1-26; Vladimir Solonari, An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21:2 (2007) 268-297; Rebecca L. Golbert, Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialization, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 (2004) 205-33.

gunpoint across the country, their horrific experiences in camps, and for the survivors, their perilous journey back home. As citizens of Romania, instead of receiving protection of their right to life, during World War II a part of the Romani population in the country found itself targeted for genocide, which is the most radical form of exclusion that any society can practice. Documents tell of the prescription of suffering, humiliation, disintegration and death, which was directly attributed to decisions made and implemented by Romanian national and local authorities, and state institutions. Testimony, on the other hand, traces the effect of this immoral and inhumane policy on the lives of individual Roma who were its victims. In Geoffrey Hartman's words, testimony allows survivors to speak and "look toward an establishment of a legacy" as Holocaust history cannot be written as usual (2002:136).

When I began collecting testimony from Roma survivors of the Holocaust in Romania in 1995, there were few researchers interested in this seemingly unimportant topic, and the persecution of Roma during World War II in Romania was virtually unknown, even in academic circles.<sup>37</sup> I came to Roma Holocaust testimonies in an unusual way. In 1994, I had a Fulbright fellowship to study Romani women's reproductive health choices. The previous summer I had worked in a state-run institution for abandoned children, one of Ceaușescu's legacy "orphanages," where children were placed by parents who either didn't want them or couldn't care for them.<sup>38</sup> Doctors estimated that 80% of the kids at our facility were Roma. I started interviewing Romani women about their fertility choices, and their mothers and grandmothers were often

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<sup>37</sup> I will use the term *Roma* to refer to an ethnic group who share a common Indian ancestry and who currently reside in numerous countries across the globe. Over the past two decades, there has been a push by Romani activists to stop the use of the word *Gypsy*, which they view as derogatory. Activists advocate using instead the word *Roma*, which means *people* in the Romani language. Like many social movements, the Romani one has many factions and few are in complete agreement about using the term *Roma* as an all encompassing term. I liken using *Roma* to describe the spectrum of peoples it covers as inappropriate as using the more generic *Native American* would be to describe someone's tribal affiliation. Roma tend to self-identify based on traditional professional occupation categories, such as miner, wood carver, bear trainer, musician, etc. Ian Hancock suggests using *the Romani peoples* for all groups, which probably fits but is cumbersome. For further discussions on the terminology issue, see Michael Stewart (1997). *The Time of the Gypsies*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Alaina Lemon in *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance & Romani Memory from Pushkin to Post-socialism* distinguishes between "Rom" and "Gypsy" by identifying the former as groups or individuals, and the later to be a pejorative term constructed through stereotypes.

<sup>38</sup> For more on Ceaușescu's pro-natal policy and its legacy of unwanted children in Romania, see Gail Kligman (1998). *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

home. Over coffees, these older women told me about their lives, and in particular, about *ando Bugo* in the Romani language, or being deported to the Bug River, a geographic marker that signified the Holocaust to them.<sup>39</sup>

These Romani women told me about being forced to leave their homes, being crushed into cattle cars, being sheltered in a pig pens and animal barns, being brutalized by the guards, and watching their loved ones die from hunger, typhus, and wretchedness. Their stories overwhelmed me. Looking back, I agree with historian Annette Wieviorka (2006), who states: “Testimony appeals to the heart and not to the mind. It elicits compassion, pity, indignation, even rebellion. The one who testifies signs a “compassion pact” with the one who receives the testimony....” (p.143). Like many others who work with testimony, I was captivated by the humanness of each story. Part of my ‘compassion pact’ was to promise to collect more testimonies, and to make them known to others. Given the decades of Holocaust denial in Romania, first under communism and then by post-communist administrations, I felt that the stories had to be told (Braham 2007, Eskenasy 2007). I wanted to make the silenced memories of the Roma knowable, which would mean entering them into the domain of Romanian collective knowledge, where they were conspicuously absent.

I propose that adding the testimonies of Roma survivors into the Holocaust narrative will help us better understand the mechanisms of the perpetrating regimes, as well as the construction and reconstruction of the Holocaust and post-memory work. I draw inspiration from the work of Stacey and Thorne (1985), who argued in the “Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology,” that many times the gaps are in the record for a reason and that adding a group overlooked in general theories is a step toward more effective accounts of societies. The authors called for “a process of paradigm shifting” to change the orienting assumptions about a discipline (p.302). By introducing Romani remembrance into the field of Holocaust studies, history, and sociology, a clearer image will emerge about the importance of social status in matters of persecution, recognition of

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<sup>39</sup> For more on this, see Radu Ioanid (1997). *Evreii Sub Regimul Antonescu*. Bucuresti: Editura Hassefer; Viorel Achim (1998). *Țiganii în istoria României*, Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedica; Viorel Achim (2004). *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria Vol. I & Vol.II*, Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedica; Michelle Kelso (1999). “Gypsy Deportations to Transnistria 1942-44,” in Donald Kenrick, ed. *Gypsies During the Second World War: In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press; Shannon Woodcock, “Romanian Romani Resistance to Genocide in the Matrix of the *Țigan* Other,” *Anthropology of East European Review*, Fall 2007, pp.26-40.

victimhood and national identity. Roma survivors belong to an ethnic group that continues to be disenfranchised and faces widespread prejudice and discrimination across Europe (Barany1998, UNDP 2002;2006, World Bank 2005,Council of Europe 2010).

I will first examine the role of testimony and how it has evolved before delving into the Romanian case. A brief examination of history will assist in placing the suffering of Roma into the depiction of the Holocaust.

## **Methodology**

Over 150 Roma granted me the opportunity to speak with them about their wartime histories. I recorded eighty interviews either on audio or video tapes, with a preference for video as an explored archive of text (Langer 1991).<sup>40</sup> The majority of those who participated in this study were children at the time of the deportation. One survivor led us to the next, making snowball inquiry the primary method of identifying participants. Survivors varied little in socio-economic status, which was low, or age, which was over 65 years. Although Romanian Roma are a diverse group (Bessinger 2001), for this paper their different identity affiliation is of little importance as the camp system was an equalizer in the distribution of starvation, disease, and brutality. Each respondent has a horrific account, replete with personal tragedy, some of which echoed hauntingly of thousands of other survivors' testimonies.

The purpose of this research was exploratory and I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to spotlight personal experiences of Roma who were in Transnistrian labor camps. The first five interviews were open-ended, which assisted in the development of a structured interview guide. Questions ranged from aspects of their lives before deportation, to the years immediately following their return to Romania. Eight interviews were analyzed inductively to identify major themes, the result of which was the development of thematic codes. The categorizations were: deportation, work detail/forced labor, starvation, the onslaught of disease, attempted escapes, living conditions in the

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<sup>40</sup> Those survivors who were under the age of five at the time of the deportation I didn't record as I found upon preliminary interviews that their recollections of events were scarce.

camps, cycles of life, death, escape/the return home, and compensation. The rest of the interviews were then deductively coded based on these themes.

Several categories relate to one another, suggesting a developmental hierarchy (Boyatzis 1998). For instance, the theme of death had many categories, including death by starvation, death by typhus, etc. These could have been placed also under their own themes, such as starvation or disease, but death was the end result for the extreme of either disease or starvation. However, a hierarchy is not always present as many respondents contracted the disease without succumbing to it. Some categories, such as starvation, were present throughout the discourse, while others such as the deportation and the return home were clearly chronologically ordered. In addition, certain themes splintered into subcategories. For instance, “living conditions” was partitioned into accommodation, daily life, and brutality; and “starvation” was divided into procurement of food and the effects of hunger.

Historical sociologists are employing narrative analysis and case study to redefine the place of theory and as an explanation to socio-historical inquiry (Gotham and Staples 1996, Steinmetz 1992, Sjoberg et al.1991). Gotham and Staples (1996) argue that narrative analysis and the case study approach require a “reference to the global context as well as the local circumstance” (pp. 491-92). Themes pervading these Romani accounts, such as starvation and resistance, thereby can be either locally fixed in Romani experience in Transnistria, or used as contextual templates for Holocaust studies, or units of analysis by which to address connections to other state-sponsored forms of violence and oppression (prisoners of war, dirty wars, contemporary genocides, refugees, etc.).<sup>41</sup> Although William Sewell (1992) advocates the use of eventful history, he notes the use of historical sociology is valuable if for nothing more than that it “increased the available number of data points.” Supporters of the mantra *Never Again* certainly privilege the collection of data as one means to ensure public awareness of the Holocaust. As survivors near the end of their lives, foundations scrambled to capture their stories. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Holocaust Oral History Project, and Steven

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<sup>41</sup> Holocaust scholars have argued vehemently against comparative analysis of the Nazi genocide. For further articulation of this debate, see Alan Rosenbaum, ed. (1996). *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Spielberg's Shoah Visual History Foundation, among others, have adhered to this practice of urgent collection of narratives.

As historian Annette Wieviorka (2006) notes, the question of language is a crucial component of testimony. She asks "where does one testify from, and what does one testify to? Does the witness testify to the existence and nature of the world of the Nazi concentration camps? ...Or does the witness testify to the death of a people?"(p. 32). In her study of Jewish accounts of the Holocaust, Yiddish is the language which appears to speak for the living and the dead of Nazism, as it is a language that Rachel Ertel writes is "no one's language" (p.33). In many ways, Romani is similar in the post-Holocaust era. Although it was not a written linguistic tradition, cultural and historical markers such as songs, poetry, and groups' familial affiliations were kept alive through Romani. Most of the survivors I interviewed spoke Romani as their first language, learning Romanian (or Hungarian or Bulgarian as the case might have been) as they grew into childhood to communicate with non-Roma. Romani remained the language through which they communicated their sorrows, sufferings and survival to their children, grandchildren, and grandchildren.

Despite this, I chose to interview my respondents in Romanian. My main concern was with transcription and audience reception. Although my fledging Romani would have allowed me to interview, I would not have been able to transcribe the sessions. Few Roma with whom I worked could write Romani, thus I worried about being able to transform materials into a useable format. Also, I believed then that an audience for my research would not be comprised of primarily Romani speakers and the goal was to bring the survivors' story into the public space and make it widely available. Roma, by and large, were aware of what the older generations had suffered in Transnistria. The consequences of not having native speakers of Romani tell their stories in their mother tongue may, unfortunately, alter in the future conceptualizations of Romani memory. However, I hope that this will not be the case.

Nearly sixty years have passed since the tragic events occurred, and certain challenges with the data must be addressed. The advanced age of the survivors might suggest that their memories might fail them. This is certainly a possible bias, getting at the very nature of working with regressive data collection (Langer 1991). While I agree

that time erodes some details, such as names of camp commanders or places, it has not diminished the effects of the deportation policy on the lives of the participants. Psychologists studying trauma discovered that traumatic events can remain fixed in one's memory as traumatic memory, or what Robert J. Liften calls the 'indelible image' or the 'death imprint' (Herman 1992:38). The events these participants experienced happened under conditions of extreme duress and remain for the most part extremely vivid. In interviews, many repeated tropes such as, "*I will never forget,*" or "*I see it before my eyes like it was yesterday.*" While memory is certainly mutable, as much research has demonstrated, I believe that the Romani narratives have been less prone to change simply due to the lack of information about the Holocaust coming into Romania based on the communist policy of Holocaust minimalization and denial in the country. Since there was not a 'Holocaust' culture, unlike in the West, where films, books, novels, art, and museums grew up around survivor testimonies and histories, often times making their way into the school system, Roma have been less exposed to discourse and discussions about the Holocaust. Furthermore, unlike Jewish victims in Romania who had a strong Jewish Federation looking after their interests, there were no Romani organizations doing so for Roma victims either under communism or after the revolution.

## **Historical Background**

Prior to World War II, Roma lived in every European country as disenfranchised members of societies, yet their wartime experiences differed, depending on where they lived. For instance, nearly all German Roma and Sinti were exterminated, whereas few Bulgarian Roma were killed.<sup>42</sup> The Nazis persecuted Roma for racial reasons, viewing them as a threat to German purity (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991). In German-controlled areas, the murder of Jews and Roma fell to the same administrative branch, the Security Police and SS Security Service. The political police, the Gestapo, were assigned to deal with the Jews while the detective forces, the Kripo, were charged with dealing

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<sup>42</sup> For more on the Nazi policy toward Roma, see for example, *Factsheets on Roma History (2007)*, a publication of the Council of Europe. Also see the series *The Gypsies During the Second World War*, edited by Donald Kenrick published via the University of Hertfordshire Press.

with Roma and Sinti.<sup>43</sup> According to historian Sybil Milton (1992), both the Gestapo and Kripo used the definitions of racial scientists to define the condemned groups and that at a minimum, the branches had Hitler's authorization to implement policies that included mass murder, and that these organizations need to be further analyzed.

Milton noted, in particular, the writings of racial scientists charged with making and overseeing the Nazi policy toward Roma. Adolf Würth, a racial scientist who collaborated with officials at the Eugenic and Criminal Biological Research Station of the Reich Health Office and later the Criminal Biological Institute of the Security Police at Kripo headquarters, wrote that the motivation for extermination of Roma was racial:

The Gypsy question is for us today primarily a racial question. Thus, the national socialist state will basically have to settle the Gypsy question just as it has solved the Jewish question. We have already begun. Jews and Gypsies have been placed on equal footing in marriage prohibitions in the regulations for implementing the Nuremberg law for the Protection of German Blood. The Gypsies are not of German blood nor can they be considered related to German blood (quoted in Milton 1992:517).

Often placed under the rubric of *Zigeuner* anyone presumed to have Indic origin in the blood, as well as those who lived a lifestyle designated by the Nazis and their collaborators to be 'Gypsy' ("asocial/criminal"), became targets of genocide. During the Holocaust, between 100,000 and 250,000 European Roma were killed by the Nazis, their allies, and their subordinates.

### **The Holocaust in Romania**

In this section, I will focus on the genocidal policies of the Ion Antonescu regime that were carried out in Romanian controlled spaces and directed toward a part of the country's Roma minority. As space is limited, I will only briefly outline the fate of the Jews to illustrate and understand the policy toward Roma, as the destruction of Romanian Jews is well-researched with several excellent works available on the subject.<sup>44</sup> By

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<sup>43</sup> I use the translation Gypsies for the German word *Zigeuner* as well as for the translation of the Romanian word *țigani*. These were the terms used in much of the documentation regarding the persecution of Roma/Sinti. Sinti are a sub-group of Roma, primarily living in Germany and Austria, who prefer to separate themselves from the larger umbrella of the term Roma.

<sup>44</sup> See Final Report, *op.cit.*



confining myself to the Roma policies of Antonescu, I will not cover the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania since it was under Hungarian occupation and thus subject to a different regime.<sup>45</sup>

General Ion Antonescu came to power after King Carol II abdicated on 6 September 1940, following the loss that year of several provinces to the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria, and he became the Head of State as the President of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister).<sup>46</sup> Turned down by major opposition leaders, Antonescu formed a joint-government with Horia Sima, leader of the Iron Guard, also known as the Legionary movement, which was popularized in the late 1920's by Corneliu Codreanu as a powerful, grass-roots movement and was heavily supported by Germany. The group's main principles were to fight against communism and return Romania to a Christian Orthodox base. Among Guardists, anti-Semitism was the norm, and members advocated for anti-Semitic legislation while also instigating violence against Jews. The joint government was marred with struggles for power between Antonescu and the Guard, which was gaining strength as a political force, drawing on the German examples and benefiting from German assistance. In January 1941, the Guardists attempted a coup d'état in Bucharest, which Antonescu quickly put down with the help of the military. He then created a military dictatorship with himself as *Conducător* of the state, which lasted until 23 August 1944.

Although the General had separated from the Guardists, he retained some similar views, such as a suspicion of Jews and a wish to tightly control this population as well as ideas of ethnic purity which were becoming prevalent throughout Nazi-controlled Europe. To help accomplish his goals towards Jews, in May 1941 the government reorganized the Under-secretariat of State for Romanianization, Colonization and Supply, as well as the Office for Romanianization, which had been created the preceding year.<sup>47</sup> Originally designed to rectify the problem of Romanian ethnic refugees evacuated from their homes, it became a means of clearing the country's key positions of Jews and other foreigners by placing Romanians in their places. The Office for Romanianization's first

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania, see Final Report, *op.cit.*

<sup>46</sup> King Michael was coronated regent of Romania after his father's departure in 1940. For more on Ion Antonescu, see Dennis Deletant (2006). *Hitler's forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44*. Houndmills [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>47</sup> Romanian National Archives, file: PCM, 156/1942, pp.1-4.

concerns were “to reintegrate the Romanian element with all its legal rights, and resolve the Jewish problem.”<sup>48</sup> A national law passed earlier that March turned over urban Jewish properties to the patrimony of the state, an action that was justified by its enforcement of national Christian ownership.<sup>49</sup> Antonescu claimed the seriousness of the problem of dealing with millions of Romanian refugees from occupied territories warranted seizing Jewish businesses and property, thus playing upon the public’s anti-Semitic fears that Guardist propaganda had artificially inflated. The legalization of the state’s takeover of Jewish and foreign properties established a precedent that a year later would permit the same Office for Romanianization to confiscate Romani properties as well, although as non-Jewish Romanian citizens, they were technically outside of the purview of the legislation.

The destruction of Romanian Jews and Roma was part and parcel of a larger biopolitical schema of Ion Antonescu to supposedly bring the country back to an ethnic Romanian base, which meant a massive restructuring of the population (Achim 2001;2002, Solonari 2007) in a bid dubbed “Romanianization” which was analogous with the Nazi’s Aryanization. Influenced by similar events taking place in Nazi-controlled territories, the Antonescu regime systematically designed and implemented plans aiming at ridding Romania of its “undesirable” minorities. As historian Radu Ioanid (2009) noted, even though the pattern of persecution against Roma was replicated through part of Nazi-controlled Europe, the Romanian case also reflects the particulars of its World War II-era government.<sup>50</sup> After initial “ethnic purification” was under way with Jewish victims mainly from the regions of Bessarabia and Bukovina by 1941, a year later the Romanian regime began its attack on part of the Romani community.

Territorial losses at the beginning of the war of Northern Transylvania to Hungary, and Bukovina and part of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union prompted, in part, Romania’s decision to enter into a pact with Nazi Germany. Romania joined the war on 22 June 1941, and Antonescu added his troops to Operation Barbarossa, Hitler’s planned invasion of the Soviet Union. The outbreak of war for Romania ushered in an

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<sup>48</sup> Romanian National Archives, file: PCM, 156/1942, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Radu Ioanid (2009). “Studiu Introductiv,” Pp.33-54, in Ioanid R., M. Kelso, and L.Cioaba, eds. *Tragedia romilor deportați în Transnistria 1942-45*. Iași: Polirom.

unmitigated period of violence toward Jews. Confident of an Eastern victory, Antonescu had formed a plan for the Jews in northern and eastern provinces, and communicated it to the government five days before the military operations began. When the attack on the USSR was under way, Antonescu ordered mass killings of Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina in a “cleansing the land” campaign that the army and the gendarmerie carried out during the summer 1941 (Final Report 2005:120). General Constantin Vasiliu, head of the Gendarmerie, explained to his officers in one county that: “By cleansing the land we understand: exterminate on the spot all Jews in rural areas; imprison in ghettos all Jews in urban areas; arrest all suspects....”(p.131). Interpreted by Vasiliu’s subordinates as a *carte blanche* policy to kill Jews “from babies to impotent old men,” the gendarmes understood that it was their duty to eradicate Jews who “endangered the Romanian nation” (p.132). The motivation for the rounding up and liquidation of Jews given by Antonescu was their supposed Soviet or communist sympathies and their presumed abusive treatment of the retreating Romanian army in 1940, after the Soviet Union had taken over the territories (Ioanid 2006:175). But the terror was also part of a larger plan by Antonescu’s for ethnic cleansing of the reclaimed regions (Solonari 2007:8).

The Romanian death squads were not the only ones active in killing area Jews. *Einsatzgruppen D*, one of the SS’s paramilitary mobile killing teams whose job it was to liquidate Jews, Roma, and communists, was also actively pursuing its mandate in Bessarabia, Bukovina and the occupied portion of southern Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> Although sharing the same goals, the Romanian and German units did not necessarily agree on the means to achieve them. German reports lamented the lack of methods applied by the Romanian troops, which shot victims but didn’t bury them, causing public health problems (Ancel 1986). The Romanians’ zeal for killing wasn’t in question, rather it was their chaotic methods that rankled the German units who protested (Final Report 2005:134). In this initial phase of purification between 45,000-60,000 Jews were estimated to have been killed (p.177). Those Jews who survived were slowly pushed into Transnistria, an area between the Rivers Dniester and Bug that came under Romanian control in August 1941, when Adolf Hitler petitioned Antonescu to accept the region as “a gift” to celebrate their

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the Holocaust in the Ukraine, see John Paul Himka. (2009). *Ukrainians, Jews and the Holocaust: Divergent Memories*. Saskatoon, Sask: Heritage Press.

shared victory in the east.<sup>52</sup> As Transnistria had never before been under Romanian rule, the gesture was interpreted as an ill-disguised attempt by Hitler to compensate Romania for Transylvanian land lost to Hungary in 1940. Antonescu reluctantly agreed to a Romanian administration of Transnistria, an agricultural region with less than half of the population of Romanian descent, in exchange for economic exploitation of the region throughout the war, telling his staff to govern the land “as if Romanian had been ruling these territories for two million years” (p.141). The region was divided in two areas, with Romanians administering the territory between the rivers Dniester and Bug, leaving the Germans to control the area from the Bug to the Dnieper River. Besides serving as a food basket for the military, the province was also key to the transport and supply lines of Axis’ Southeastern front, with millions of German and Romanian soldiers passing through the region. Once in possession of Transnistria, coined Romania’s “ethnic dumping ground,” some 150,000 Jews were deported to the new territory, most of those along the Bug River. Concentrated into camps and ghettos, daily life for Jews was precarious, as most deportees would die from typhus, starvation, exposure to cold, hard labor detail, or mass shootings (p.142).

### **The Deportation of Roma to Transnistria**

By the 1930s, the majority of Romanian Roma earned their living as blacksmiths, craftsmen, sieve makers, silversmiths, pot washers, domestic workers, musicians, and unskilled laborers in agriculture.<sup>53</sup> The process of integration was slowly progressing, as decades had passed since Roma were emancipated from their 500 years of slavery in 1855-56. Roma remained a poor, illiterate and marginalized minority as little was done to improve their living conditions by the various governments (Achim 1998). A 1930 census indicated that 262,501 individuals (excluding nomadic *țigani*) declared themselves

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<sup>52</sup> Romanian National Archives, File: PCM, 292/1941, p.3.

<sup>53</sup> For more on Romani slavery, see Petre Petcut, “Preturile sclavilor rromi în Tara Românească 1593-1653” and “Le Lendemain de l’esclavage. Les mesures de l’État pour la sédentarisation de Roms,” in *Anuarul Centrului de Studii Rome* 1/2008. pp. 11-22; 23-40.

ethnically *țigani* in Romania.<sup>54</sup> By 1942, the figure shrank to 208,700 in Romanian-controlled regions due to loss of territory.

At the request of Antonescu, whose ethnic cleansing policies against the Jews were already underway, statisticians at the Central Institute for Statistics wrote a report on the *țigani* population in 1942.<sup>55</sup> The document is important because it not only details the demographics of the population considered to be ‘Gypsy’ by the authorities in Romania, but it also reveals the bio-racial politics of some influential Romanian academics, who included Roma alongside other groups as a threat to the purity of the majority ethnic Romanian population. The team was led by the Institute’s director, the prominent demographer Sabin Manuilă, a proponent of the eugenics movement in Romania. The report took issue with the census data’s population figure for *țigani*, believing the figure of 208,700 to be too low. The exact number of Gypsies was reportedly unknown and difficult to calculate due to poor record keeping by local authorities and increased assimilation of *țigani* with local populations. Nomadic Roma posed a special dilemma for researchers due to their frequent movements, and the scientists could only estimate them to be considerably less numerous than their settled counterparts. The report takes on a sinister note, warning that action needed be taken to prevent the further intrusion of Gypsies into Romanian society. The authors cautioned that since the Gypsies’ “primitive crafts are indispensable to the agricultural activity of the peasant’s social strata,” it would bring them closer to ethnic Romanians, resulting in “a lessened Romanian repulsion for this foreign population ...leading in some places to a mixing of the population.”<sup>56</sup> The statisticians believed that determining ‘contaminated’ regions was of paramount importance because Gypsies with half blood or less were numerous, and despite low living standards, they adopted Romanian national characteristics and set aside their own. To rectify previous oversights and to retard integration, Manuilă proposed an in-depth anthropological study to identify the descents of former slaves.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Romanian National Archives, file: PCM, 42/1942, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> Romanian National Archives, file: PCM, 42/1942, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.6.

## The Expulsion of the Nomads

For nomads and semi-nomads, there was no indication that they would be targeted by the Antonescu regime as the first Romani group for deportation. They were the least integrated in society, therefore less likely to inter-marry with Romanians and a lesser threat to the “purity of the Romanian nation” according to the regime’s standards, but it is possible they were targeted first as a weaker group and whose deportation would raise the smallest opposition from the Romanian population. While previous governments had targeted Jews, first through restrictive legislation and later through heinous attacks before massive deportations got underway in 1941, Roma had experienced no change in their status as citizens. Aside from legislation in 1940 that restricted the movement of nomads based on supposed fears of them spreading epidemics, Roma respondents reported having no inkling of the impending doom, not even when authorities conducted a census of them in May 1942. Antonescu, moving forward with his Romanianization policy, had ordered a census of *țigani* meeting certain criteria that would later be used as the basis for deportation: all Gypsies living a nomadic lifestyle and settled Gypsies who were considered to be ‘dangerous’ – those holding criminal convictions and those without regular forms of employment (Achim 1998, Kelso 1999).

A month later deportation orders imposed a total sweep of nomads, who were to be expelled and placed in concentration camps in Transnistria, just as certain categories of Jews had been deported the previous autumn. Antonescu ordered the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie (IGJ) to supervise the deportation of nomadic Roma whose caravans would serve as their transportation across the border. Additionally, the orders stipulated that deportees were not to be given either time to prepare for the departure or information about the destination. In a letter to Antonescu regarding the execution of the deportation orders, Colonel Tobescu at the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie asserted that advance warnings were unnecessary for nomads since they had few assets to liquidate and their habitual wandering was preparation enough. Gendarmes proceeded to enter the camp sites of nomads, ordering them to pack their wagons for a trip, without specifying their final destination. All members of a *sălaș* (family) were forced to leave without exception. Although the orders had exempted parents, spouses,

and children of mobilized soldiers and deceased veterans of the current war and WWI, the exemption was largely ignored. Also, to facilitate cooperation of the nomads, some gendarmes invented scenarios in which *țigani* would receive houses, animals, and work in return for their voluntary compliance in the ‘resettlement’ campaign.

By the end of August 1942, officials estimated that approximately 13,000 nomadic *țigani* had crossed over into Transnistria (Kelso 1999:109). Local commanders of gendarmes waited for the Roma and assigned them to various localities mainly in the Golta, Balta, Berezovka and Oceacov regions. The former Prefect of Oceacov wrote in his memoir of the arrival of the nomadic *țigani*:

During one week 15,000 Gypsies arrived. The commander of the gendarmes reported to me verbally...that [the Gypsies] were in an incredible state of misery...there were a lot of old people, women, and children. In the wagons there were paralyzed, older persons well over 70 years of age, blind and on the verge of death. The great majority of them were naked in rags. I spoke with them. They protested, they screamed, they cried, they ranted: why were we arrested and sent to Transnistria? Many showed me that they had children at the front, women whose husbands were at the front, there were some who had lost sons or spouses who died on the front. Some others had wounded relatives in hospitals (Ioanid 1997:316-321).

Historian Radu Ioanid (2009) summarized that the deportations were done with “improvisations, arbitrariness, and corruption.” When errors surfaced later especially regarding relatives of soldiers, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie backed local authorities' illegal actions by rationalizing that individuals with relatives in the army could not survive economically without the *sălaș*, hence the complete expulsion.<sup>58</sup> Romani soldiers, outraged to learn their families were deported while they risked their lives on the front line, refused to accept the deportations. Striving to calm the ranks, the Interior Ministry ordered commanders with Roma soldiers to carefully explain the deportation categories and the appeal process for those believing their loved ones had been erroneously expelled. Initially some Romani soldiers were allowed to take a leave of absence and recover their families and bring them back to Romania. Later on, the General Inspectorate of Gendarmerie stopped the repatriation of soldiers’ families, claiming it was

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<sup>58</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 130/1942, p.1.

spreading disease such as typhus from the camps into Romania, and instead proposed to the Ministry that while families of nomadic soldiers should not be repatriated to Romania, their living standards should be improved in Transnistria. Colonel Tobescu proposed preferential treatment and recommended furnishing soldiers' families with houses, land, goods and possibilities of employment.<sup>59</sup> He also suggested settling soldiers' families separately from other nomads.

### **Evacuation of settled Roma**

On 17 May 1942, the Interior Ministry ordered the police to conduct a census of settled *țigani*.<sup>60</sup> Eight days later the police indicated that 31,438 *țigani* resided in urban and rural territories who matched the Ministry's criteria for deportation to Transnistria.<sup>61</sup> The figure of 12,497 of those Roma considered by authorities as the most dangerous, undesirable, and unfit for military service were destined for the first train transport. The Ministry placed the bulk of the responsibility for deportation on the gendarmes.<sup>62</sup> The deportation of settled Gypsies differed from that of the nomads not only in the means of transportation used, but also in the more meticulous instructions sent by the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, which wanted to avoid prior mistakes. As directed, gendarmes contacted local police officials for assistance in rounding up the selected *țigani* and bringing them either to the train station or to gendarmerie headquarters twenty-four hours ahead of the scheduled departure times of trains organized by the National Rail System.<sup>63</sup> As with the nomads, settled Roma were not warned in advance of their deportation to prevent liquidation of their assets.<sup>64</sup>

Archival documents and the historical context suggests that the expulsion of settled nomads was based on racial motivations, to achieve purification of the Romanian

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.26.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.38. The action also involved rural and urban police departments, mayors, the National Center for Romanianization (CNR), the National Rail System (CFN), the Under-secretary of State for Supplies, the Under-secretary of State of Romanianization, Colonization, and Property, as well as the Ministry of Finance.

<sup>63</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.32.

<sup>64</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.10.



race, and not social motives, such as some historians have suggested and as Antonescu publicly claimed.<sup>65</sup> One order called for the forced evacuation and internment of *țigani* to eliminate “heterogeneous elements” and “parasites” (Ioanid, Kelso, and Cioabă 2009:270-271). The missive reads that from all urban and rural areas “all parasitical *țigani*, those behind the times and dishonest, rich and tolerated must be removed to secure order.”<sup>66</sup> The order requires us not to take a simplistic interpretation that the Antonescu regime authored independently of its ally Nazi Germany the policy for elimination of a part of the Romani community from Romania. It begs us for a closer look at the eugenics ideas that were prevalent in the Antonescu regime.<sup>67</sup> The language used by the Romanian bureaucrats reveals the very influence of Nazi racial policy on the deportation of Romanian Roma.<sup>68</sup> One close governmental advisor, Sabin Manuilă, author of the demographic study mentioned above, even went as far as to publish accounts of the extreme danger that Roma presented. He did not believe, however that Jews were racially threatening to the Romanian population since, for the most part, they did not intermarry and self-segregated, although he did envision them as an economic danger (Bucur 2002:147). The Gypsies, however, he classified as a greater danger due to their ‘criminal’ elements and capability of ‘despoiling’ Romanian racial purity:

The Gypsy Problem is the most important and acute racial problem in Romania...The anthropological Gypsy type must be defined as an undesirable one which must be not influence our racial constitution...The Gypsy mix in the Romanian blood is the most dysgenic influence that affects our race (p.147).

German authorities were also interested in the situation of Romanian Roma. As a guest of Manuilă on a visit to Bucharest, one Nazi demographer wrote concerning the Central

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<sup>65</sup> See Vladimir Solonari, An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21:2 (2007) 268-297. Viorel Achim (1998) for instance credits the deportations as being socially motivated.

<sup>66</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.10.

<sup>67</sup> For more on the eugenics movement, see Maria Bucur.(2002). *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*.

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press; Marius Turda. “The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania.” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), pp. 413-441.

<sup>68</sup> For more on National Socialism’s policy on Roma, see Michael Stewart, “How does genocide happen?” published in Astuti, R., J. Parry, C. Stafford, Eds. (2007). *Questions of Anthropology*. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology Vol. 76, Berg: Oxford-New York; pp 249-281; Sybil Milton, “Correspondence: "Gypsies and the Holocaust" *The History Teacher*, Vol. 25, No. 4. (Aug.1992), pp. 513-521.

Institute for Statistics's data on *țigani* that Gypsies were "a problem of capital importance for Romania" as from the viewpoint of racial psychology they represented a 'serious problem' (Ioanid 2009). While most of the extreme racist statements came from members of the Iron Guard and other proponents of racial biology, the issue of Roma remained fairly marginalized in public rhetoric, whereas the preoccupation of a "Jewish problem" remained at the forefront. The policy against Jews and Roma was not the most consistent from the ideological perspective, with several currents of opinion going on at the government level, the fact that racial and social considerations often mixed, and also the heavy influence of external events such as the success or defeat on the front lines on the government's. <sup>69</sup> Historian Maria Bucur (2002:225) also finds that there remains insufficient evidence to date to draw a causal link between the eugenics movement and the ethnic cleansing of the Antonescu regime, but she leaves the question open due to the closed nature of key archival sources.

Evacuations of selected settled Romani population began on 12 September 1942. Roma were only allowed to take hand luggage with them, leaving remaining possessions and property behind, which then reverted to the local office of the National Centre for Romanianization, and where none existed, to the mayor's office. Gendarmes wrote that 13,176 settled *țigani*, a slighter higher number than anticipated in the original plan, arrived in Transnistria. <sup>70</sup> On 3 October 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie reported to the Interior Ministry that the deportees were turned over to the Transnistrian government (established by Antonescu and lead by former university professor Gheorghe Alexianu) for placement on Soviet-style cooperative farms. In return for their labor, Roma were to be given housing and food. The second set of settled *țigani*, the remaining 18,262 considered "less dangerous," from the spring census, were to be deported early in 1943. <sup>71</sup>

In the rush to deport as many Roma as possible, entire groups were swept up with little regard to the criteria outlined by the government. Letters poured into government offices reporting "mistakes" in the deportations (Kelso 1999:126). During a meeting of

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<sup>69</sup> When signs appeared that Germany could lose the war, the Antonescu government stopped the deportations and later even provided assistance to Jews to leave the country to Palestine.

<sup>70</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.209.

<sup>71</sup> Romanian National Archives: file IGJ, 126/1942, p.205.

the Ministerial cabinet after the Romani deportations finished on 29 September 1942, discussion turned to the possibility of repatriating some Roma who were erroneously deported and stopping the deportation:

*Professor Mihail Antonescu, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers:* We ask General Vasiliu to discuss with Colonel Davidescu [Chief of Antonescu's military cabinet] this question, as we have some complaints on the national level in this area. This, is on the one hand. On the other, please communicate, and give a memo, that explains: the drafted and the family of the drafted, and especially the *figani* that have a trade – blacksmiths, qualified workers and the others, they don't enter into this evacuation category.

*General C. Vasiliu, Under Secretary of State at the Interior Ministry:* We brought 26,000. There are some more pocket thieves. We aren't bringing them.

*Professor Gheorghe Alexianu, Governor of Transnistria:* Please authorize me, for when I find these drafted *figani*, or orphans, or invalids from the last war...

*General C. Vasiliu:* All those are with criminal records. Are you sending me back hardened criminals?

*Professor Mihail Antonescu, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers:* For those who we have rounded up – God be with them! We won't bring them back. Only rare cases....(Ioanid 2009:37).

Historian Jean Ancel (2006) writes that those cabinet minute notes revealed the “true goal of the deportations: extermination but not through execution.” Ancel distinguishes between the fate of the Jews, some of whom were shot and others left to die in ghettos, and the Roma who “were brought to die in Transnistria, lied to about the goal of their “transfers” and left to die from hunger, cold and typhus. Ancel wrote: “Truthfully, only God remained with them”(p.24).

### **Conditions in Transnistria**

The Transnistrian administration made no arrangements for housing or food, and placed the Roma mainly in large open fields until a plan could be implemented. The local government's lack of organization, compounded by the deteriorated state of the Roma, gave way to a state of chaos by early fall. Gendarmes reported to Bucharest that

controlling the 7,058 nomadic Roma already in the area was only possible by confiscating their caravans (to limit their movement) and putting them at work sites.<sup>72</sup> Although the confiscation of the caravans eased temporarily the authorities' control problem, it exacerbated the already miserable living conditions of the Roma. The wagons provided more than transportation; they were their homes. The loss of clothing, pillows, blankets, kitchenware, and daily living necessities was never replaced. In several areas after securing the caravans, authorities then transferred Roma by trucks or on foot to villages or agricultural farms, placing them in either in evacuated Ukrainians' houses or in animal barns or sheds that were devoid of basic necessities. Survival thus depended on individuals' abilities to acquire food, heating supplies, water, and other goods. One survivor, Salică Tanase, confessed that theft from nearby crops, trade with local police, and ingenuity ensured his survival (Kelso 1999:113). Those unable to deal or sell their services ultimately perished.

Reports back to Bucharest alerted officials that major systematic planning was required for those already deported to Transnistria before yet another group of *țigani* could be relocated. On 17 October 1942, the Interior Ministry suspended all further deportation plans until the spring, and attempted to reorganize the existing calamity.<sup>73</sup> That decision was taken exactly at the time that Romanian authorities decided against deporting its Jews to death camps such as Belzec in Poland (Ioanid 2009). German authorities had been pressing the Antonescu regime to turn over the country's Jews to the Nazis, a plan that waxed and waned in its support among Romanian administrators. For Roma, the next months revealed the Transnistrian government's inability to cope with the situation, as reported by gendarmes back to Bucharest. For instance, a December report from Oceacov gendarmes informed headquarters of the overall regional situation - the ethnic Romanians' black market activities, the exchange rate of the mark, the unavailability of produce in the markets, and the miserable plight of the *țigani*. One commander reconstructed the depth of the distress:

Due to the poor quality of the food some *țigani*, and this constitutes the majority, lost so much weight they shrank into mere skeletons. Especially in recent days, as

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<sup>72</sup> Romanian National Archives: File 166/1942, p.171, p.163.

<sup>73</sup> Romanian National Archives: File 121/1942, pp.336-37.

many as ten or fifteen have died daily. They were full of parasites. They received no medical treatment and had no medicine. They are naked without any clothes, and clothing and heating materials are completely lacking. There are women with their inferior parts completely naked in the true sense of the word. They have not been given any soap and they have neither washed themselves nor their clothing, not a single shirt which they have. In general, the situation of the *țigani* is terrible.

Because of the misery, many among them are reduced to mere shadows, and are almost wild. Their state is caused by the bad housing, food, and cold. Due to the hunger to which they were subjected, their thefts have frightened the Ukrainians. Although in the villages [before in Romania] some *țigani* stole out of habit, there are [others] who were honest back home, and started to steal only when hunger brought them to this shameful state.

By November 25<sup>th</sup>, 309 Gypsies died as a result of neglect. Their bodies were found along the Oceacov-Alexandrudar highway. They died from hunger and cold.<sup>74</sup>

The image of naked *țigani* dying of exposure and starvation is striking, and reminiscent of the conditions of Jewish deportees. The gendarmes pointed out the government-induced shortages that reduced the Roma to skeletal figures. Gendarmes from another camp reported to Bucharest the haunting sights of the Gypsies' dire living conditions, similar to the one above.<sup>75</sup> The document asks that immediate action from the Bucharest administration be taken to prevent further agony and loss of life, going as far as to blame the local mayor of Varvarovca for the situation, as the gendarmes claim that the official doesn't have "sufficient personnel or even the good will to manage the villages," which the authors claim will mean that *țigani* "will all die or continue to steal from the neighboring communities because [the Mayor] will not give them any kind of food other than flour and potatoes, not even salt." One gendarme observed that the deaths are horrible, saying that "*țigani* die worse than animals, and they are buried without a priest."<sup>76</sup>

Despite the details of the horrific deterioration of the Roma, almost nothing was done physically to relieve their sufferings. Death tolls rose with the onslaught of disease. Typhus destroyed thousands as it spread quickly among Roma housed in overcrowded

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<sup>74</sup>Romanian National Archives: file 130/1942, pp.127-31.

<sup>75</sup> Romanian National Archives: file 43/1943, pp.260-62.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. These documents also show that some local authorities did not approve of the central government's treatment of the Roma and that there was little coordination between them.

schools, houses, barracks, and shacks. The former Prefect of Oceaov, Vasile Gorsky, wrote in 1945 of the typhus epidemic that ravaged the *țigani*. Upon discovering the prevalence of the disease, Gorsky took measures to prevent further spreading of the infection. However, the belated effort was not enough as between 3,000 and 4,000 *țigani* succumbed to fever, heart disease, fatigue, bronchial pneumonia, delirium, and damage to their nervous systems (Ioanid 1997:316-321). During the winter of 1942-43, the agricultural farms were almost inactive, and the Ukrainians took what little work was available. As a person's workload determined their rations, the lack of employment for Roma accounted for their gross deprivation. Unwilling to wait for conventional methods of improving their lot, Roma deportees engaged in resistance. Ordered to remain where they were placed, they defied authorities by leaving the camps mainly at night under cover of darkness. They stole corn, clothing, pots, and blankets from neighboring Ukrainian villages for survival.<sup>77</sup> As survivor Ion Neagu explained, sometimes parents sent their children to steal food, and they didn't always return: "I remember when three or four children left - seven, eight and ten years old - to get potatoes from the field. Only one of them came back. Shot. A bullet went through his back and came out his chest" (Kelso 1999:121). Although punishment of prison, or even death loomed, Roma continued their struggle to survive.<sup>78</sup> By 1943, gendarmes reported that some Roma were attempted to escape from Transnistria by any means available.

For those Roma who remained in Transnistria the situation continued to be precarious. In the early months of 1944, the Soviet army mounted an offensive to recapture its occupied territory and Romanian and German troops retreated across Transnistria. This meant that liberation of Jews and Roma who were left alive in camps effectively occurred through abandonment by their guards, leaving them to the perils of facing an oncoming front line. The archival records concerning the release of Roma are few, most likely due to the confusion of the retreat and the change in government. On 23 August 1944, King Mihai announced the dissolution of the Antonescu government and proclaimed an armistice with the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States. Antonescu was arrested and two days later Romania declared war on Germany. By that

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<sup>77</sup> Romanian National Archives: File IGJ, 59/1942, p.305.

<sup>78</sup> Romanian National Archives: File IGJ, 60/1943, p.116.

time, most deportees had started by any means possible to return to Romania. Survivors' recollections reconstruct the events precipitating their return home. Many learned of the Romanian army's retreat from the gendarmes who were guarding them, as they, too, were abandoning their posts to escape before Soviet troops took over the area. Afraid to strike out on their own, many Roma recounted waiting a few days before leaving. Upon arrival their arrival home, untreated illnesses such as typhus and tuberculosis claimed the lives of many Roma. The majority discovered once home that there was nothing left of their property or goods that had remained behind.

On 13 September 1944, one day after Romania signed the official armistice in Moscow; the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued an order which granted *țigani* freedom to practice their respective trades.<sup>79</sup> In essence, this was the closest to a liberation order that existed. In 1944 when the Eastern front fell, less than half of the 25,000 Roma deported had survived.<sup>80</sup> Ion Antonescu and his top collaborators, Mihail Antonescu, Foreign Minister and Vice President of the Council of Ministries; General C.Z. Vasiliu, Director of the Gendarmerie and Sub-secretary of State at the Interior Ministry, and Dr. Gheorghe Alexianu, Governor of Transnistria, were tried and found guilty of war crimes in May 1946. One of the charges levied against them was crimes against humanity for the treatment of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews and Roma in Transnistria. All four were executed.

Roma who returned to Romania after the liberation from camps had little to no opportunities to represent their traumatic experiences.<sup>81</sup> Roma strove to settle back into some semblance of their pre-war life, which was difficult as the country transitioned from fascism to communism, another major and disruptive upheaval. While survivors recall having told their non-Roma neighbors of their experience upon returning home, they also were attempting to blend into the crowd, so to speak, to avoid being targeted once again for their skin color and lifestyle, by 'Romanianizing' as much as was possible.

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<sup>79</sup> Romanian National Archives: File IGJ, 86/1944, p.295.

<sup>80</sup> The official statistic sanctioned by the Romanian government in the Wiesel report states that 11,000 Roma died. It was compiled by a commission investigating the Romanian Holocaust by using documents from the Transnistria administration before liberation. Oral testimony revealed to me that nearly everyone with whom I spoke reported losing loved ones on the road home, thus the Wiesel report under-estimates the numbers of deaths.

<sup>81</sup> Jews were not granted a public space either until the war trials, however by 1945 the Jewish Federation began collecting their testimonies as evidence.

For Jewish survivors who had been deported from the Hungarian-controlled part of Transylvania, there was a window of opportunity to discuss their experiences. Those who suffered in camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau, such as Oliver Lustig, were encouraged to narrate their sufferings.<sup>82</sup> Their experiences conformed to a national narrative that the Romanian communist party was shaping about the war during the Ceaușescu era of rising nationalism that stated the fascists were ideological enemies of communists and that the persecution and atrocity during the war, which was brought on by Nazis, had to be repressed. It is in this discursive space, created by party apparatchik, that one finds a voice for certain types of testimony. The stories of Jews deported by Hungarian troops to German-run camps were especially convenient for the Romanian communist regime since they were highlighting mistakes by a rival country, Hungary, with Romanian history text books and official discourse emphasizing that Romania resisted German pressures to hand over its Jews while omitting that the country had carried out its own deportation policies in the East.

The communist regime suppressed, however, the narratives of Jewish survivors of deportation and internment in Transnistria. After the war, there were a series of trials that convicted dozens of individuals, such as gendarmes who were guards or camp commanders, where Jewish victims of the atrocities were called forth to testify against their former perpetrators. Roma, however, were not called to submit testimony (much like in Germany).<sup>83</sup> One can ask whether this was due to the prosecution's belief that Roma suffering would either fail to illicit sympathy with the court due to the low socio-economic status of the victims or due to the fewer numbers of Roma who were persecuted it may have seemed marginal in comparison with Jewish suffering. In any case, Roma were not included in the postwar trials (Final Report 2005). After this period of justice seeking passed, there was be a silencing of Transnistrian narrative for Jews as well (Shafir 2007).

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<sup>82</sup> See for instance Oliver Lustig (1987). *Jurnal Insingerat*, Bucuresti [Romania]: Editura Militară. In the preface, Lustig expresses his motivation for writing the book so that he could accuse all those guilty of provoking the suffering of 160,000 Jewish victims deported under the Horthy Regime from Northern Transylvania just because they were born Jewish (p.6). Interestingly, the publisher billed his book as a novel.

<sup>83</sup> For a better understanding of the fate of German Roma and Sinti post-war, see Gilad Margalit (2002). *Germany and its Gypsies: A Post-Auschwitz Ordeal*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.



Marginalization of Roma in Holocaust history was thus the product of several factors which colluded to evict them from memory. The silencers were the historians who helped build the virulently nationalist historiography proposed by the communist regime since the mid 1960s and who were still in control post-communism of many education avenues such as universities, institutes, and state institutions such as the national archives, and some even became nationalist politicians elected to parliament (Livezeanu 2003).<sup>84</sup> However, as Irina Livezeanu (2003) points out, the communist and post-communist era nationalist historiography also takes its roots from the pre-war nationalist period. Atrocities like the persecution of Roma or Jews obviously did not fit with this official discourse and research into this area was not encouraged. Post-communism, besides the narrow framework regarding historiography, one must also consider that these “uncomfortable” Holocaust narratives were emerging in the larger context of an insecure Romania after 1989, which had only recently shed 45 years of authoritarian rule only to find itself trapped between a threatening East, an exploitative West, and an ethnic war raging in the neighboring (former) Yugoslavia. Romania was in the throes of economic turmoil caused by the closure and privatization of state-owned companies, political upheaval, rising unemployment, the disappearance of the communist-era social safety net, etc. Roma emerged during these years as the universal scapegoat for all society’s ills (Barany 2002). Such was the intensity of resentment against Roma that the country had to deal with dozens of pogroms against Roma, spread throughout the country. During these post-communist years, Romania has also been coping with the emergence of other large groups of state victims, such as political prisoners, ethnic Germans, and fellow Romanians who suffered deportations under Stalin, so the public space available to former Roma victims was very small to non-existent – and seemingly, who would want to hear about the past plight of the most unpopular ethnic group in the country?

Add to this the economic dimension, with built in ambivalence due to huge potential damages needing to be paid by today’s generation of Romanians to millions of people belonging to former victim groups, and we understand the scope of the problem for elderly, disenfranchised Roma to gain space for their narratives and gain the

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<sup>84</sup>For further development of Romani marginality and the Holocaust, see Raphael Vago, “The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: The Plight of a Stateless Minority,” at: <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2000-1/vago.htm>.

recognition which was eventually offered first to other groups that were able to lobby, either through their own political power (former anti-communists) or with the help of other states such as Israel in the case of the Jews, who also enlisted strong allies in the blocs and international organizations that Romania was trying to join as it was building closer ties with the West.

The fate of the Roma is rarely mentioned in academic sources, but this hasn't been due to a lack of historical materials. Unlike what historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1997:42-43) discovered while studying the Haitian revolution - that some things and peoples are 'absent *in* history,' this is not the case of the Roma. The available sources regarding the deportation and internment of Roma are ample, including direct knowledge by millions of Romanians who remember the event (albeit in a diluted and filtered manner), which has also made its way into contemporary life (Kelso 2007). It was the communist construction of history that engineered the silence regarding the fate of Jews and Roma in Transnistria, but it has also been the failure of post-socialist scholars to adequately deconstruct that narrative that, for the most part, has reproduced the silence about the Romani genocide. Raul Hilberg, considered the father of Holocaust studies, understood that it was the present social status and racism that contributed to this void. In 2001, Hilberg gave a keynote speech at a symposium hosted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Roma and Sinti Under-Studied Victims of Nazism.' In it, he said that the postwar trajectories of the two groups differed drastically, as Jews had the state of Israel to protect them, however Roma had no homeland:

They have no protector. They have no refuge. All they can do is run, that's it. They are ignored because they are powerless. They [were] vulnerable not only to the Nazi machine, they are vulnerable to such nice, beautiful western-oriented democratic states such as the Czech Republic [said scornfully]. They are vulnerable where ever they go. But what does that mean? If we want to build a world in which there is justice for all, where do we start? The answer is: The Roma.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The audio recording of the seminar on 21 September 2000 held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, including Hilberg's speech, is available at: <http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/symposia/symposium/2000-09-21/>.

Hilberg also stated that scholars must address the issue of the Roma if they are to fully grasp what happened during the Holocaust, as he was convinced “that the fates of the two communities are inextricably linked. It’s not a question whether one wants to talk about both, one has to.” By touching upon the issue of social inequality, justice, and memory politics, Hilberg signaled that the case of the Roma needs to become known.

### **The Advent of Holocaust Testimonies**

Much of the collection and use of testimony during and immediately following the Holocaust was to support evidence that atrocities took place. Even while the persecution was on-going, Jewish witnesses were telling their stories by writing in diaries and journals, and by collecting archives for future study of the destruction upon them. One of the best known early examples of these recordings is the *Diary of Anne Frank*, which is taught around the world in school systems, but hundreds of other writings existed as well. Those testimonies, over time, were sometimes turned into literature, which was published post-war. Oral testimonies were also collected during and after the war, often as supporting evidence for perpetrator trials. Historian Annette Wieviorka (2006) writes that postwar personal and individual memories were mainly kept within in families and that they were “not part of the cultural mainstream and had little political meaning” (p.55). She goes on to argue that it was the Eichmann trial in 1961 that created a pivotal moment in the memory of the Holocaust, as it marked what she has coined the ‘advent of the witness’ (p.57). Unlike at Nuremberg, where witness testimonies were used primarily to confirm what the prosecution already knew from documents, the Eichmann trial was based on both documentation and oral evidence (p.67-68). Oral testimonies were used to pull together bits and pieces of personal tragedies that could be visualized through the survivors’ words for the Israeli and international audiences following the trial. Wieviorka states that the trial created a space for victims to speak, a social demand for testimonies (p.87). Witnesses were granted a new function and identity as survivors, whose duty was to “be the bearer of history,” which she argues transformed the “conditions for writing the history of the genocide (p.88).” By the 1970s, systematic collections of audiovisual testimonies were under way in Israel, France, and the US.

These were transformed by the improvements in technology, which led to large scale collections such as that of the Steven Spielberg video archive. Wieviororka questioned the explosion of testimony, finding that for the most part it was an attempt “to rescue individuals from the masses, to give voice to ordinary people who have neither the desire nor perhaps the ability to put their stories in writing” (p.138). She then goes on to quote Aharon Appelfeld, who accuses theology and sociology of speaking about the ‘Holocaust,’ whereas the writer points out that literature provides people with names and surroundings, putting ‘a cup of coffee in his hand’ (p.140-1). The trend of testimony, by focusing on individuals, moves away from generalizations about historical processes, placing memory work back into the realm of the realizable.

### ***El Phure: Finding Romani survivors in Romania***

In 1995 my Romani tutor introduced me to Marioara so that I could practice my burgeoning language skills. When I told her of my project to collect oral histories of Romani survivors, she offered assistance. While social scientists would label Marioara as my “key informant,” our relationship has long since surpassed the static construction of the term allowing for a wonderful friendship that shifts between work colleague and kindred spirit.<sup>86</sup> In 1944 Romanian police had categorized both Marioara’s grandparents and her in-laws as “returning deportees,” and she committed initially to this project because of the suffering her relatives endured in labor camps. She tells me she worked with me over the years of periodic data collection out of friendship. Marioara rose well before dawn to feed the animals, to wash clothes, and prepare meals for her five children so that we could spend our days traipsing in and out of muddy villages within 200 kilometers of Bucharest looking for our study participants, *el phure kai sas ando Bugo* (in Romani) or old people who had been to the Bug River.

Our work wasn’t easy. There were no formal networks of Romani survivors and they lived primarily in rural areas with poor access to public transportation. Soon we discovered that *el phure* lived not in neatly clustered areas, but instead were spread out in

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<sup>86</sup> For a look at a reconstruction of the informant-researcher relationship, see Ruth Behar (1993), *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. Boston: Beacon Press.

small villages dotting the map of southern Romania.<sup>87</sup> They owned no telephones and thus had to be contacted in person to invite them to be interviewed. Often we would make an appointment one day for the next, only to discover upon returning that a baptism, horse sale, or *kris* (Romani trial) had usurped our date. Survivors also were initially deeply suspicious of my motives, even though Marioara - a *romni*, or Romani woman, explained our purpose. They asked: Why would a *gazdi*, or non-Romani woman, want to know about the deportation? Did the *gadzi* even understand what that meant?

I did and I didn't. Archival records had prepared me for the events of the deportation and incarceration, but my Romani dictionary failed to give me the right vocabulary for it. Although a Romani word had been created by international linguists to represent the Holocaust, *Porrajmos* (The Devouring), it was an unfamiliar term to the Romanian Roma who were its victims. The horrific events that took place in the spatial borderland of the Bug River from 1942-44, were conflated by survivors into *ando Bugo* (at the River Bug). As I began learning the vocabulary of *ando Bugo*, the elderly survivors, started talking about their time in camps. One survivor led us to another, expanding our networks.

### **Framing the Romani Narrative: External and Internal Constraints**

The more we worked with Romani survivors and their families, it became clearer that their supposed silence about their wartime experiences was multi-faceted. Before delving into the results of the research, I would like to make a brief foray into a discussion about the place of Romani narratives to situate this work within the larger framework of scholarship on the Romani Holocaust. Amid the plethora of Holocaust narratives, Romani survivors write hardly any.<sup>88</sup> Out of the thousands of publications on the Holocaust, only a few dozen works touch specifically on the Roma, and most are historical accounts written by non-Romani scholars (Crowe 1996, Lewy 2000, Thurner 1998, Kenrick 1999, Ioanid 2000, Polansky 2007). It should not be too surprising then that an ethnic minority that has been highly marginalized, both in historical accounts and

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<sup>87</sup> Survivors live all across the country, however we focused on Southern Romania as Bucharest was our home base.

<sup>88</sup> There are a few exceptions. In English, see Otto Rosenberg (1999). *A Gypsy in Auschwitz*. London: London House.

in contemporary practice (Barany 2002), has produced little scholarship on its experience. Reasons often cited for this phenomenon can be relegated into external and internal constraints.

### **External Constraints**

One of the major issues that keep Roma from being studied is their *exclusion from Holocaust studies*. Most scholars who exclude Roma do so by using a narrow definition of the Holocaust, defining it as systematic genocide of the Jews. They argue that the Holocaust remains a uniquely Jewish experience and that while other victims certainly suffered in camps, their fate was not unique because the Nazis meant to completely destroy only the Jews, who experienced devastating losses (Gilbert 1985, Lewy 2000, Bauer 1992, 1998). Some scholars reject this hierarchical ranking of victims and argue to include Roma (Kenrick and Puxon 1972; Milton 1991,1992; Friedlander 1995, Hilberg 2000, Hancock 2001, Stauber and Vago 2007, Gerson and Wolf 2007). As mentioned earlier, the preeminent Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg (2000) was adamant that the fates of Jews and Roma were intertwined, and they had to be studied together. He stated his findings about the Roma and compares it to the Jewish fate:

Obviously, we are dealing with two Diaspora peoples. Both for hundreds of years were subject in Europe to distrust and to expulsions. They were hounded. They were vilified. Now and then they were welcomed, but at best they were tolerated. I believe that the ignorance of both by the gentile population was very considerable....

I discovered, by and by, in the Roma/Sinti community there were movement restrictions, there were registrations as you heard, finger printing, even before Hitler. In a certain sense, the Jews of 1932 felt that they were on the brink of full acceptance. They were almost completely emancipated. They still had not got a really good foothold in the German civil service or the railroad administration. But, these things come eventually. When you look at the community of the Roma or the Sinti, well, they were very far, far removed from integration.

And so if one were to take any measure whatsoever against them, one could already start in the middle, in other words, they didn't have to begin the very careful surgical separation of Gypsy civil servants or Gypsy this or that, no, one could already begin to say, "Get out of your home." "Go to some little place in the city near the railroad track, some undesirable part in your carts, live in a shack."

And one could do this before the outbreak of war. Before the Jews were ejected from their apartments in '38, the beginning of '38.

We find the first Jews expelled to Poland. Of course the attempt was already made in 1938 unsuccessfully, but a year later after the outbreak of war the occupation of Poland, the [unclear on tape] Jews moving from Vienna into Poland, we find Sinti were selected in the western provinces of Germany, removed in the spring of 1940 as you all know, to Poland, together in the same place. We find both of them in concentration camps. I look over the lists of Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, they are there..... [From Lodz]...they were sent to Auschwitz and they were gassed in the same gas chambers as the Jews. And what other ethnic group was subjected to gassing? What other ethnic group? [Speaker's vocal emphasis].

There was one other thing. I said that the community of Sinti/Roma in Germany were under the jurisdiction of the criminal police. But if you carefully read what those experts in Gypsy affairs had to say about that community, it turns out that [it is] petty-theft kind of stuff. They are not accused of felonies like robberies or murders. It's very interesting. And please also take note that when the Germans use the word *plage* "plague," that it may not be, depending on the context, the term plague. It's a nuisance. It's the fact that Nazi Germany considered Gypsies, *Zigeuner*, to be a nuisance. Does that make the tragedy less significant or more so? If they are so harmless, if all they do is a little stealing, is the answer the gas chamber? A bullet? Hunger in a camp?

Let me say a word about the lack of a plan to annihilate the Gypsies. We have no plan for the Jews, this has been reiterated. We have no word of Eichmann, who heard it from Heidrich, who heard it from Himmler that Hitler had given an oral order to annihilate the Jews of Europe physically. He never wrote it down. The Jews were not annihilated all at once. Although Himmler had that dream, he even had a date, December 31st 1942, for Germany and Poland, they didn't even get them out of Berlin until 1943 completely, and even then not of course mixed marriages. And when we consider why in the case of the Roma community there was no pronounced sense that there was an overall order or policy to kill them all, why not? Well, the Criminal Police had jurisdiction of Jews and Gypsies in one document to the SS and police. So there is no need for an order. It doesn't arise.

Keep in mind, one of the difficulties in killing off some of the Jews was that they had a place in society. They were married or they were well known, or they had served in the army and somebody would raise objections to them being killed and so on and so forth. But why were the Jews in mixed marriages protected more in a sense than the Sinti in mixed marriages? The Sinti could be sterilized. And then it dawns on you, what does this bureaucrat think of a German woman who marries a Sinti, who is the lowest of the low? But he doesn't have that view of a Jew, he does not have that view.

Most scholars on the Holocaust in Romania also exclude Roma, albeit for different reasons which have been mentioned earlier in this paper, although this is slowly changing (see Ioanid 2000, Achim 2004, Kelso 1999, Woodcock 2008 for some exceptions). This differential treatment is particularly strange in discussions about the Romanian theatre, as ministerial orders after 1942 regarding both Jewish and Romani deportees were often bundled together, just as the two groups were bundled together on trains to Transnistria in the fall 1942, and just as they were often bundled together in misery of the Romanian-run camps. Transnistrian camps such as Bogdanovka and Dumanovka, sites of major massacres of Jews, were also sites of death and destruction of Roma. Romanian historian Viorel Achim (2004) writes: “the situation of the Gypsies cannot be thought of much differently than the intent in that moment for the Jewish population, which earlier had meant the end for many deportees” (p.141). In discussions of Romanian administration of Transnistria, British researcher Dennis Deletant (2004) writes: “The Romanian occupation had different ramifications for the Jews and Gypsies on the one hand, and another one for the rest of the population.” (p.87). And Israeli historian Jean Ancel (2006) wrote that although there were similarities and differences in the Romanian policy, that “both ethnicities were affected the same by the Holocaust” (p.32).

There are also *institutional constraints* that maintain Romani exclusion. The survivors themselves and many of their descendants are outside of the mainstream production of scholarly knowledge as they have almost no cultural capital.<sup>89</sup> Roma are rarely in positions of power in academia. Less than one percent of Roma in Romania go to centers of higher education, and functional literacy rates hover around 60% for women and 45% for men (Zamfir and Zamfir 1993). Of the respondents interviewed for this study, the majority were illiterate. Furthermore, institutions from which academic work is produced act as barriers to deny Roma access to information. For example, survivors told me that when they requested copies of their archival records from national and local

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<sup>89</sup> The exception would be for musicians, but a very small number of Roma are musicians. In fact, during the deportations of Romanian Roma, the famous Romanian musician and composer, George Enescu, intervened with Ion Antonescu and said that if any more Romani musicians were deported, he would go as well. See Viorel Achim (2004), *Documente Privind Deportarea Țiganilor în Transnistria*. Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedia, p.330. However, deportations had already been halted when the composer spoke with Antonescu.



archives, they were denied access.<sup>90</sup> Some were refused entry into buildings housing archives while others were turned away by archivists with misinformation that documents from that period no longer existed.<sup>91</sup>

### **Internal Constraints: Fear, Traditional Practices, and Painful Memories**

For Roma, there is also the *fear of being labeled a victim*. Some survivors were fearful of being discovered as former victims of the Antonescu regime, as it might set them up as targets for new ethnic hatreds; therefore they hadn't told their stories to those outside of their families since their return to Romania after the war. From 1990-1995, some 40 incidents of anti-Romani violence broke out across the country, leaving several Roma dead, some severely beaten, and others homeless after their properties were destroyed by their non-Roma neighbors. Immediate concerns of nascent Romani organizations set up post-1989 were to stop ethnic violence against Roma and to help those who were victimized, as well as to bring immediate human rights concerns to the international community.<sup>92</sup> They were far away from being ready to tackle bringing Holocaust narratives to the public, as they were caught up in addressing immediate needs. It would take another decade before their organizations were able to do so.

One seventy two-year-old woman, whose nephew had told her I wanted to talk about *ando Bugo*, hid in her house and cried hysterically when her nephew brought me into the yard to introduce us.<sup>93</sup> She thought that I was there to re-deport her to Transnistria! The first time this happened I was shocked, the second time I was also shocked, and by the twentieth time a survivor feared redeportation I had accepted it as a 'normal' reaction. The fear still lingered from 1942. Their reaction is not surprising considering post socialist Romania's anti-Romani sentiment (Verdery 1996, Barany 2002). Time and again in speaking casually with taxi drivers, street vendors and sales people (who had no inkling that I researched the Romani Holocaust) I have heard the

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<sup>90</sup>Interviews with A.B. and M.D. Bucharest, Romania. February 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with A.B. and M.D. Bucharest, Romania. February 2002.

<sup>92</sup> In 1994, I volunteered for a year at Romani Criss, Romania's largest NGO working for Roma rights. The organization's mission and goals were to highlight Roma's low socio-economic conditions as well as human rights abuses.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with M.H., Ocna Mureș, Romania. 1995.

phrase, “*If only Antonescu had finished the Gypsies off then, we wouldn’t have this problem with them now.*” The survivors' fear is understandable given public sentiment.

Saul S. Friedman in his analysis Jewish survivors’ testimony noted something quite similar in that fear was pervasive and prevented Jewish victims from telling their stories to the public. The fear, he said, lingered from as early as 1939, and included a fear of retaliation from anti-Semites if survivors would tell their stories, which became more acute years after liberation when they heard slanderous terms against them such as “kike” (Friedman 1979: xv).

Several researchers report that *Roma don’t speak of their dead*, thus culture prohibits them from speaking about the Holocaust (Grigore 2007, Clendinnen 1999, Bauer 1998, Vago 2001, Fonseca 1995). This supposedly explains the lack of scholarship on the Romani Holocaust. Some claims by non-Roma of Romani silence border on the absurd. Author Isabella Fonseca's remarks on the seemingly lack of collective memory by Roma about their sufferings are inaccurate. She writes:

The Jews have responded to persecution and dispersal with a monumental industry of remembrance. The Gypsies--with their peculiar mixture of fatalism and the spirit, or wit, to seize the day--have made an art of forgetting (Fonseca 1995:276).

Fonseca transfers her romanticized version of ‘Gypsies’ onto the real life protagonists of the Holocaust and in one line manages to erase over half a century of oral history being passed down from generation to generation. She writes that where ever she traveled, Roma couldn't recall the Holocaust. Alternative explanations exist for Roma not speaking to her about the Holocaust – perhaps there were selection issues (talking to Roma who were not deported), or communication problems, such as using the invented term *Porrajmos* in her inquiry, as she does in the chapter title on the Holocaust in her book, and as I mentioned people outside the international Romani elite are unaware of this term. Her conclusions, aside from being unfounded, infantilize Roma and rob them of their agency. While this cultural motive is plausible as an explanation based on traditions among some Roma groups, I have not found this among Romanian Roma that I worked with. Rather I have found that fear of new persecutions, institutional barriers such as

limited access to archives, and widespread racism and discrimination have kept Roma from sharing their story with outsiders.

Others believe that *painful memories* prevent survivors from speaking out. Psychologist Dina Wardi (1992) in her work with Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children, noted that Jewish survivors generally told little of their story to their children due to the great pain involved with recounting tragedies. However, parents who survived Nazi persecution often expected their children to carry the entire family history with them, thereby transforming the children into ‘memorial candles’ for future generations (p.30). The Romani survivors in my study diverge from Wardi’s findings among Jewish survivors since all Romani respondents affirmed in interviews that their stories were shared with their children and often with their grandchildren. In the absence of monuments or official history textbooks, their children were the only repositories of this painful family history. Romani survivors who I know have relegated their narratives to counter-memory. The Roma *are* telling their story, only they are doing it orally, and, for the most part, within the sanctity of the family. One nine-year-old girl recounted to me her grandmother’s story almost verbatim to the elder woman’s telling of it.<sup>94</sup> That was not an isolated incident. Several times throughout the recording of these interviews daughters, sons, and grandchildren were present and chimed in, “*Don’t forget to tell about the time when....*”

## **Romani Voices**

Narratives evoke the anguish, humiliation, and horror inflicted on the respondents, going to the heart of the traumatic stress inflicted on survivors. One man, fourteen-years-old upon deportation, witnessed his father gunned down by a guard while trying to sneak out of the camp to procure food.<sup>95</sup> A woman, then eight, watched guards cut off her mother’s toe for not yielding the last of their gold.<sup>96</sup> Another woman, twelve at the time, recounted soldiers “playing” by butting her head together with her sister’s

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<sup>94</sup>Interview with A.C., Tătărăstii de Sus, Romania. 1999.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with C.P., Bucharest, Romania. September, 1999.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with A.I., Ciorlogârla, Romania. September, 1999.

until her sister slipped into a coma from which she never woke.<sup>97</sup> Individually the accounts are tragic, collectively they are horrific. While each narrative is unique in that survivors have their private traumas and triumphs, in coding these accounts thematically I discovered commonalities among them. For this chapter, I selected three themes that were pervasive throughout Romani narratives: starvation, disease, and escape. The chosen themes also reflect the study's aim to illustrate the effect of the deportation policy on individuals and their families. They are also common themes in narratives of Jewish Holocaust survivors (Niewyk 1998, Lewin 1990, Rothchild 1981, Friedman 1979). For instance, starvation and typhus were catalysts that accentuated suffering and often provoked death, which tore families apart. Escape was selected because it demonstrates the extent to which Roma resisted their fate in Transnistria.

To offer a better insight into the life in the camps and personal struggles for survival, I will focus on the testimony of one Romani woman, Anuța Brânzan, whose experience resonates closely with the narratives of other survivors. In 1998 I met Anuța, who had retired early from her job as a factory janitor for health reasons. In her early sixties then, Anuța was heavy-set with frizzy graying hair that she attempted to control by pinning back, and her grey-blue eyes were ringed with dark circles. At our first meeting she was quiet and nervous, seemingly weighed down by life itself. After I got to know her, I later learned of Anuța's happier days as a fun-loving young woman she had grown into despite her Holocaust experiences, who adored summers at the seaside. That was before a poisonous marriage with a violent batterer and insidious battle with cancer had permanently marked her as 'fatigued.' As we sat together in an over-heated kitchen in a ubiquitous communist bloc apartment in Bucharest getting to know one another, Anuța chained smoked expensive imported cigarettes bummed off her cousin who was a cook in the Turkish Embassy. She had never spoken about her experiences in Transnistria to anyone she wasn't close to, and at the time, she didn't want her teenage grandson to know about her deportation. Anuța was atypical of most of the survivors that I interviewed as she described herself as fully-integrated into Romanian society, having shed all visual and linguistic markers of her cultural background. Her ex-husband had been a Romanian, she explained, and her daughter, whom I met later, was an energetic

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with L.S. Ivesti, Romania. October, 1999.

bottle-blond nurse who preferred passing by concealing her Romani origins. Although Anuța declared that “I am a *țiganka*, and I am proud,” she too preferred to “live like a Romanian,” as she would tell me continuously.

Once our interview got going, I recognized that Anuța was a woman after my own heart, a talker who need very little prompting. We easily filled an hour cassette before she tired. I asked to speak again, and she agreed. Over nine years I interviewed Anuța five times, sometimes alone in her Bucharest apartment, sometimes with her sisters Margareta and Verginia, and always with a table stocked with food nearby that she’d prepared for us. I was doing what Henry Greenspan (1998) suggested in taking testimony repeatedly from the same person to really understand the ‘context of recounting’ (p.9). Below I have pieced together these interviews to form a representation of her experience, which is an abbreviated version of a longer testimony that was published in 2009.<sup>98</sup> Merges between interviews covering the same topics are not marked, however I use ellipsis points to indicate when material has been removed. Background information for the excerpts is provided before the presentation of materials. The thematic division of the sections follows as close as possible the chronology of events.

Anuța’s testimony positions us often in an uncomfortable place of an intimate listener to a story that challenges our senses by bringing us closer to understanding the daily obstacles faced by those in camps deep in the Ukraine. In 1942, Anuța was eight years old, living with her parents and three sisters in a provincial town in southern Romania. She describes her family as poor, tight-knit, and happy. In their two-room house with dirt floors, Anuța remembers her father Radu doting on the children between his work as a shoemaker and part-time musician. Her mother Constantina was a housewife, and was close to her extended family who lived nearby and frequently helped out with the girls. The second daughter in the family, Anuța had completed first grade and was looking forward to school starting again that September when the police came unexpectedly and announced their “resettlement,” in the East, a euphemism created by authorities to hide their true intentions. Labeled by authorities as part of the settled Roma considered “dangerous” because Radu had a prison record, the family was deported that

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<sup>98</sup>See Radu Ioanid, Michelle Kelso, and Luminița Cioaba, eds. (2009). *Tragedia Romilor Deportați în Transnistria 1942-1945* [*The Tragedy of Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-45*], Iași: Polirom.

very same day, and placed temporarily in a soccer stadium in a nearby city. Days later, shoved into cattle cars, they were sent with some 13,000 other settled Roma to Transnistria, where nomadic Roma had already arrived months before.

### **‘Lady, please give me some bread’: The Effects of Hunger**

Once Romani deportees had crossed the Dniester River and reached Transnistria, local authorities placed them primarily along the River Bug either in remote villages where locals had been evacuated or in Soviet collective farms in the counties of Golta, Balta, Berezovka and Oceacov. The Romanian gendarmerie had the task of guarding camps, and relied on Ukrainian militia to fill out guard duties. All camps were differed in size, administrative organization, and work details as there was little standardization across the area. Although authorities were to provide food rations for deportees, more often than not provisions ceased after the first few weeks, if they had been distributed at all (Kelso 1999:115). Depending on the camp, conditions varied, but the Transnistrian government established that those who worked were to receive a ration of 400 grams of food daily, while those incapable of work - small children and the elderly, were to have been allotted only 200 grams of food. Gendarmes reported back to Bucharest that the meager rations were never enough, often weren’t even given, and resulted in turning deportees into “skeletons” who foraged for food (Kelso 1999:113).

Anuța doesn’t recall much from the train journey, as she told me her parents protected her from many of the horrors along the way. It was after they were in Transnistria that Anuța’s memories sharpen, recalling the stint of forced labor, the slow deterioration of her family from the dire living conditions, and the near continual hunger that plagued her:

They took us to a farm, which had a barn and a storage facility. We didn’t all fit in there so the rest of us stayed outside. We slept outside for about a month. Then they took us with horse wagons to some military barracks on the [water], very close to a town [Oceacov]. They kept us there for two months. Then they put us in horse wagons and divided us in sectors. Traditional Roma on one side, the Romanianized Roma some place else.

They put us Romanianized Roma and the musicians, the ones who did not speak Romani, in that village - Vladimirovka. There were no Germans there. There were Romanian gendarmes [guarding us]. It had only two streets. They moved the Russians<sup>99</sup> living on one street to the other one and put two families to a house. Then they moved us, as many as could fit, into the houses. We were more than 700 people there. Some three, four, or five families to a house, as many as could fit. Russian houses had three rooms. I think we were about ten families inside. Some three or four families here, two or three there in the other room, and so on. However we worked it out among ourselves....

[Later], they did not take us to work very much. They took us a few times to work in the cornfields to cut weeds from the corn. I went too, as a child. They made some wooden tools for us with an iron blade to cut the weeds so that it wouldn't cover the corn. When the corn was small, we were to clean it of weeds. The Russian women would say, "Come on you go, too, Anushka, to the corn," and they showed me how to pick [corn], how to carry as much as I could. Sometimes the Russian women sent me to get some [corn] for the cows. I would pick some corn, and would give it to them for the cows and secretly they gave us milk.

Once two Romanian gendarmes caught me in the field and beat me with the whip, so hard that I shit on myself. They said if they ever catch me there again, they would kill me. What was I doing there? Meaning I should just sit there, like in a camp. We were not even allowed to go into our yards. We weren't allowed even to make a step from the yard outside, on the sidewalk. So what was I doing there [in the field]....

We did not have contact [with the villagers].<sup>100</sup> We were kept under armed guard. We weren't even allowed to go get some water. If the water came they would knock at the gate, yell from the street to come out with your bucket, your pitcher, cups, whatever you had to get water from the wagon. If you didn't have anything [to put it in] or if you couldn't go out because you were sick, you suffered. You did not even have water to wet your mouth, not even a cup of water. We were not even allowed to go to water. Nothing. The [villagers] were not allowed to come to us and we were not allowed to go to them. They tortured us to kill us.

[Guards] gave us a little bit of food or none at all. We were like sick cows, closed in. No food. For a while they brought us some grains like for the cows, a can filled with grains, but not more than [for] two or three months. They gave us barley like we were cows. A Russian would come and my father would go out [to meet him], to give us a can filled with barley. Who could eat barley? Who? Like

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<sup>99</sup> Most likely she refers to Ukrainian locals who lived in the village – they made up the majority of the local population, but Romani deportees often do not distinguish between Ukrainians and Russians, labeling everyone as "Russian" which to this day is also a synonym for most Romanians for the term "Soviet" as do many Americans.

<sup>100</sup> Contact was limited between locals and deportees. They met either in the fields for work, when guards allowed home owners to check on their houses now occupied by Roma, or for burying the dead.

we were horses, so they gave us barley? And then they didn't give us anything anymore. Absolutely nothing. And there was no doctor there with us. No medication. Absolutely nothing....

Luckily, an old Russian would bring us food. He was the owner of the house where we stayed. They were forced out, too. He would bring something from time to time. My father gave him the best of what we had. The sheets my mother made, good clothes, whatever he had. My mother and father gave the Russian man earrings, bracelets, whatever they had to get some potatoes.

But [the Russian] would tell us he cannot give us more, that he barely had enough for his family, because they had rations, too. The army had carried off [the harvest] and they were not the masters there anymore. We got some milk, corn, and ate it like cows, because we did not have what to cook it in, or how to boil it.

“With what can I cook this corn, these potatoes?” My father asked the Russian. “I can't come [with fire wood],” he said, “because I am afraid the gendarmes would catch me and they'll shoot me. I'll give you a hoe to carve pieces from that tree in the yard to make a bit of fire.”

We made a little fire and steam, to cook a little. [The food] was mostly raw. But we could eat it.

To think, I wasn't even eight or nine years old, what could I do? As long as [my parents] were alive I didn't suffer very much. My mother gave us her food. My father sold everything we had. He sold most of the clothes, even some that were ripped. So we wore like a sweater. The clothes became too little so my father sold them. [Later] in the summer we foraged some greens – grass, roots to eat. We did not even have water to drink. Thin. Wretched....

The powers from above must have kept us alive. We were without food, without water. Like animals in the wild. You waited - maybe you would die. You expected only to die. You did not expect any joy. Your day to die, that's all you waited for there.

Nearly all respondents recollect similar accounts to illustrate the conditions under which they lived and the suffering endured due to intense and unrelenting hunger. Every interview deals substantially with food, or rather the lack of it. Their discussions pertaining to food document the various stages from the procurement of rations, to scrounging or foraging for food, to the end stages of severe hunger and malnutrition, leading to disease or death. Archival reports from camp guards elucidate the physical



deterioration of the Roma due to starvation (Kelso 1999), while survivors' accounts relate the psychological effects.

Other survivors detail vividly the effects of hunger. One man, eleven at the time, tells of being forced to work even though no rations were forthcoming: "*We went to bed hungry, we woke up hungry. In the morning, they took us to work at the collective farm. 'To work.' I was crying because I didn't want to go. 'No! To work!' the guards yelled. Out of fear, you went.*"<sup>101</sup> Starvation meant more than physical symptoms, it symbolized a loss of dignity as deportees - just for a piece of bread - first cajoled, then begged, and finally stole. One woman reported, "*We didn't know how to ask [for food]. But we learned how to say in Russian carrots, bread, eggs.*"<sup>102</sup> Fifty years later another woman recollected the Russian she learned to survive. "*We would go to beg. Do you know what words I remember to this day? 'Lady, please give me some bread.'*"<sup>103</sup> Starvation also meant a weakening of the body, and possibly death. Another man added, "*In the morning we would find some 7-8 people dead. From Hunger. We would take them and throw them in a common grave. We couldn't do anything else.*"<sup>104</sup>

While the respondents rarely speak directly of the psychological implications of massive starvation, they are clearly present. Élie Cohen (1953), who had been a prisoner in several Nazi camps, produced one of the first and most pivotal psychological studies on effects of the concentration camp on human behavior. He looked at the psychology of Jewish prisoners, and noted that hunger was the drive that spared no one, reducing prisoners to a primitive phase of self-preservation that overrode any previous learned behavior, or what Cohen notes as 'civilized' restraints (p. 153). Hunger becomes the main motivator of human behavior. According to Cohen, the only factor that held hunger in check was 'the reality principle,' or the ability to discern danger of an immediate life threat. In Anuța's account above, the reality principle is present as guards beat her for stealing corn, and fear for her life prevented her from trying to seek food this way again, even though she was starving. Other Romani survivors reported similar theft scenarios, often ending tragically. "*One night a guy went to steal two potatoes. [Guards] shot him*

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with M.V. Răcari, Romania. October 1999.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with I.T., Gălăteni, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with M.C. Roșiorii de Vede, Romania. July 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with C.I. Ghimpați, Romania. July 2000.

*in the back and his insides came out the front and fell in his hands. He died for two potatoes.*”<sup>105</sup>

As the situation in Transnistria became abysmal for many, the learned behavior Cohen categorizes as ‘civilized’ gradually disappeared. Discrimination for food products soon vanished. Dogs and hedgehogs turned into dinner, and after those sources were killed off any foraged carrion sufficed, even grass and the soles of shoes constituted a meal. One woman recounted what desperation forced her to do. *“I dug through the horse manure with my fingers to get the corn kernels and I ate them. There was massive hunger. People were dying.”*<sup>106</sup>

Hunger is “a ruthless and unscrupulous drive” which devalues anything not serving its exclusive interest (p.139). The instinct for self-preservation led respondents to extreme acts such as infanticide and cannibalism, a radical departure from the Romani social norms governing behavior. Among Roma, children are celebrated as good luck and babies are doted upon by relatives. One woman revealed that when the choice came down to transporting a cooking pot or her toddler on her back during a forced march, she abandoned her daughter on the side of the road so that she could continue carrying the pot that was used to feed her other children.<sup>107</sup> Another survivor told of his wife’s putting their newborn in the snow to die because she didn’t have milk to feed the baby.<sup>108</sup> One man summarized the how development of cannibalism came about: *“After all those horrible conditions, some Roma were in a state to even eat each other.”*<sup>109</sup>

Several respondents witnessed consumption of human flesh as sometimes their deceased family members were contemplated for another’s sustenance. One survivor recalled: *“My father died. I had to stay watch over him so that no one would come to cut him to eat him. I guarded him all night until someone came to bury him.”*<sup>110</sup> Another woman said: *“My second child died after my milk dried out. The third the same. Some Roma took the baby and cut it to eat. I was crying and yelling. What could I do?”*<sup>111</sup> A few even acknowledged eating deceased deportees: *“Without us seeing, my father cut the*

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with A.C., Udupu, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with A.I., Videle, Romania. July 2000.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with M.C. Urziceni, Romania 2003.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with S.T. Pitești, Romania. November 1995.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with T.I. Mereni de Jos, Romania. October 1999.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with E.S., Ivesti, Romania. October 1999.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with I.T. Gălăteni, Romania. August 1999.

*flesh of the rear end of a [dead] Roma to give us some food. There was nothing else for him to do. He cut [some of] that man and put [the flesh] on the fire and gave us something to eat.”*<sup>112</sup>

Cannibalism also broke out among Jewish prisoners housed in horrendous conditions at Peciora, which was considered the harshest camp in Transnistria. Gendarmes had reportedly hung a signpost with the words “Death Camp” at its entrance (Final Report 2005:43). The head of the gendarmerie administration in Transnistria had recommended sending the poorest Jews there since, his logic went, they had no chance of survival anyway. A passage quoted in the *Final Report* that was taken from Matatias Carp’s *Cartea Neagra* (1946-48), a four volume series about the destruction of Romanian Jews in the Holocaust, details the horror of Peciora.<sup>113</sup> It states: “Unable to get supplies, camp inmates ate human waste, and later [fed] on human corpses” (p.143). As with Roma, it was Jewish survivors’ testimonies that brought the incidents of cannibalism to light.

### **The Toll of Typhus**

Typhus destroyed thousands as it spread quickly among Roma housed in overcrowded schools, houses, barracks, and shacks without minimal sanitary conditions. Anuța and her family were in the center of the epidemic in Oceacov. The destruction of loved ones tore away the fabric of the family, leaving many young children destitute and orphaned. Nearly all respondents reported falling ill to typhus, or losing family members to the disease that ran rampant in the overcrowded housing conditions of the improvised labor camps, both among Jews and Roma. Already weakened by food deprivation and misery, typhus ravished those deportees who could not fight it without proper medical provisions. Whereas hunger killed relatively slowly, the malady rapidly engulfed the Roma. Death hovered, seemingly inescapable. The infrastructure of the makeshift camps couldn’t support the daily losses. Devastated relatives of victims reported watching with

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with A.I. Ciorlogirla, Romania. September, 1999.

<sup>113</sup> Carp’s *Cartea Neagra* (Black Book) was banned shortly after its publication by the communists, who, according to the 2000 reprint edition’s editor, confiscated every available volume and “fed them to the pulp mills” (p.2).

horror as loved ones were thrown in piles where they sometimes remained for days before being tossed into mass graves. Typhus not only devoured the bodies of its victims, it also debilitated the spirit of survivors and family members' of the deceased.

Anuța and her family continued to scratch out a meager existence in Vladimirovka during the winter of 1942-43. But her world would change irrevocably after New Year's Day, when typhus broke out. Anuța estimates that out of some 700 people placed in the village, only 30-40 Roma survived until spring. She recalls:

A young girl who had stayed with us in the house got sick with typhus. My father took her away so that we would not get sick, too, but we still got sick....[My mother] did not eat anymore, she didn't even drink water. She would only hit her head against the walls. An old lady from [our hometown] who stayed with us told me [later] that she would go in a barn and cry and scream, saying, "I look at my children now they don't even have water, they don't have any bread. [Back home] we used to carry [bread] with a basket and with a bucket of fruit for them. And now they don't even have water."

It was mostly because of this that she got sick. She only lasted four months, that's how long my mother resisted. When she saw us in such a state, immediately she got sick. And in three or four days she died of typhus. During the night of St. John [January 6<sup>th</sup>] my mother died....

When our mother died, my middle sister slept in her arms all night. She didn't know that [our mother] was dead. I realized that my mother was dead when my father started crying, and the others in the room said, "That's it, she's dead." My mother cared for [my sister] the most, because she was more sensitive and she loved my mother the most and was always with her. And all that night [my sister] slept in her dead arms.

The Russians who were in the village were forced to take care of the dead and they had a wagon and a hook, I think it was five meters long, so that they wouldn't get close to the sick. They forced the people in the house to load them [in the wagon]. They knocked on the window to ask if you had any dead. Every day they would come and knock on the window to ask if you had any dead. And if you did, you had to go throw them into the wagon yourself, and they would take the dead to the grave and pull the body with that five-meter hook into the grave. Then they poured lime on the top, because of typhus. They dug a big grave, and put hundreds of people there.

In the morning, a man knocked on the window. "Do you have dead?"

My father said yes.

My sister looked up, “Who’s dead?”

“Mother.”

Then she realized that mother was dead. My father had to take [my mother] out to put her in the wagon, with nobody next to her.<sup>114</sup> Who knows where they took her and threw her. In the spring [my father] found out how hundreds of dead were buried in a common grave.

We didn’t have the possibility to bury the dead. We had no candles. You buried them like dogs. And [the villagers] left them there like the dogs and ran as fast as [they] could. You only waited for tomorrow to die. You waited from moment to moment to die....

They didn’t shoot us, not this, but they made us suffer. Hungry, without water, without anything...they left us to die like that, hungry, closed in, isolated, to get sick from typhus.

Anuța tells of her mother’s weakened mental state at seeing her children reduced to an animalistic living. Anuța attributes her mother’s broken spirit as a contributing factor in her demise. The physical death of her mother was brought on by typhus, but what killed Anuța’s mother was the psychological trauma of forced incarceration. Holocaust scholars call the state of mind of camp prisoners who give up the will to live *muselman*.<sup>115</sup> Social psychologist Leo Eitinger in his studies of Jewish survivors noted that the effects of hunger and disease retarded normal mental reactions and reduced one’s ability to counteract apathy and despair (Eitinger 1998). *Muselman* generally overcame prisoners who, due to ravages of hunger, disease and despair, had no hope left. Anuța indicates that her mother could no longer cope with the situation and lost the will to live, giving into the state of *muselman*. Other survivors also reported *muselman* among Roma. One man said: “*I noticed that when only one person remained alive out of a family composed of seven, he willed his own death. We were destroyed.*”<sup>116</sup>

Other respondents recalled stories similar to Anuța’s, with deterioration of living conditions giving way to disease. “*There was no food, no soap. Misery, only misery. You*

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<sup>114</sup> I translated this sentence as is, but I believe Anuța meant, “with no one to stay with her.” After a loved one dies, Orthodox Christians traditionally sit beside the body until it is buried, never leaving it alone. Family and friends take turns staying with the deceased.

<sup>115</sup> This is a German word meaning “Muslim.”

<sup>116</sup> Interview with I.N, Videle, Romania. June 1995.

*didn't have any place to bathe. The lice were [on us]."*<sup>117</sup> Another man added: *"Nobody took you to the doctor. When one got sick - the lice jumped off him – eaten alive. The lice ate you alive."*<sup>118</sup>

Survivors' guilt has been noted by researchers as feelings of guilt for having endured the trauma of the camps while their family members did not (Marcus and Rosenberg 1988). Eitinger notes that feelings of guilt also stemmed from the disappearance of the deceased "without a trace" as there "were no graves to mark the burial of the dead" (Eitinger 1998: 478). Anuța was haunted years later by her mother's burial "like a dog" in a common grave. She told me at in our last interview that if she could just get back to the Ukraine to kiss the ground where her mother was buried, she would find a little happiness. Other Romani respondents experience similar episodes of survivors' guilt.

The effects of hunger and typhus were not just physical, as noted above, but they also contributed to the deterioration of Romani culture. Primarily Orthodox Christians, Romanian Roma place a great deal of emphasis on funeral rites to guide the deceased into the next world and to comfort those left behind.<sup>119</sup> The profane death of their loved ones haunts many. One woman, just 12 when her family was deported, recounted the loss of her family from typhus and their unblessed burials as there were no priests to conduct religious rites. *"My brother took my mother by the feet, I took her head, and we put her in the ground. Who was there to bury her? Father was gone - buried by some Gypsies."*<sup>120</sup> She told me that three days later, her brother died: *"I was alone. No one to help me, because they were afraid of getting sick. I took him in my arms and put him in the ground."*

As a coping mechanism to ease their guilt and pain for not observing religious traditions, some Roma struggled against cultural losses by improvising religious symbols to mark the passing of family members. *"When my sister died, they made her grave on the surface, as deep as a plow. Without a cross, without anything. So we took the stock of*

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with G.S., Joița, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with C.I. Udupu, Romania. November 1999.

<sup>119</sup> Ninety percent of people living in Romania are Orthodox Christians.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with R.V. Bucharest, Romania. June 1999.

*a sunflower and made one.*"<sup>121</sup> Candles are important in Orthodoxy as they illuminate the path into the other world for the dying and deceased, and they were difficult to procure in camps. Like Anuța, most respondents lamented over the lack of candles when loved ones died. "[When] someone died - without a candle, without anything. Like we could get a candle? So this is what we did. We lit a rag from a piece of cloth, and we said it was the candle."<sup>122</sup>

One woman told of the great lengths her family went to for a candle when her younger sibling was dying:

My father went to ask a Russian for a candle. The guy didn't know what my father was asking for [as my] father spoke Romanian. The Russian went and brought my father a piece of polenta. 'No, no!' [My father said.] He beat my father in the head for refusing the polenta. My father thought the Russian would kill him, and with the child at home dying. My father lay down and did like this [she mimics holding a candle in her hands with her eyes shut and mouth open.] Then the Russian realized what my father was asking for and told some women, 'He wants a candle.' So the women brought him two candle stubs. But the child had already died.<sup>123</sup>

Eitinger addresses various coping mechanisms used by camp prisoners through the prism of crisis theory. Denial of the situation, among other responses, was common (Eitinger 1998). Prisoners psychologically separated themselves from the apocalyptic events in order to continue on with life. Death, instead of being a rare incident in one's life, became a far too familiar occurrence. Dina Wardi (1992) in her work with Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children finds similar coping mechanisms at work, including robotization, whereby those who adjusted to initial shocks of camp life adopted automatic reactions and behaviors to ensure survival. Wardi notes that for some camp prisoners, there was a loss of ability to relate to others and to mourn deceased relatives and friends.

Narratives from Romani survivors reveal similar reactions in their coping mechanisms, often evoked when they were trying to maintain some of their cultural repertoires. Certainly, denial and robotization were present for some Romani prisoners in

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with C.I. Măgurele, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with A.C. Udupu, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with P.F. Cornetu, Romania. June 1999.

Transnistrian camps. Romani narratives also reveal that some abandoned these repertoires in order to survive. The typhus epidemic marked a turning point for a few who divorced themselves from traditional practices of respecting the dead and even separated themselves from familial relations. One man recounted how he felt after his father passed away. *“One would say, ‘Oh, father died?’ Good-bye. May God rest his soul. Maybe tomorrow I’ll die too. You couldn’t cry anymore, there were no more tears left.”*<sup>124</sup> Another woman said: *“This old man who died had one boy. The boy said: ‘Father died?’ And he took two portions of polenta from the fire, eating and crying for his father.”*<sup>125</sup> Such distancing from family would be impossible to imagine in normal times as Roma typically have tight families with close bonds extending to distant relatives.

### **A Shot at Freedom: Escape from the Camps**

Escape constituted the only active resistance that Roma had to rebel against the heinous policies of the camp.<sup>126</sup> From interviews with Romani survivors, we learn that some deportees did not passively accept their fate. Escape represented an attempt to circumvent death. Suffering from the effects of starvation and typhus, deportees often chose to risk immediate execution rather than continue etching out a tenuous existence. Most respondents revealed in interviews that they tried to escape at least once, although nearly all failed. Generally, runaway Roma did not get very far from camps as they had no supplies, their emaciated and tattered forms were conspicuous, and they had little access to transportation to cover the long distances between Ukrainian villages. Among study participants, only two survivors’ efforts to escape were met with success. The rest were caught by the guards and either returned to camps or re-deported further into the occupied Ukraine.

The autumn after Anuța’s mother died, her father and other deportees realized that something had to be done, or they would all perish. So many others had succumbed, and although he never fell ill, Anuța’s father Radu feared for his children’s lives. Encouraged by others, Radu fled Vladimirovka with his four young daughters who, by that time,

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with C.D. Cornetu, Romania. June 1999.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with C.P. Ghimpați, Romania. June 1995

<sup>126</sup> I distinguish here between active resistance (escape) and passive resistance (theft for food, etc.)



were dressed only in rags. Anuța recalls that it was very cold when they departed and her father was hopeful for success. He was prepared to give the last of their wealth for a shot at freedom:

Out of fear we ran away. We were in a horrible state - without shoes, without clothes, and we left to walk. What, to wait to die there like the others? We fled. My mother was already dead. Some gendarmes had said the front fell and that the Russians were coming. [They] said it would be bad for us if the Russians came....

We walked through rain, mud. We were falling behind [the rest of the group] as my father had to carry my little sister in his arms. A [Romanian] army truck picked us up on the road and took us to Odessa.<sup>127</sup>

...[T]here, in the train station they found us. We were there – poor. Of course the gendarmes got us, a platoon that was in Odessa. The gendarmes that were in the station took us to in a cell in their headquarters, and then loaded us [onto a train]. My father asked one of them, “Where are you taking us, to Russia or to the country?”

He said, “I give you my word of honor that I am taking you to Romania. I am happy that I’ll get to see the country and my family now that they made me your guard.”

“But why are they sending us under guards, if they send us to the country, why do we need a guard?”

“Well, that’s how they decided.”

Then my father, he had a pair of earrings - big gold earrings in my sister’s ears, he took them out and said to him, “Look, I’ll give them to you, so you will remember us.”

But the train went east into Russia. The gendarmes went with us until the train stopped, where it was ordered to go. They left us in a field there.

The attempt to escape by Anuța’s family failed, as it did for most who tried to flee. Several Roma witnessed members of their group either being severely beaten for attempted escape, or being shot by guards upon discovery. “*It was four in the morning when we ran away. We hid wherever we could. We succeeded. [But] we got sleepy, and*

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<sup>127</sup> The military was not involved in the deportation and incarceration of Roma. The gendarmerie and the police, under the Ministry of the Interior, guarded Jews and Roma in Transnistria.

*[the guards] saw us. They put us in the wagons and beat us. Then they took us back.*"<sup>128</sup>

Another group wasn't as lucky to just receive a beating. One man remembered, "*We tried to run away and the police caught us. A policeman pulled out his gun and shot 5-6-10 people. Nobody had the courage to run away a second time.*"<sup>129</sup>

Through examination of the narratives above and archival sources, it is evident that some Roma in Transnistria also actively resisted the forced incarceration. Jewish prisoners also turned to escape to flee Transnistria (Final Report 2005). Gendarme reports indicate that as conditions worsened in camps, more and more escapes were tried (Kelso 1999:127). At the end of 1943, nearly 800 Roma had returned clandestinely to Romania (Kelso 1999:121). Through examination of Romani narratives, we learn the abominable situation gave several deportees the mettle to risk everything for freedom. Anuța tells us that fear for their lives prompted their escape. Starvation, typhus and family loss hadn't brought on *muselman* and their will to live remained strong.

Resistance is also a prominent theme pervading Jewish narratives of the Holocaust. According to author Tim Cole (2000), it is *the* meta-narrative that the state of Israel used to build its major shrine to Holocaust survivors and has shaped Israeli identity. While debate rages among academics as to just how much resistance Jews provided against the Nazi killing system, author Elie Wiesel's questions not whether Jews fought back, but how they managed to find the physical and spiritual strength to do so under extreme conditions of starvation and brutality (Suhl 1967:4). Yuri Suhl's seminal book *They Fought Back* details the extent of Jewish resistance to Nazi genocidal policy in ghettos and camps. He rejects claims from Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt that Jews passively accepted their fate, being led 'like sheep' to the slaughter. Like historians Michael Berenbaum and Hermann Langbein, Suhl advocates that Jewish resistance was present in small ways in every camp (Gutman and Berenbaum 1994). Survivor narratives are replete with work slowdowns, for instance, as one means of resistance.

In sociology, there is a tendency to look at resistance as part of collective action by rooting it in literatures of social movements and identity (Einwohner 2007). While

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with C. P. Bucharest, Romania. September 1999.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with C.I. Măgule, Romania. September 1999.

this works when one defines resistance as major revolts, such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, it has little salience when looking at individual and familial decisions to escape from Transnistria. Interestingly, if this literature is tapped into, the case of the Roma shows that despite not having what Ronald Berger (2002) points to as key components of collective action in Holocaust resistance – *leadership resources* in civic and religious leaders, *ideological resources* in helping members make sense of the destruction, or *organizational resources* to help individuals engage in action, Roma were still able to circumvent the oppressive system through escapes. A better interpretative framework might be literature on human agency (Sewell 1992), but this can be problematic as well since social structural constraints, or what Berger calls ‘situational contingencies,’ might have been greater than individuals were able to overcome. Therefore this could erroneously imply a ‘weakness’ on the part of those who did not attempt to flee. In reality, there are yet too many unknowns about how Roma formed their decisions to escape that are hard to evaluate, including the perceived probability of success (guard policy, closeness to a train station or a bigger city such as Odessa, other successful escapes from the camp, etc.) Nonetheless, narratives suggest that resistance was very much a part of camp life among Roma in Transnistria. Further analysis on this topic is necessary to discover, in addition to escape, the types of resistance that were present and how external factors influenced resistance decisions – for instance whether resistance was more or less likely if the camp conditions were harsher – and I would expect that the largest number of escapes would come in the areas where the guards lacked manpower (i.e., high ratio of prisoners per guard might have meant a diminished risk of being caught). I would also expect to see a rise in escape attempts as camp conditions deteriorated over time, as people basically were forced to evaluate whether the risk of dying by staying in the camp was higher than the risk of death by attempting to escape.<sup>130</sup>

### **Narratives Emerge After 1989**

Survivors of Transnistria, Jewish and Romani, did not find available public space for more than sixty years to break the historical silences that surrounded their

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<sup>130</sup> For an exception to the lack of scholarship, see Shannon Woodcock, “Romanian Romani Resistance to Genocide in the Matrix of the *Țigan* Other,” *Anthropology of East European Review*, Fall 2007.

persecutions. The political changes ushered in after the 1989 revolution paved the way for some public discourses of the formerly repressed, either under communism or under the pro-fascist regime, with a heavier emphasis on the former since millions of Romanians considered themselves victims of communism. Jewish survivors, sometimes with the assistance of the Jewish Federation and sometimes on their own, began creating space for their testimonies in various written and audio-visual formats while unfortunately Roma were not able to do so. I believe that the combination of Romani disenfranchisement at nearly all levels in society in the 1990s alongside the very real fears in Romani communities of new forms of ethnic persecution is what maintained their public silence on the Holocaust.<sup>131</sup> While former communist prisons were becoming monuments, and compensation legislation was underway for those victims, discrimination against Roma seemed to flourish in education, health, housing, human services, and employment with little abatement. Discussions about the Holocaust did emerge but with almost no focus on the Roma tragedy. Rather the main debate was between nationalistic Romanians and Western (or Western oriented) scholars around whether a Holocaust had occurred against the Jews in Romania, and, if so, who was responsible, with the former arguing that there was not, and the latter arguing that there was a Holocaust against Jews authored by the Antonescu regime (Eskenasy 1997, Shafir 1997, Livezeanu 2004). Historian Annette Wieviorka (2006) states that:

Every testimony is recorded at a precise moment in time, and as such may be instrumentalized in political and ideological contexts that, like all such contexts, are bound to change. The moment when a testimony is delivered tells a great deal about the society in which the witness lives (p.137).

Most likely the resurgence of Holocaust denial and the attempted rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu by extremists prompted Jewish survivors to ‘speak out’ about their experiences.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> For the status of marginalization of the Roma in the 1990s, see Zoltan Barany (2002). *The East European Gypsies: Regime change, marginality, and ethnopolitics*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

<sup>132</sup> Mihai Chioveanu, “A Deadlock of Memory: The Myth and Cult of Ion Antonescu in Post-Communist Romania,” in *Studia Hebraica Vol III*, 2003, pp.102-137.

Historian Stefan Ionescu in his work on Jewish survivor testimony examines the relationship between Holocaust remembrance in post-communist Romania by concentrating on the proliferation of survivor literature after 1989, namely personal narratives in the form of diaries, journals and memoirs. Ionescu believes that up until the time of his writing in 2005, Jewish survivor accounts were the main agents of Holocaust memory that fueled public discussions, but he cautions that most of the debates around these narratives were restricted to cultural and political elites, and rarely penetrated the general public's consciousness.<sup>133</sup> Most of these accounts were published through a small Jewish publishing house, Hasefer, or appeared in cultural reviews. Although the interested public was limited, nonetheless tangible products were on the market. Another active group in publishing Holocaust literature has been The Association of Romanian Jewish Victims of Holocaust. A part of their mission is educational, and they have a strong presence in teacher trainings on Holocaust education as well as in public speaking campaigns. Additionally, survivors collaborated on a documentary film project, *Holocaustul Uitat (2004)*[The Forgotten Holocaust], which aired on one of Romania's most popular channels, PRO-TV, and it is distributed in schools. Despite Jewish survivors' efforts, Ionescu states that they have not dominated the public discourse on the Holocaust as scholars and pundits have cornered that market (p.363). Nevertheless, the books are selling, being used in schools, and Jewish survivors are visible on television around Romania's Holocaust Commemoration Day, held annually on 9 October.

As for Romani survivors' accounts, until recently there were no publications of their experiences available. However the past five years have seen slight improvement, as three edited collections featuring testimony, as well as one memoir, have appeared. For those works in print, only one was for sale, making the distribution minimal and spotty at best. All three of published volumes on Romani memory were funded by international governmental or intergovernmental donors, demonstrating some limited foreign interest in preserving Holocaust narratives of Roma as well as stressing the lack of interest by Romanian official institutions for such projects. While the funding support allowed for much-needed works to come forth, it also hampered public discussions, as restrictions

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<sup>133</sup> Ionescu notes that there are several exceptions to this, including the David Auburn, ed. (2004). *The Journals of Mihail Sebastian*, ed., New York: Dramatists Play Service.

were placed on selling the products that had been financed with public money. If a product is not available, it is hard to generate a buzz around it. For all effective purposes, Romani narratives are absent from the Romanian consciousness about the Holocaust.

The first written collection of Roma narratives, *Lacrimi Rome*, was published in a private printing house by Romani activist Luminița Cioabă in 2006. Funded by UNICEF, the volume was not for sale and was distributed through Cioabă's non-profit organization. Cioabă, a poet, interviewed relatives who had been deported to Transnistria because they were nomadic *căldărari* (coppersmiths).<sup>134</sup> A strong introduction to the book by historian Jean Ancel, considered one of the fathers of the study of the Holocaust in Romania, clearly lays out the bio-political nature of the genocide against Roma using an integrated approach of comparing their fate to that of the Jews, and it is one of the best summations available of the Antonescu policy toward Roma (unfortunately, few will have the chance to read it). The survivors' accounts presented in the book capture a segment of the then-nomadic Roma that is rich with detail, however, only if one can wade through them. Cioabă, as the editor, did little to contextualize the testimonies, leaving them as raw transcripts that specialists like me appreciate, but can be difficult for the general public to understand. The survivors told their stories in traumatic memory mode to Cioabă, an insider who grew up hearing their accounts, and in her interviews she rarely asks for clarification about information that only insiders would know. This produced some powerful memories of family tragedies, but it also meant the accounts oftentimes do not make sense to the non-expert. For example, one survivor talks about asking for monies for his Transnistrian experiences, but there is not a footnote to explain that he applied for the German Forced Labour Compensation Programme, established in 2000 by the German government, that was awarding former victims of Nazism compensation for slave and forced labor.<sup>135</sup>

Another publication appeared in 2005 featuring Romani testimony that I co-edited with my Romanian colleague Ana-Maria Popa. That year I had released a documentary film, *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies During WWII*, and I wanted

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<sup>134</sup> See Luminița Cioabă, ed. (2006). *Lacrimi Rome*. Sibiu: The Ion Cioabă Foundation.

<sup>135</sup> I also interviewed this person in 2005, not knowing that Cioabă had also done so. (He was her mother's brother.) Thus I knew from my interview with him for which Holocaust-era compensation programs he'd applied and the final result of his endeavors.

to integrate it into the Romania education system as a way of adding Roma back into the national historical narrative of the Holocaust. As director of a Romanian non-profit organization, the Association for Dialogue and Civic Education, I sought and received funding from the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest to duplicate the DVD for every Romanian high school and to make a teacher's guide to accompany it.<sup>136</sup> Our publication, *Hidden Sorrows: A Teacher's Guide to the Persecution of Romanian Roma*, was directed at Romanian educators as a resource for them to use in conjunction with the film. The guide offers excerpts of Romani oral histories, supplemental readings by experts on the Nazi and Romanian genocide policies toward Roma, classroom activities, a chronology, and a copy of *Hidden Sorrows*. Distribution has been through the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and non-profit organizations working on Holocaust education training projects. I will leave either criticism or praise to another, as appropriate. I will add, however, that even though our product has hit the mark by reaching teachers, whose positions in the education system are influential over adding information into the collective memory of the country, the guide was disappointingly not for sale to the general public due to grant constraints, thus limiting its availability.

The latest publication with Romani testimonies, one of which is Anuța's, was released in 2009, *Tragedia romilor deportați în Transnistria 1942-1945 [The Tragedy of the Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-1945]*, which I co-edited with historian Radu Ioanid of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Cioabă's assistance. This volume brought a collection of essential archival documents together with Romani oral histories to elucidate Antonescu's deportation policy towards Roma, and was funded by the Roma Contact Office at the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE). Initially, the OSCE office refused to have the publication for sale as it was to be distributed for free, just as the others had been. Through special negotiations the publisher, Polirom, one of Romania's top editing houses, was allowed to sell a restricted number of books. *Tragedia romilor* has received positive reviews in national press outlets

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<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, Luminița Cioabă also did a documentary film, *Lacrimi Romane* (2006), based on her interviews, however she has not furnished me with a copy of it after I requested it in 2006.

and online blogs,<sup>137</sup> which I see as a small step forward in adding Roma back into discussions around the Holocaust. However, most of the online comments following the reviews reveal racially-tinged negative stereotypes about Roma. These comments suggest a critical need to continue with education - a project which has just begun.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to examine the plight of a virtually unknown category of Holocaust survivor, the Roma, at the territorial margins of the Third Reich's attempted colonization of Europe. Transnistria, as noted by one scholar, is often called the 'Forgotten Cemetery,' as so few works focus on the killings that occurred there. In the same light, Roma can be categorized as the 'Forgotten Victims' as scholarship often passes by Romani survivors. Narrative accounts from Romani victims provide additional depth and breadth to scholarship on the Holocaust by adding another layer of understanding to the heinous policies adopted by the Nazis and their allies.

The narratives also suggest the importance of oral history in the case of the Roma, who up to this point have been a virtually unknown category of victims. Research on the Roma and the Holocaust has been scant, and scholarship focusing on the plight of the Romanian Roma even scander.<sup>138</sup> The persecution of Roma has been largely left out of history textbooks, and few researchers focus their efforts to advance knowledge about the Romani genocide. Oral history is paramount in revealing how Roma of varied ages and circumstance at the time of the war coped with their forced incarceration in labor camps in the occupied Ukraine. While we do not get structural details from Roma survivors, we find instead how they were affected by the Romanian policies. We also find the emotional and constructed memory of each survivor that reflects not only their personal experience, but also their collective experiences. These accounts provide valuable insight into the social world of Roma. Romani survivors, like all of us, interpret and process the

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<sup>137</sup> For instance, see reviews from *Revista 22* (Magazine 22) by Petre Matei at <http://www.revista22.ro/articol-6302.html>; in *Cotidianul* (The Daily) at [http://old.cotidianul.ro/exterminearea\\_tiganilor\\_marturii\\_si\\_documente-75649.html](http://old.cotidianul.ro/exterminearea_tiganilor_marturii_si_documente-75649.html).

<sup>138</sup> For works on Roma and the Holocaust, see Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxom (1972) *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, New York: Basic Books. Also see the Interface Series, edited by Donald Kenrick: *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.



happenings in their lives that were not just part of ‘History’ but were formative events shaping the rest of their lives. Their stories also inform us about Romani identity and culture through the interpretation of events before, during, and after the deportations to Transnistria.

Oral histories can offer a counter-narrative that can both empower the former victim-group and eradicate long-held misconceptions about them due to biased historical sources by correcting imbalances in official versions of history. National narratives of events often are constructed through documents, artifacts and other relics left behind by those in power – most often people working for the perpetrating regime. While archival documents provide a framework for viewing the Holocaust as an event, the narratives offer detail into the social construction of the experience of Roma. The themes of ‘hunger’ and ‘typhus’ reflect the battle within the individual to preserve the known, or the sense of individual and group identity under conditions of extreme duress. Some survivors abandoned their traditional codes of behavior while others fought to preserve their customs. The recreation of the candle from a scrap of cloth to guide the dead to the afterworld illustrates one technique employed by prisoners to preserve part of their pre-camp life identity as Orthodox Christians.

Oral histories are not diaries or personal memoirs written for internal or external consumption. For the most part they are interviews made by second parties whose motivation typically is for posterity and public consumption. Central to understanding the sufferings of Roma was to incorporate their voices into the historical narrative. This chapter attempts to breach the ‘official history’ by including the Roma and detailing their fate, one that is hardly ever discussed in public forums. The testimony is also part of cultural history, where Roma are the repositories of their life events, as seen and interpreted by them throughout the past sixty years and retold to the listeners of their tragedies. Roma can and do talk about their tragedy, but they do so within the sanctity of the family and their immediate professional group, rather than as a collective, cohesive group. Finally, this work speaks to the issue of continued repression of the Roma as Europe’s largest transnational minority. Whether the exclusion from mainstream forms of knowledge production is viewed as external, internal, or a combination of the two by the

reader, the survivors' silence is telling. Unlike other victim groups, little to no public space has been allocated for Romani testimonies.

## **Chapter Three: Representations of and Reactions to Roma as Holocaust Victims**

At the heart of this inquiry into Holocaust narrative has been the assumption that we cannot know this –or any- era outside of the ways it is transmitted to us in its representation.

– James Young<sup>139</sup>

How do we lead a camera or pen to penetrate history and create art, as opposed to merely recording events? What are the formal, as well as moral responsibilities if we are to understand and communicate the complexities of the Holocaust through its filmic representations?

– Annette Insdorf<sup>140</sup>

### **Introduction**

When I began collecting testimonies from Romani survivors of the Holocaust in 1995, I never imagined that five years later I would make a documentary film that involved purchasing a video camera worth more than my car, raising funds through film grants, employing media professionals, scouring film and photo archives for illustrative materials, and learning film editing programs.<sup>141</sup> The memories that survivors shared with me in our oral history interviews captivated me as no stories ever had, and I felt compelled to share their experience with others so that audiences could experience in some way what I was privileged enough to be learning. As David Patterson (2007) wrote, “When the survivors bear witness to what few eyes have seen, they entrust us with a message that we must bear. Thus transformed into messengers and witnesses, we are transformed into teachers” (p.135). I felt that the trust Romani survivors had placed in me by sharing their horrific stories obligated me to teach others about the fate of the

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<sup>139</sup> Young, James (1988). *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.148.

<sup>140</sup> See Annette Insdorf (2003). *Indelible Shadows*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.xv.

<sup>141</sup> I received funds from the Texas Filmmakers’ Production Fund, the City of Austin Arts Council, Texas Council for the Humanities, and Texas Council for the Arts.

Romanian Roma during WWII, which remains relatively unknown subject both inside and outside of Romania.<sup>142</sup>

My initial foray into dissemination about the Romani genocide was in 1999, when I wrote a book chapter on the deportation and internment of 25,000 Romanian Roma in concentration camps in Romanian occupied Ukraine from 1942-44, using archival and oral history sources.<sup>143</sup> The pro-Nazi regime of military dictator Ion Antonescu (1940-1944) brutally implemented genocide against a part of Romania's Jews and Roma.<sup>144</sup> Like Jews, Roma were targeted for racial reasons. Expelled from the country at gun point, Roma deportees had their properties and possessions confiscated by the state. Placed in make-shift camps with inhuman living conditions, the deportees were often forced into slave labor. Disease ravished the camps, killing thousands of Roma. Beatings, bullets, starvation, and exposure killed thousands more. When liberation came in 1944, less than half of those deported had survived. Communist-era historians, coined "history cleansers" by historian Randolph Braham, transformed the Holocaust into a Nazi-only crime, denying that wartime Romanian authorities had committed atrocities and erasing the ethnicity of the victims (Braham 1997, Cioflâncă 2004). The post-communist governments continued, with few concessions usually under foreign pressures, the policy of denial until 2003, when a crisis following a government statement denying clearly that the Holocaust had occurred in Romania, provoked outrage in the international community at the very time when Romania was knocking at the doors of NATO and the EU (Chioveanu 2003). Forced to confront the past, Romania, like Poland, went through what sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) terms *a narrative shock*, or a repositioning of the national historical narrative. After a panel of historians assembled by President Ion

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<sup>142</sup> For more on Roma and the Holocaust in Romania, see Michelle Kelso (1999), "Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria: 1942-44" in Donald Kenrick, ed. *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press; Radu Ioanid (2000) *The Holocaust in Romania: the destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu regime, 1940-1944*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee; Viorel Achim (2004), *Roma in Romanian History*, Budapest: Central European University Press.

<sup>143</sup> Kelso, *op.cit.*

<sup>144</sup> On the deportation to and murder of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in Transnistria, see, for example, Jean Ancel, the German-Romanian Relationship and the Final Solution, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19:2 (2005) 252-75; Dennis Deletant, Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18:1 (2004) 1-26; Vladimir Solonari, An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21:2 (2007) 268-297; Rebecca L. Golbert, Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialization, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 (2004) 205-33.

Iliescu, headed by Nobel-laureate Elie Wiesel, presented its findings in 2004 the Holocaust was officially recognized.<sup>145</sup> However, despite the political turnaround, Holocaust education was still grossly lacking.<sup>146</sup>

In this chapter I will explore two areas: the production of a cultural object, a film entitled *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies During WWII (2005)* that informs about Roma and the Holocaust in Romania, and the reaction of Romanian audiences to the documentary.<sup>147</sup> I view my filmmaking as social action stemming from my academic research, thus I situate myself as a scholar-activist, or a group of academics that Charles Hale defines as working “in dialogue, collaboration, alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives” (Hale 2008:4). Those we work with are not simply “informants” or “data sources,” as Hale notes, but “are knowledgeable, empowered participants in the entire research process.” By collaborating with Roma survivors and their families, filmmaking became a collective process of bringing their stories to light while advocating for improved conditions for Roma today through a) providing Roma access to Holocaust-era compensation programs and b) re-inserting Roma into Romanian historiography and thus creating space for them in the body politic. I believe that *Hidden Sorrows* and audience reactions to it merit examination for several reasons. First, it is the only documentary on the subject of Roma and the Holocaust that is approved and distributed by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, and that is thus widely used as a pedagogical tool in the national education system.<sup>148</sup> It has what sociologist Michael Schudson (1989) would call retrievability, making it accessible to many people through schools. It also has cultural resonance, or as Schudson writes, institutional retention, which is part of culture he believes is powerful as it allows objects to enter school classrooms, thereby entering “into the knowledge formally required for

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<sup>145</sup> See *Final Report*, op.cit.

<sup>146</sup> For more on Holocaust education policy in Romania, see Felicia Waldman (2004). “Holocaust Education in Post-Communist Romaina.” *Studia Hebraica*, Vol. IV, 88-102.

<sup>147</sup> I use the word *Gypsy* in the title because my respondents declared a preference for *țigăni* over *rom* (*Gypsy* over *Roma*) in interviews. For an opinion on terminology regarding Roma and identity differing from my own, see Shannon Woodcock “Romanian Romani Resistance to Genocide in the Matrix of the *Țigăni* Other,” *Anthropology of East European Review*, Fall 2007.

<sup>148</sup> Since 2006, my film has been distributed, alongside a teacher’s guide that I co-authored on the Romani genocide, by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research. There are several other films available on the fate of Roma in Transnistria, including one done by a national television station and two by Romani activists.

citizenship....” (p170). Second, it was the first film on the subject that played in Romania at film and art festivals, was shown on public television, and screened around the country in cultural centers, schools, and other venues.<sup>149</sup> Third, it has also garnered and generated national and international media attention. While the film is just one representation of the Holocaust history of Romanian Roma, viewers’ reactions to it provide insight into their prior knowledge of the genocide while revealing present attitudes toward the Holocaust and toward Roma. Understanding Romanian interpretations of Romani Holocaust history is essential since Roma, unlike other victim groups in recent Romanian history, continue to be the main target of prejudice and racism in post-communist Romania.<sup>150</sup>

The foremost questions in my research on audience reception to filmic representation of Roma as victims of the Holocaust were: how do Romanian viewers respond to representations of persecution of Roma during the Holocaust? What do recollections of the Romani Holocaust reveal about the collective memories of Nazi persecutions in Romania? Has communist-era myths of Romanian exceptionalism (i.e.: no Holocaust in Romania) entered the collective memories of Romanians? What do Romanians think about Roma and the Holocaust, and is this transformable? Of particular interest to me was the way that young people, perhaps best positioned in Romanian society to learn about and be open to materials on Roma and the Holocaust, would react given the wider context of a society with high levels of prejudice toward the Roma minority in Romania. Over the next pages, I will briefly examine the role of film in Holocaust history, my conceptualization of a documentary film, and then I will delve into viewer reactions to it.

As a researcher whose work focused on Roma and the Holocaust, I wondered how many Romanians really understand what had happened in their country during

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<sup>149</sup> Screening venues in Romania include but are not limited to: Best Fest Film Festival 2009, Astra Ethnographic Film Festival 2007 & 2008; Romani Arts Festival 2007 & 2008; Romanian National Television Transylvania (TVR-Cluj): in 2007, 2009; Project Think Tank traveling festival 2006-07. In addition to being used by educators, I have screened it at over 15 high schools, 6 universities, 5 conferences, as well as prestigious institutions such as the Romanian Cultural Center in Bucharest and the Romanian Peasant Museum.

<sup>150</sup> From 1990-95, some 40 incidents of anti-Gypsy violence broke out across the country, leaving several Roma dead, some severely beaten, and others homeless after their properties were destroyed by neighbors. While mob violence incidents against Roma have not occurred in recent years, discrimination against Roma in education, health, housing, human services, and employment continues to be a problem in Romania according to the World Bank, the U.S. Department of State, the European Union, the Council of Europe, various human rights organizations, and numerous academic studies.

WWII. Having lived for over nine years in Romania, I witnessed with frustration and outrage as Romani friends were chased out of restaurants, pharmacies, schools, public institutions and even a church.<sup>151</sup> I listened to and argued with a cross section of Romanians who repeated racist tropes of “lazy” “criminal” and “parasitical” *țigani*, (the same inflammatory and erroneous rhetoric used by the Nazis and their allies to condemn Roma to death) as they lamented the failure of the wartime leader Ion Antonescu’s attempt at solving the country’s “Gypsy” problem.<sup>152</sup> I believe that the WWII genocide of Roma begun by Nazi Germany and emulated in allied countries based on racial hatred that killed up to 500,000 Roma,<sup>153</sup> needs to be known not only to rectify a silenced injustice in history, but also to (re)educate non-Roma Europeans to help stop unbridled acts of discrimination and ethnic violence that are being perpetrated against Roma, who are today Europe’s largest transnational minority.

Roma have the least amount of schooling, the highest infant mortality rates, the worst housing situations, and the greatest numbers of unemployment of any group in Europe (UNDP 2002; 2005). They also face rampant discrimination, and in attitudinal studies, they continually rank highest as the least tolerated minority in European societies (Petre 2004, World Bank 2005, Eurobarometer Report 2008). One out of every two Roma report experiencing discrimination during the course of a year, and one in five report being crime victims due to their ethnicity (EU-Midis Report 2009). Even though for the past twenty years human rights groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations have worked to improve the conditions of Roma, there still is much to be done and the problems are growing in scope due to socio-economic conditions in transition countries, run by weak governments with few resources and little concern for

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<sup>151</sup> I have been numerous times with Romani colleagues who were told “to leave” places. In 2006, a Roma survivor was denied entry to a Lutheran church in Sibiu during open hours to the public, as he was informed by the clerk that only church members could enter. In Roșiorii de Vede in 2007, my Roma colleagues were refused service in a local restaurant. In 2008, a Romani girl was refused registration at her local school. Although discrimination is illegal in Romania, few Roma feel empowered to fight it and even if they did, they don’t know where to turn. For instance, see the resolution to the school issue at <http://www.ovid.ro/rezultate/personal-stories/#Alina>

<sup>152</sup> According to a study, World Bank Final Report: Qualitative Survey (Focus Groups) Attitudes Towards the Roma in Romania July 2005, most Romanians believe that Roma are social deviants (criminals) who seek advantage at the expense of Romanians.

<sup>153</sup> For more insight on Nazi policy towards Roma, see Sybil Milton, “The Gypsies and the Holocaust,” *The History Teacher* 24, no.4 (August 1991), pp.375-387; and Correspondence *Ibid* 25, no.4 (August 1992), pp.515-521.

assisting the least popular minority. On 22 June 2010, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recognized the increasing seriousness of the plight of Roma, linking current xenophobic acts to those of the Holocaust, issuing a resolution that expressed shock at:

recent outrages against Roma in several Council of Europe member states, reflecting an increasing trend in Europe towards anti-Gypsyism of the worst kind. Taking advantage of the financial crisis, extremist groups capitalise on fears deriving from the equation made between Roma and criminals, choosing a scapegoat that presents an easy target, as Roma are among the most vulnerable groups of all. This situation is reminiscent of the darkest hours in Europe's history.<sup>154</sup>

It was exactly my dismay at the lack of information about those darkest hours when the Holocaust was perpetrated and increasing racism against Roma that prompted me to make a film.

I wanted a cultural medium that would access wider audiences, especially appealing to young people, who I believe are, as the next generation of leaders, in need of learning from history and in receiving tolerance education. Filmmaking enabled me to engage in public sociology, to build a bridge between my academic knowledge and the public(s) who are in discussion about the issues at hand (Burowoy 2005). It was a way for me to change the collective memory of Romanians by expanding their cultural repertoire and to provoke them to think differently about the negative schemata in which the majority place Roma. A documentary film seemed an ideal format for general audiences that both privileged survivors' interpretations of their Holocaust experiences as a means of "giving voice," and structured a story that could be neatly tucked into a teacher's tool kit. A film is also, as sociologist Michael Schudson (1989:153) phrased it, a 'discrete symbolic object' of culture that could have many functions in social life that could be examined through interpretations of viewpoints, or in my case, through audience reception. I was interested in how audiences receive cultural knowledge through media and make meaning of it in their daily lives varies. Works in cultural studies recognize that

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<sup>154</sup> See Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe Resolution 1740 (2010) The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe, accessed on July 5 2010 at: <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/eRES1740.htm>.



audience interpretation of cultural artifacts, such as books and films, depends on their own identity and cultural backgrounds and are open to multiple interpretations (Radway 1991, Shively 1992, Bird 2003). Audiences have agency that transforms them into active participants whose meaning making is constantly evolving (Sewell 1999).

## **Methodology**

To analyze Romanian perceptions of Roma as victims of the Ion Antonescu government, I use audience reactions to *Hidden Sorrows* as measured in various ways. Due to decades of Holocaust denial in Romania, the low socio-economic status of Roma today and the widespread negative attitudes of the general Romanian public toward Roma, I hypothesized that many viewers would have trouble reconciling their opinions of Roma (read as asocial victimizers of Romanians in today's society) with the new information presented about Romani suffering and Romania's role in the Holocaust. I expected that Romanian audiences, facing psychological discomfort, would try to make sense of the history by appealing to the present and thus seek justification for Antonescu's policies by pointing out today's tensions involving the Roma minority. I assumed that they would place Roma in an adversarial framework, blaming them for failing to integrate in society and for other social problems such as crime, as these were common views expressed in the media as well as in general discourse at the time the film was made and screened.

The data were collected from the spring 2005 through the summer 2008, as over 1,000 Romanians viewed the film in private or public screenings, after which post-screening discussions were recorded.<sup>155</sup> Four methods were employed to record audience reactions: audio and/or video taped discussions; written, anonymous surveys about the film and its topic; free-form essays by the participants-viewers (especially used among students); and field notes based on participant-observation taken either by me or my research assistants.<sup>156</sup> For this chapter, I focus on a portion of the data, the written

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<sup>155</sup> The film screened in ten cities across Romania in high schools, universities, museums, nightclubs, etc. Screenings also took place in Poland, Hungary, Croatia and the United States, but those discussions have been excluded from this sample. The film also aired on Hungarian National Television on 2 August 2007.

<sup>156</sup> Field research assistants were Ana Maria Popa, a journalist and civil society advocate, and Iulia Vasile, a former student of mine in the Language and Literature department at the University of Bucharest.

responses of over 270 high school students in grades 9-12, who viewed the film as part of their coursework. At each of the viewings I recorded post-screening discussions either on digital audio or video formats. When this option was not possible I wrote-up discussions in my field notes. At all schools, I collected written, anonymous evaluations from students after the screening.<sup>157</sup> In students' reactions, I discovered patterns of conceptualization of the Romani Holocaust that repeat themselves across audiences, regardless of age, gender or occupation.<sup>158</sup> Several themes emerged, for example such as surprise that "Gypsies have a history," denial of the genocide of Roma, guilt over the Romanian role in the destruction of the Roma, gratitude for having learned the "real" history, and confusion between present and past portrayals of Roma. At one high school, the teacher had students submit essays about *Hidden Sorrows* directly to me.

Thus from their reactions, I was able to assess not only their prior knowledge of the Romani Holocaust, but also their current views on Roma. While comments provide incredible insight into students' perceptions of Roma in Romanian history and of Roma themselves, the students' remarks must also be taken in context of Romania's post-socialist transition and the attendant struggles to come to terms with its troubled past and its treatment of national minorities. The heightened sensitivity to and discussion of Romania's Holocaust history have evolved primarily in response to geo-political pressures from the U.S. and Israeli governments and organizations, rather than emerging from an internal desire to confront past atrocities.<sup>159</sup> The bulk of the Holocaust discourse focuses on the fate of the Jews, though a minuscule space exists for examination of the fate of Roma, as the ubiquitously marginalized 'other.' Additionally, over the last decade various foreign governments and institutions have pressured Romania to improve the country's dismal human rights record toward Roma, which has prompted much national

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<sup>157</sup> When students noted their ages and gender in written forms, this information is included in a parenthesis beside the quote.

<sup>158</sup> In 2005, the US Embassy in Bucharest invited me to do a speaking tour with the film at Romanian high schools and universities. Additionally in 2006, I was asked by organizers of the Projector Tank Festival to include my film in their traveling festival, which toured in the UK and Romania. I was invited to come to high school and university screenings PTF set up, and thus was able to record these sessions as well. For photos of one of the screenings of Projector Tank at Cosbuc High school in Bucharest, see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/projectortank/>, accessed on 16 February 2010.

<sup>159</sup> This differs from the mainly internally driven examination of the atrocities committed by the communist regime that has gained in strength over the past few years.

debate in the media about the place of Roma in Romanian society.<sup>160</sup> Although my research about the Romani Holocaust as depicted in the film was independent of the events surrounding Romania's confrontation of its Holocaust history and its post-communist treatment of Roma, the impact of these larger discourses is also reflected in the students' discussions regarding Roma.

### **Film as medium for Holocaust education**

Much has been written about the ability or even intention to represent the Holocaust.<sup>161</sup> Viewpoints range from those of Elie Wiesel that comprehension is impossible unless one has lived it, to the interpretation of more artistic perspectives encompassing the world of art, film, literature and other sources that expressive mediums can be adequate to portray ranges of understanding of the Holocaust on intellectual and emotional levels.<sup>162</sup> Regardless of one's position, Holocaust novels, films, documentaries, plays, photographs and art have mushroomed over the past thirty years, providing consumers who are non-specialists with many avenues to explore representations of the horror of the historical event known as the Holocaust. Author Anne-Marie Baron (2006), who writes about the Shoah and film, contends that it is "perfectly legitimate for this major modern art form to deal with all the tragedies of our times without its images being suspected of systematically minimalizing, watering down, or disguising reality" (pp.20-21). It is silence around these crimes that she fears most, believing that cinema will help keep those heinous crimes "in the collective memory" and it is a "key teaching aid." The vast number of video archives that have sprung up in recent decades, such as those

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<sup>160</sup> For instance, media coverage of reactions to the European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) 2005 decision about the Hădăreni case show how polarized discussions are when Roma are victims of violence directed toward them by non-Roma. The ECHR awarded €238,000 to Roma victims of ethnic violence in 1993, when their homes in Hădăreni were burned by non-Roma locals who were supported by the police. The media discussions reveal public dissatisfaction with the court's decision. The Romanian judicial system grossly failed to adequately resolve the 40-odd cases of violence directed towards Roma by non-Roma, and the ECHR decision was viewed by many as a blow.

<sup>161</sup> For more on representation of the Holocaust, see *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in film and television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joana Newman; Annette Insdorf (2003). *Indelible Shadows. Film and the Holocaust*, New York & Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Ilan Avisar (1988). *Screening the Holocaust Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>162</sup> See, for instance, Primo Levi (1996). *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

collected at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and the Steven Spielberg's Shoah Visual History Foundation, reify the importance of technology of film and video in preserving memory, or "doing memory work."<sup>163</sup>

Film has been an especially important medium for transmitting Holocaust representation, and feature films such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), *The Holocaust* (1978), *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Life is Beautiful* (1997), alongside numerous others, have irrevocably changed the landscape of memory and representations of the Holocaust. Annette Insdorf (2003), a Holocaust film scholar, noted that when she began her work on the genre of Holocaust films in 1980, there were 60 serious filmic representations of the Holocaust. Eight years later, the number of films had burgeoned, as 100 new ones had been released (p.xv). That figure is even higher today, due to the commercial successes of feature films since then. According to Holocaust historian David Cesarani (2005) over the past twenty years "film and specifically filmed testimony" have become increasingly central for institutions such as museums and memorials in the process of representing the Holocaust (p.xxi). Film has not only changed how institutions establish memory culture, but it has also changed how the Holocaust enters our memories a part of a cultural repertoire. Many researchers, for instance, credit film with bringing the Holocaust into the national consciousness in the United States (Haggith and Newman 2005:8).

The genre of documentary has also, and will continue to have, a vast pedagogical effect on viewers. As groundbreaking works such as Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955) and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) demonstrate, the documentary can be a powerful means of transmitting historical facts as well as memories of the event to a broad public; it shapes collective memory and can often have a powerful emotional effect on those who view it. Documentary film can, as historian Deborah Lipstadt (1995) states regarding the use of *Shoah* in her college courses, inform students about history and allow them to work out for themselves the connections with the present (p.26). In a recent collection about teaching the Holocaust, Aaron Hass (2004), a psychology professor and one-time Pulitzer Prize nominee, wrote about the power of film:

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<sup>163</sup> These video and film archives have not been built without critics. See Diane Wolf's critique of the Spielberg collection in Judith Gerson and Diane Wolf, eds. (2007). *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Identities and Memories in Jewish Diasporas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Despite almost thirty years of practice as a teacher, despite the inherently interesting material embedded in my lectures, my students seem most impacted by the documentaries they view. Of all the documentaries, it is the single camera transfixed on a seated Holocaust survivor, dressed in a dark blue suit and red tie, as he grimly tells of what he experienced and witnessed during those dark years, which makes it most difficult for my students to move on to the rest of their day (p.101).<sup>164</sup>

As Hass discovered, central to documentaries about the Holocaust are the survivors themselves (Haggith and Newman 2005:125). Their gripping testimony can bring in audiences in ways that little else can. Authors Haggith and Newman (2005) point out that Holocaust documentaries share several commonalities by employing familiar cinematic techniques to guide viewers through a historical narrative: an explanatory voiceover commentary, a linear, chronological narrative, ‘talking head’ interviews, and the use of archive film and photographs (p.125).

Increasingly, methodologists specializing in Holocaust education recommend films to disseminate historical information to students, as film is an excellent medium for ensuring an emotional connection with the past for a generation of youth raised on visual mediums. For instance, the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Israel uses films in all areas of their curricular development, including outreach to the general public, when teaching about the Holocaust.<sup>165</sup> The Council of Europe also recommends film as an education tool for Holocaust study.<sup>166</sup> Film scholar Florence Jacobowitz sees the documentary as a strong means of affecting public memory of the Holocaust. In her writings, Jacobowitz (2003) praises Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, noting that viewing it is:

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<sup>164</sup> Hass had invariably placed the face of the Holocaust survivor as male, whether intentional or not is unknown. In many instance, it is indeed a male survivor, such as Elie Wiesel, that embodies the idea of a spokesperson-survivor to speak out against the evils of the Final Solution. In the cases of victims, it is the reversed and is a feminized image that may conjure up, as Anne Frank, both in literature and film, emerges as the consummate victim.

<sup>165</sup> For more information on materials promoted for educational uses at Yad Vashem, see their webpage <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/units/index.asp>.

<sup>166</sup> See Anne-Marie Baron (2006), *The Shoah on screen – Representing crimes against humanity*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

like entering a site of memorialization; it is a monument to the murdered.... It becomes a memorial space where the relationship between past and present is contemplated and, like memorials, it addresses not only what should be remembered but how, and the way a work of art can contribute to the inscription of historical testimony and public memory (p.7).

Indeed, *Shoah* is one of the foremost used films in Holocaust education. Jacobowitz writes that cinema is making a contribution to the cultural process of remembrance (p.10). The very techniques of the genre assist in this process, as she argues that “the audience constructs a spatial relationship between the face and the object, in the imagination” and that “cinema plays on the viewer’s inclination to identify with a character and share imaginatively and empathetically in the human experience being presented” (p12). James Young (1988) also reached the similar conclusions about the relationship created between images and pictures of faces. He writes that faces, “in particular, affect us viscerally, evoking emotional, parasymphathetic response over which viewers have little control: that is we respond to pictures of people as if they were actually people” (p.163).

Romanian filmmaker and professor Radu Gabrea, age 73, knows the power of cinema for educating viewers about social and historical issues. He is the most prolific filmmaker about the Holocaust in Romania, a distinction that has earned him many accolades abroad in international film festivals, but few at home. While most of his films have Jewish life and culture as the main theme, the Holocaust is personally relevant to Gabrea, who lived in Romania under the Antonescu regime. On the subject of the Holocaust, he has directed two feature films, a made-for-television movie, one documentary, and has two more documentaries in the making.<sup>167</sup> Gabrea believes that film can change perceptions of viewers about a topic: “With film, there is the implication of truth in the image. It is the combination of language and image that is the most powerful.”<sup>168</sup> Gabrea has found in his works on the Holocaust that film can provoke very strong reactions in audiences, ranging from fantastic receptions to open denial that the Holocaust happened. His latest film, *Gruber’s Journey* (2009), has done just that. It is an adaptation of a book written in 1943 by an Italian war correspondent who witnessed

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<sup>167</sup> Titles of Gabrea’s films dealing with the Holocaust are: *Don’t Be Afraid Jacob* (1981), *Sammy’s Conference* (1996), *Struma* (2000) [documentary] and *Gruber’s Journey* (2008).

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Radu Gabrea, April 1 2010, Bucharest, Romania.

fragments of the Iași Pogrom.<sup>169</sup> Few Romanians know of the massacres of June 1941, ordered by Antonescu, which resulted in the deaths of an estimated 13,000 Jews.<sup>170</sup> In Romania, Gabrea noted that there “is a wreck of interest in the truth” about the Holocaust and that despite little information in circulation about the Holocaust there is a fatigue about it, as he noted that some viewers and critics were “pissed off by this kind of topic – having the mentality of ‘what, again?’” The lack of acceptance of Holocaust films and documentaries in Romania, according to Gabrea, who is also a former director of the Romanian National Center for Cinematography, is that history had been hidden from the Romanians and little has been done to counter the former regime’s manipulations of historiography. “It is a problem with the education system in Romania. There is a deeper problem with the truth.” Film, Gabrea contends, is an excellent medium for bringing the truth of the event of the Holocaust to audiences.

### **Transforming Testimony into Documentary: The Conceptualization of a Film**

From the onset of the film project, I conceptualized a documentary that was primarily geared for educational purposes. It thus became a daunting task to try put on video a re-counting of the event of the Holocaust pertaining to Roma that would bring the documentary on a comprehensive level for contemporary audiences, especially Romanian youth, who knew little of the Holocaust due to decades of communist cloaked denial, and even less about one of its victim groups, the Roma. I hoped that the documentary would be both informative and transformative, a film that could provide what researcher Elisabeth Cowie (2005) mentions as “a tool which can bring us to feel as and to feel for those we learn from and learn about in the documentary – enable us to form our own memories.” Such remembering, she says, will be in relation to our present experience of the representation of past events. The documentary is therefore in its selections and ordering “a particular form of narration of the factual and the objective through which it becomes knowable, thus producing a documentary epistemology in which we are enabled

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<sup>169</sup> See Curio Malaparte (2005). *Kaputt*, New York: New York Review of Books. See also, Radu Ioanid, “The Holocaust in Romania The Iasi Pogrom of June 1941,” *Contemporary European History* 2,2 (1993), pp.119-148.

<sup>170</sup> For more on this subject, see Radu Ioanid (2000). *The Holocaust in Romania: The destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu regime, 1940-1944*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

not only to see but are also brought to know” (pp.182-3). At a minimum, my aim was for others, especially youth, to be able *to see*, but also *to know* what happened to Romanian Roma deported to Transnistria. As for longer term entrance into their own memories, I could only speculate whether the film might create a space for this kind of cultural remembering among a group of young Romanians that had no ‘historical endowment’ of the Holocaust, as Anna Reading has called family memory of the Holocaust communicated through generations, a phenomenon that Marianne Hirsch has coined ‘postmemory.’<sup>171</sup>

In directing a film for general audiences based on archival and qualitative research, my intent was to challenge the landscape of encoded “otherness” in Romania that places Roma outside of the body politic by inserting a representation of their wartime history in an attempt to carve out a place for Roma into the country’s dominant narrative of WWII, the Holocaust, and socio-political identity. As a sociological actor with a policy agenda of education about the Romani genocide, I was also motivated to rectify an injustice that few designated important as it was actively absconded by the Romanian state for decades. I argue that precisely this denial of Roma as historical actors in Romanian history has actively contributed to the continued informal and formal exclusion of the Roma minority from mainstream society by perpetuating them as the eternal “other” (Woodcock 2008). This exclusion places Roma in the role of an undeserving ethnic minority, while conveniently allowing for the ‘moral absolution’ of the state of its responsibility for crimes committed against Roma, thereby ignoring any reparations that Roma may legally be due. One example of this can be seen from the reaction of some former members of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, who should arguably be strong advocates of including Roma as a former victim category, since members of the Commission wrote about the persecution of Roma in their report. Instead, when a legal definition of the Holocaust in Romania was altered to include Roma in national legislation,<sup>172</sup> a few members were worried. They fretted that adding Roma would re-open what they hoped was a closed chapter in post-war

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<sup>171</sup> For more, see Anna Reading (2002). *The social inheritance of the Holocaust: gender, culture, and memory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; and Marianne Hirsch (1997). *Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

<sup>172</sup> Emergency Ordinance 31/2002, covering Holocaust denial, provided a definition of the Holocaust that was later amended to include Roma. It was promulgated into law in May 2006.



reparations, as it might cost Romania too much money to compensate Roma who had been largely excluded from indemnification programs after the fall of communism.<sup>173</sup>

After 1989 and through the present, the socio-economic status of the Roma has differed drastically from the other major ethnically identified victim category in the Romanian-authored Holocaust, the Jews.<sup>174</sup> The two groups were in different social strata even before the Holocaust. During communism, both groups had diverging policies applied to them by the state, affecting parts of the populations positively and parts negatively. For example, forced sedentarization for nomadic Roma brought some benefits of education for youth. At the same time, it contributed to cultural negation as they were not allowed to nomadize and their professions started to become obsolete with increased industrialization. Although the Romanian communist regime moved toward an integration of Roma as national policy, it was a forced assimilation that left little room for ethnic or cultural identification, and it never lost sight of the Roma as being a separate group (Tismăneanu Report 2006). As William Gamson (1995) accurately noted, the consequences of continued exclusion, even if informal, have cultural as well as social psychological impacts on a society when the “cultural code of ‘otherness’ remains the same” (p.17). In the case of Romanian Roma, as high school students’ reactions to the documentary film have shown, a discourse of informal exclusion remains present among the majority (Romanians) and negatively affects the representation of Roma as historical actors who were excluded from Romanian society through genocide. Present anti-Roma attitudes spill over into the viewing of the past, making a reconstruction of the Holocaust and coming to terms with it extremely difficult. In post-communist Romania, how does one of the tenets of Holocaust education, tolerance building, then occur when a former victim group remains “othered”?

While I had conducted qualitative research, including oral history collection for years prior to filming, videotaping testimony for a film presented a host of new challenges both from methodologically and technically. So I set out to acquire filmmaking skills through courses, learning how to transform my academic knowledge

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<sup>173</sup> Conversations with former members who wish to remain anonymous in October 2005.

<sup>174</sup> For more on the situation of Romanian Jews under communism, see Carol Bines (1998). *Din istoria emigrărilor în Israel 1882-1995*. București: Editura Hasefer; Liviu Rotman (2004). *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă. 1944-1965*. Iași: Editura Polirom; Carmen Chivu-Duță (2007). *Culte din România între prizonire și colaborare*. Iași: Editura Polirom.

into a filmic form for broader consumption.<sup>175</sup> By 1999, I began filming testimonies as Roma survivors' expressions, hand gestures, and body language communicated so much of their lived experience and memories that I felt it essential to record them on video. As Laurence Langer (1991) and others have argued, video testimonies hold great value. The presence of the camera recording the survivor's story allows for communication of experience that might otherwise be lost in a different medium. By switching to video, I wanted to prevent disembodiment of survivors from their modes of expression, as Young (1988) notes that can happen when just a voice is captured on an audio track. Gestures, expressions, as well as silences all communicate emotion and embodied memory that spoken language sometimes fails to express. Video testimonies record all these cues, which figure into survivors' stories. For instance, one woman I interviewed on video, who was a child at the time of the deportation, was forced to have oral sex with a Soviet soldier after liberation from a camp. She was standing in front of her new house, which was yet unfinished. It was late afternoon when we filmed her, and the sun warmed the light brown earthen bricks that had just been laid down to construct the inner walls of the home. A tiny woman in her 70s, Silvia's memories were clear regarding the trauma she suffered. After telling me about her shame and what she had been through, Silvia repeated with a scornful voice: "He put his penis in my mouth." She then leaned over and spat, a look of total disgust appearing on her anguished face. The gesture of spitting, of physically reacting decades later to act the oral sex forced upon her in 1944, told me more about the incident than the words themselves could have, as her body continued processing her trauma.

I knew when I started videotaping interviews that the tapes could be used for multiple purposes – as archived testimonies in and of themselves, as excerpts for insertion into filmic mediums such as documentaries, or as transcribed text for publications. Young (1988) argues that video testimony, which also is the "making of witnesses," offers a different exploration of memory than other forms, such as literature or art (p.157). Unlike many Holocaust scholars, Young is open to examining Holocaust films as texts to be analyzed, and in particular what he calls "cinemagraphic testimony."

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<sup>175</sup> I owe many thanks to Ellen Spiro and Paul Stekler of the Radio Television Film Department at the University of Texas as they graciously allowed me to audit documentary film courses.

Young offers the thought that survivors' video testimony is "organized twice over" as "once in the speaker's narrative and again the narrative movement created by the medium itself" (p.157). Taking this a step further with the format of documentary film, there are two levels of narrative at work, to paraphrase Young. As director of the medium, there is my narrative as interpreter and presenter of the historical sequences of the event itself and of the survivors who lived it.<sup>176</sup> There is also the narrative within the narrative, or the survivors' transmission of their interpretations and impressions of the event. Young tells us that the act of filming, then, records the witness as "document" as "he makes his testimony and the understanding of meaning of events generated in the activity of testimony itself" (p.159).

At first I was hesitant to film for the documentary, as I wasn't sure how to make survivor's "testimony" a "document," in Young's phrasing. By doing oral history, I felt as if I was preserving an entire narrative of a survivor as a document. By making a documentary, I would be truncating each person's memories to make a composite representation of an entire group's experience. If I cut up the testimony, wouldn't I then be breaking the narrative? How would I then be making a document worthy of evaluation? Even though I'd edited textual testimony as well, it still seemed somehow a more 'pure' form of representation than film for conveying the entire story of an individual. I also feared that the act of pointing a camera at survivors, who had never been interviewed on video before, would inhibit them from telling their stories. The first dilemma I solved later in editing, by keeping true to the spirit of the survivors' testimonies, just as I had in written editing. The second problem was addressed even before we starting recording. The process of taping was explained to survivors, and they, of course, were able to give their informed consent. They understood that at any point they could stop the interview. To put survivors further at ease, there were always several people present (except when survivors requested differently), from their families and from our film crew, one of which was my Romani informant Marioara, who also acted as

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<sup>176</sup> Originally I planned to use only survivors' account to carry the story, but there were too many historical holes that needed to be filled to make the story comprehensive for the viewers to do this. Consequently, my editor Melania Oproiu suggested and I agreed to interject myself as a character into the story. In the film I introduce myself as a research of this history, seeking out survivors to share their memories with me. Thus it is my voice that transitions segments of the film divided into my divisions of historical chapters, and I appear periodically throughout the documentary as well.

translator from Romanian to Romani when necessary. Marioara, as a member of the traditional coppersmiths *căldărari* community, also spoke as a guarantor for me as director of the documentary with the Roma we interviewed. She provided assurance that the film was a legitimate endeavor that would benefit Roma by making their tragic history public, and that all interviewees would be treated respectfully and fairly in the final product. In other words, she put her reputation on the line for the project. Indeed, without Marioara's determination to see the fruition of our work on video, the project would not have been possible.

Prior to filming, I paid little attention to the chaotic environment that generally composed the background of our interviews. For instance, when we interviewed inside, grandchildren randomly ran in and out of rooms, slamming doors and calling to one another from all locations inside and outside the house while blaring televisions or boom boxes from adjacent rooms added to the ambient sound. As long as I was focused on the interviewee and the microphone was placed close to the person to provide sound clean enough for transcription, I could ignore the surrounding cacophony. I had long ago adapted the many texts I'd read on interviewing through sociology methodological seminars to my fieldwork, where seemingly few of those instructions applied. Authors typically wrote of the need for interviewing in a "quiet, calm place" where interviewer could be "one-on-one" with the respondent, ensuring an atmosphere conducive to instilling confidence between parties for the interview. It was almost impossible to achieve the textbook scenarios in Romani households where I interviewed, as my respondents generally lived in extended families in what I interpreted as overcrowded conditions, with sometimes 20 people sharing a few small rooms. I didn't have to concentrate on visuals when recording for audio testimony, as I was focused on the words. Often there were several people around the survivor, including numerous grandchildren who cuddled up for a few minutes before running off, daughters-in-law sitting at the feet of their mothers-in-law to hear again the stories they had heard for years.

While this was all fine for recording testimony that I knew would be transcribed for written texts, it was, however, more challenging when filming the documentary as there were new audio-visual rules that had to be applied for the *mise-en-scene*. For the

audio portion of the film, the voice track has to be pure without ambient noise drowning out the interviewee. The microphone is unforgiving, picking up absolutely everything, even if it's unidirectional. For instance, if a slamming door obliterates or distracts from what the interviewee says, that segment of the interview, no matter how riveting, cannot easily be used. As a director, I had to make an on-the-spot decision of either asking the interviewee to repeat what was said, losing spontaneity and sometimes emotion, or continuing on. As a qualitative researcher, ambient noises had caused few problems for me as long as the voice was discernible but even if it was not, my handwritten notes could be used to fill out the transcriptions. When filming, I had to adjust my previous interviewing techniques as for the most part, we shot outside in fenced courtyards under a spot of shade. Cracked plastic chairs were quickly draped with women's scarves or nearby carpets brought out to make us more comfortable for the hour-long interview. Extension cords reached down from jerry-rigged wires feeding not only the house with electricity but also my camera, which was competing for power with televisions and refrigerators that often my Romani hosts graciously shut off for our interviews. Visuals were, of course, critical in filming. To achieve acceptable audio and video, I chose a standard interview format of a seated person telling his/her story, alternating between close-up and medium shots of their faces. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

This style of filming ran counter to Romani culture (as it does to many cultures), since individuals are rarely isolated when telling their life stories as family members have always been their primary audience. At first I attempted to include family members into the shots, but this soon became problematic. For instance, if a survivor was telling a particularly painful part of her story and a young grandchild got restless and started pulling grandma's arm to get some attention, the child became too much of a visual distraction, and it was no longer useable visually for the film. Another area in filming that ran counter to Romani culture was keeping some kind of crowd control. When I brought in a camera and a crew, and the number of onlookers would swell exponentially as neighbors, friends, and curious passersby would all cram around to see what was happening. While film courses had instructed me on how to set up the technical aspects of filming, they didn't give me crowd management skills. In the beginning, Marioara and I fought unsuccessfully this type of 'communal filmmaking,' as I called it. We were

pantomiming “hushing” by putting our fingers to our lips because the microphone picked up not only the boisterous voices of our spectators, but also the constant “chatter” of yard animals – clucking chickens, honking geese and barking dogs, ambient noises which are somewhat atypical when capturing Holocaust testimony such as one might find at Yale University’s Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies or in Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Visual History Foundation collections. Eventually, we found our way. For instance, we bribed kids with promises of candy if they remained quiet, and encouraged the men to go outside of the courtyard where we were filming to where our driver was conveniently parked. In his car, he had stored a vast collection of Romani music CDs that was certain to keep onlookers occupied.<sup>177</sup>

As the filming went on and the survivors’ participation grew, I grappled little with the angst of whether or not my final product would be an accurate representation of the event. I knew from coursework that the camera’s lens is extremely subjective, as would be my presentation. Also reassuring to me was that the project would be a joint effort, a compilation of my interpretation of the Romani suffering during the Holocaust with the memories shared by survivors and their families. I wasn’t going for filmic breakthrough with the documentary. Rather, I was looking to tell a comprehensive, chronological story using survivors’ accounts to propel the narrative forward and engage audiences on an intellectual and emotional level. I also hoped to bring them in contact with Roma, whose stories were rarely heard by non-Roma and with whom viewers most likely had no contact. Although the Holocaust history of Roma was not part of my personal or even national history, the themes of stratification, inequality, racism, and injustice tugged at me - all familiar themes in sociology. In one of the film grants that I submitted and for which I later received funds, I stressed that the goals of the production were to clarify for audiences who the Roma were; to give background on the growth of Nazism and racially-based extermination policies, leading to the deportation and internment in concentration camps of Roma; to transmit what Roma had suffered and remembered from their experiences; and finally, to depict Roma survivors some 60 years later as they struggled

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<sup>177</sup> In our experience, Romani men were much louder than Romani women in groups.

for financial compensation from Germany and Switzerland,<sup>178</sup> while also sharing their parts of the culture through daily life events.<sup>179</sup>

### ***Hidden Sorrows: Form and Content***

The purpose of employing a film for classroom usage unites the idea of representation of the Holocaust together with testimony: the documentary being an interpretation of the historical events surrounding the destruction of part of the Romani community, and the survivor testimony within it being the interpretation of the historical events as viewed through the perspective of the survivors. In other words, my documentary attempts to capture Romani perspectives, which are then filtered through my eyes as the director and shaped into a filmic story comprehensible to audiences. The documentary thus informs those who lack both the contextual knowledge to place the persecution of Roma alongside that of the Jews, while also acting as an entrée to Romani thought and recollection or collective memory. Early on I chose to shoot mainly an expository documentary, a format that most television documentaries still follow, as it addresses the viewers directly by using interviews, voice over, and archives (Barbash and Taylor 1997:17-18). This genre of documentary tends to be used especially in educational films since the viewpoint of the filmmaker is clearly presented, leaving little room for misinterpretation. The main material for the film is memory. We shot around 100 hours of footage, mainly interviews that were edited down for the final version, which emerges as a highly edited document. The basic selection criteria were cogent quotes, combined with technically proficient visuals and audio.<sup>180</sup> I wanted to center on witness testimony as the engine propelling the story, using “talking heads” where the camera is focused on one person telling her or his account. Through editing, there is an emotional crescendo, or

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<sup>178</sup> There were two compensation processes covered in the film. The Swiss Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust/Shoah, established by the Swiss Banks, and the Humanitarian Fund for Former Victims of Nazism, established by the German Parliament. For more on this see Michelle Kelso, Holocaust-Era Compensation and the Case of the Roma, *Studia Hebraica* 8/2008, pp.298-334.

<sup>179</sup> Grant submitted and received from the Texas Council for the Humanities, 2000.

<sup>180</sup> Certain segments, like the death of one of the survivors, were not included in the film. To watch another human dying, I felt, would have been too shocking. I also left out mothers talking about committing infanticide since I felt the topic was very difficult to handle in the film. However, in *Tragedia romilor deportati în Transnistria 1942-45 (The Tragedy of Roma deported to Transnistria)*, Iași: Polirom, 2009 a book I co-edited with Radu Ioanid, I selected testimonies that included infanticide that could be.

emotion management, built up in the storyline that brings viewers through the stages of emotions the survivors told us they felt: disbelief (deportation), shock (camp life), desperation (hunger, disease), horror (brutality, cannibalism); despair (death), etc. Unlike many of the Holocaust films I watched that ended with liberation, I wanted to continue with the present so that viewers could see Roma survivors today as real people with families. I chose to anchor the now as survivors applied for compensation programs to broach issues with viewers such as justice and historical legacies. Thus I took made the unusual decision to divide the film into two distinct segments.

The first part of the film focuses on interwar and wartime history as it unfolded in Romanian-controlled territories. Twenty-two Romani survivors narrate the story of the deportation, internment, and return from Transnistria, a part of Romanian and German occupied Ukraine during WWII. The blending of one survivor's story into another was my attempt to fuse testimonies whose themes overlapped in qualitative interviews, some of which were covered in the previous chapter. The last part of the film concentrates on the lives of survivors in the late 1990s as they applied for humanitarian funds for surviving victims of the Holocaust living in Eastern Europe launched by the German government and Swiss Banks. The memories the Holocaust were scrutinized also by bureaucrats working for those programs as Romani testimony then become public record, against which indemnification was doled out. In other words, the survivors' accounts became commodities whose value may have depended on how (well) survivors communicated their sufferings and in what detail to non-Roma audiences. As I wanted the film to go beyond the historical representation of the Holocaust and its commodification, this segment of the film has an ethnographic focus. Five survivors are featured as they wait for their claims to be processed, broaching the themes of accountability, responsibility, and justice for victims of state-sponsored violence. Vignettes from their daily lives illustrate some aspects of Romani culture, spanning important events such as a wedding and a funeral, to more routine happenings such as going to an open-air market and sharing a meal with family members.

*Hidden Sorrows* begins with a small scene in Romanian village with Roma inhabitants. In the opening shot, the camera films out of a car window, detailing dilapidated houses we pass, as a melancholic clarinet tune plays in the background. An



old man's voice comes in over the music and the homes, and says in Romanian: "They would wake us up, and drag us through the snow." By the time the sentence finishes, the next cut brings us into the house of our speaker, an elderly Romani man, shabbily dressed, who the camera focuses on as he looks directly into the lens with his deep brown eyes. While he is seated, we can still see that the man is thin, frail and not in good health; a cane extends from his right hand and his face is disfigured. The man's face is well lined, making his age hard to guess. He wears a gentleman's hat, although he is inside, a signature of his once nomadic roots. "Life was bitter for us," he tells the viewers as the camera slowly zooms out, showing us his surroundings. The walls behind the man are made of packed earth, long ago painted a yellow that has since faded, with brightly woven carpets adorning one wall behind him. His voice trails off, and he looks away from the camera, his eyes roving until they turn in the direction of someone we cannot yet see. The camera cuts to a middle-aged woman dressed in a floral blouse and headscarf (his daughter-in-law), and she senses his nervousness, telling him: "Don't be afraid, nobody's taking you back to Russia."<sup>181</sup> Just tell your story, who died, and how your life was." Momentarily convinced, the man gives us one small detail: "Lice bit us all over." Fear overtakes him again. "I'd better not do the interview if it means going back there," he decides. Another woman intervenes (Marioara), telling him not to worry, that no one will take him back to Russia. He answers that he is very afraid to go back. The man looks directly into the camera once again, addressing me as I film: "Miss, I want to stay here in Romania."

I opened the film with this scene because I wanted audiences to immediately understand two things. First, that the attempted genocide of 1942-44 has lasting consequences, as Roma survivors still fear being targets of racial hatred. The Roma were victims of Antonescu's policies, and the trauma inflicted upon them during the war remains constantly with them. In the climate of Romania in the 1990s through today, Roma have continually ranked as the least tolerated national minority, and are the group most often discriminated against in society (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006, Troc 2002). I wanted audiences to understand that some Roma still live in fear of being unjustly

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<sup>181</sup> The respondents sometimes use the term "Russia" when describing Transnistria, as in Romanian "Russia" stands for Soviet Union and during the war the area Romania ruled over was occupied Soviet territory.

victimized, so that viewers would begin to have empathy with the survivors. Second, I wanted to communicate that many survivors live in rural areas (grossly underserved by social services as Romanian audiences would know), and more importantly, that they are elderly, impoverished, and in ill health. This becomes important later in the film, as we follow survivors as they apply for Holocaust-era compensation programs.

After the opening scene, I appear briefly on screen riding in my car, explaining who I am and the reasons why I decided to make this film. The shots used to illustrate my voice over cut back and forth across the verdant Romanian countryside, passing through villages and small towns. I inform viewers:

Few know about this tragedy as Gypsies are often left out of history books, and survivors rarely speak their suffering with outsiders. Together with my husband Alex, I traveled through the Romanian countryside to visit Gypsy communities, searching for survivors willing to speak with us. I wanted to capture their story before there was no left to tell it.

At my editor's suggestion, I personalized the film by placing myself in it as a character and as the narrator, so that the perspective of the filmmaker was apparent immediately as it was included throughout the documentary. The film then moves to the opening credits, which are followed by a brief introduction to the Roma people and their history in Romania. Elderly survivors then are featured, describing their lives before the war as either nomads or settled Roma, with photographs and archival films used as illustrations to their text.<sup>182</sup> Mirică explains his family's lifestyle as itinerant coppersmiths: "We traveled in our wagons from village to village. People called us nomads. We had our horses and wagons. Our entire fortune was inside our wagons." Irimia tells that his father had two trades to support the family: "My father's family were blacksmiths. They made wagons and agricultural tools. Horseshoes. Pots. Wagons. He was also a musician." Another man, Ilie, comments nostalgically on his family's idyllic situation: "My father was a horse-trader. He bought a horse for a price, and sold it for more. We had the good life! If you could have seen me then, a real gentleman! I was rich, too. All Gypsies lived well, as did everyone in the country."

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<sup>182</sup> Archival materials came from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, the Moldova State Film Archives, and the City Museum of Bucharest.

The next five minutes of the film details the Nazi take-over of much of Europe, and their conception of racial biology, which targeted Jews, Roma, the disabled and others. This segment also introduces the Antonescu regime and its partnership with Germany, both in war and genocide. I then describe how the nomads were taken first, followed by the settled Roma considered “dangerous” by the regime. Survivors share their deportation experiences. Maria, a nomadic coppersmith, tells of the anguish of leaving their belongings behind in Romania: “Our tents were left behind with all that we owned. We left with the clothes on our backs. We looked back and cried, ‘Oh, God, how can we leave all this?’ Imagine someone forcing you out of your home. We were punished to death. I could cry.” Margareta, whose father was a cobbler and her mother a housewife, remembers the terrible train ordeal: “They put us in the stadium, where they called out our names. After a while when they had enough detainees, the trains were waiting to take us away. They loaded 50-60 families into a car, including the children. Those were wooden cattle cars with barred little windows. You could hardly breathe. It was not human. It was animalistic.” Irimia recalls the turning point when they learned that the Romanian police had lied to them, that their forced expulsion was more ominous than they had anticipated: “In the train we stopped in Tighina, at the border [between Romania and Transnistria]. They allowed us to go to the market, although escorted. People bought food for their families. Some Romanians there told us, ‘Brothers, you’re going to be exterminated.’”

The next portion of the film concentrates on the conditions in the camps as recounted by both survivors and archival records. Here I decided to work in various themes that had emerged from the oral histories, from the effects of hunger and disease, through rapes and killings of Roma internees. Juberina recollects the forced work detail and the cruelty of the guards:

They forced us to work in the snow and cold. And in storms. They forced us with guns. They’d beat us to keep digging - the young and old alike. Once they took us out and my father was ill and couldn’t go. He said he couldn’t work and they simply shot him in the leg. It was in the fall and he didn’t heal until the spring. There weren’t any hospitals, doctors, anything.

Crai explains that starvation devastated the Roma: “The evenings we would sit and talk with each other. By morning, hunger had killed 7 or 8 people. The living would bury the dead, all in one pit. It was all we could do for them.” Angelina struggled to find any sustenance in the camp that would keep her alive: “I was always searching [for food]. If there was a dead dog there, we ate it. From hunger we ate anything to survive. I dug through cow dung to look for corn kernels to put in my mouth.” Survivors frequently reported cannibalism, and Aristita is one of many to confirm this: “My father cut a piece of a dead Gypsy’s backside without us seeing. We had nothing left. He put the meat on the fire and fed us.”

I purposely decided not to shy away from difficult topics in the film such as cannibalism and rape, precisely because most Romanians have a hazy idea of what happened to Roma deportees, often uttering comments like “they went there on journey” (Kelso 2007). By incorporating cannibalism, a taboo in Romani and Romanian cultures, I thought to stress the veracity of the experience. As prominent Holocaust writer Lawrence Langer (1996) notes, he is “chastened by how much -- despite the shame and remorse it evokes -- witnesses are willing to \*admit\*, not conceal” (pp.7-8). I felt the same way. It was extreme duress, death by starvation, which forced Roma deportees to desperate and forbidden acts. The consummation of another human being for survival drives home in the film the tenacious hold that deportees had on life and the kind of agency that remained – forcing them to violate the basic tenets of life to sustain life. More than half of those I interviewed talked about cannibalism in the camps. Many of the testimonies are difficult to watch, as they bring forth graphic examples of the destruction the Roma in Transnistria. Through my observation of thousands of viewers, cannibalism was one of the most difficult moments for audiences to watch as many squirmed uncomfortably in their seats, covered their eyes, turned their faces away, remained frozen, or even cried.<sup>183</sup>

When testimony couldn’t be used to drive the story forward, I used voiceover to do so. For example, over archival images of the fall of the Eastern front spliced with others of refugees, bombings, and general chaos that ensued from the retreat of the Axis

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<sup>183</sup> Interestingly, cannibalism was only mentioned once in post-screening comments by viewers. Perhaps because it is a psychologically difficult concept to address, or it’s taboo, or it’s due to denial. Concerning emotions, students also wrote of their responses to the film. One high student wrote to me: “I cried!” while another wrote “I found ‘Hidden Sorrows’ very emotional....”

army, I narrate the text below as a transition between camp life and liberation, as a means of setting up the narratives of survivors:

In the spring of 1944, the Soviets recaptured occupied lands. The Axis army retreated, abandoning the camps. Gypsies fled alongside thousands of war refugees, just behind the front lines. Fighting exhaustion and disease, Gypsies also had to dodge German and Soviet soldiers. Death was not yet beaten.

Survivors then share their understandings of the long, torturous road home. James Young (1988) and others have articulated that survivor testimony should not be looked at as “proof,” but rather an expression of their memories of the events. It was how “events have been grasped by the victims and the perpetrators, explained by them, contextualized by them – even at the expense of historical accuracy” Young writes, as they “must remain as important in historical inquiry as the collection of ‘raw data’ (p.165).” In this particular sequence, the narratives are especially crucial in understanding what was happening on the ground for Romani survivors, as archival records of the liberation of the camps are few since the Romanian army and gendarmerie, which guarded the camps, fled ahead of Soviet troops, leaving an almost inexistent paper trail. Roma tell us what each person remembers from the ensuing chaos of liberation:

Ion: After the Russians pushed back the Germans, we followed the Russians. They took us up on their tanks or on their cars.

Vică: The Romanians told us, ‘You can leave now.’ ‘But where shall we go by foot?’ ‘You’re free to go. Go back to Romania!’ It was impossible to go back like that, no shoes, no clothes, no nothing. But we went forth with our families.

[Black and white archival film images begin as Vică is still speaking and we see muddied roads, crowded with people moving, all fleeing the front. A flute plays a disturbing melody, which continues over as an under track to the next account.]

Cocoş: We were a convoy of 200-300 Gypsies. One night we slept in a haystack. I will never forget that night. We had made a fire. We had a little sister, two days old. And my mother was so tired from the road. She had kept her to her breasts but she fell asleep, and the baby fell out [of her arms] and died.

Juberina: Kids were abandoned on the way home by their parents who were too exhausted to carry them. Old people were left by the side of the road, and they died there. Many children and old people died in this way.

[More black and white archival films of refugees on crowded roads, with musical accompaniment, transitions the two survivors.]

Melantina: My grandmother was behind me. She was begging me to help her walk. I said, 'I cannot carry you.' She was sick, she was limping. I told her, 'I can't, grandma.' I was too exhausted myself. I had to leave her outside one village. [She looks away from the camera....]

Viewers learn from survivors of their return to Romania and the second part of the film begins, concentrating on two Holocaust humanitarian assistance programs established in the late 1990s by the Swiss Banks and the German government in attempts to ward off large class action lawsuits that were brewing in the United States over dormant bank accounts in Switzerland and slave labor claims against the German state and industry. By 2001, the lawsuits would be dropped for settlements from the Swiss Banks for \$1.2 billion and from Germany for \$10 billion, but before that, the humanitarian funds would be partially paid out to former Nazi victims, among which Roma were a claimant category. The collapse of the communist regimes, in part, reopened the question of Holocaust compensation, which, according to survivors, was never fully settled. In Romania, the Swiss Fund for Humanitarian Assistance to Needy Victims of the Holocaust/Shoah (Swiss Fund) headquartered in Bern, and the German Humanitarian Fund for Victims of Nazi Persecution were both accepting applications from Roma as former victims of Nazism. In the remainder of the film I describe the application process, problems with it, and talk to survivors about their application status and for some, their eventual payments. It is in this portion of the film that my activism and filmmaking merge. I am no longer simply narrating a history as I begin with my husband Alex assisting some 200 survivors living in 30 villages to make their applications for these funds. In a narration over visuals of us filling out forms and talking to survivors in different communities, I inform viewers that:

The application process was complicated, but especially so for elderly Gypsies who don't read or write. The passage of time, combined with Swiss and German bureaucracies, made the applications extremely difficult. Survivors had to prove

they were deported, which was not easy as they had no access to archival records. They also needed medical certificates and current identification papers. Many Gypsies have ago lost these documents. Tucked into old purses or hidden under beds, tattered papers were sometimes recovered after prolonged searching.

Nearly two years after the application process began survivors were still waiting for the humanitarian assistance. Frustrated with the bureaucracy, we decided to expedite the process by contacting Alison Mutler, the bureau chief of the Associated Press in Romania. Ms. Mutler wrote an article that the *New York Times* picked up that focused on the long wait of impoverished Roma survivors for Holocaust compensation payments from the Swiss Fund.<sup>184</sup> A modest sum by western standards, \$700, it was a large amount for elderly survivors scraping by on pensions of less than \$30 a month. Anuța Brânzan, whose testimony was spotlighted in the previous chapter, is the first survivor featured in this portion of the film. Over establishing shots of her city, whose hazy gray skyline is dominated by communist-bloc apartments, the camera then finds Anuța as she goes about her daily shopping in an open-air market buying vegetables, flowers and watermelon. She narrates:

I am not ashamed to say I am a *țiganka*. I am proud of it. I can do anything I am asked to. I am not afraid to work. I am not stupid. I can do things.

My pension is about \$20 a month. With this money, when I go to the market, I can't even buy food for two weeks. This money is not enough to pay the utilities or even the phone. Only God Almighty knows how we resist.

[Interview shot with Anuța seated.]

Let me tell you what I would do first [with the money]. I'd build myself a proper grave. I want no dirt thrown over me. I've had enough in all those trenches and cemeteries. I want a nice grave. I'll even let the Germans build it for me, if they want to [said with humor].

An old man dressed in ragged clothing walks through his dirt courtyard on a fall afternoon, holding the hand of a five-year-old girl. He struggles to move forward,

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<sup>184</sup> "Romanian Gypsies Wait For Slave-Labor Payment," *New York Times*, July 24, 2000. Accessed online 5 June 2010 at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). Within a few days of the story running in the *NYT*, the Swiss Fund agreed to a payment plan for Romanian Roma survivors. And Alex and I, as signatories on the applications, were placed under a three-year gage order by the Swiss Fund executives that prohibited us from talking to the media about the processing of the payments.

dragging one leg behind him and using a cane to keep his balance. Ilie Constantin, a formerly nomadic coppersmith, tells us about his current situation:

I introduce myself as a sick person. I had a stroke.

[Visuals switch to his family gathered around a table in front of their dilapidated house. They are sharing a large pot of soup, all dipping their spoons in the same pot and eating with their fingers steaming polenta that is placed on newspapers around the table.]

Believe me, there are many days where I don't want to eat before my grandchildren who barely have enough. Sometimes the polenta is not enough for all of them. I feel bad if I take some, too.

My daughter-in-law feeds me from her earnings. [Visuals of her shredding cabbage by hand on a table in the courtyard.] When she cooks, she gives me a bowl of soup. And I am pleased. [Ilie eats his soup sitting outside in the courtyard.]

[Interview shot with Ilie seated.] But I don't want to live any more. I am waiting to for my day to die. But if I die today, there wouldn't be any money for my burial.

[Text over an image of the puddle in the road that pans up to the street] Two months later, Ilie died. His children mortgaged the house to pay for his funeral.

After following three other survivors waiting for their payments, the film concludes by discovering that the Swiss Fund made payments to all the survivors still living who applied through our assistance, while the German government denied some who were featured in the first part of the film for supposedly not having proof of their deportation, despite their applications having had copies of archival documents attached.<sup>185</sup> Viewers also learn that other survivors, out of fear of being identified as a former victim of the Antonescu regime, did not apply for compensation.<sup>186</sup>

For me, the importance of a testimony-driven film is the impact it can leave on an audience, which I am nearly certain knows little to nothing about the Roma genocide. As

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<sup>185</sup> I procured copies of archival documents, mainly deportation lists, from the Romanian State Archives in Bucharest. In the applications, I wrote the exact fond, file number, and page number of where the document could be found at the RSA.

<sup>186</sup> Neither of the compensation programs were well published, as they relied on word of mouth mainly to inform Roma survivors. This was an inadequate method of 'advertising,' but one that I believe was done to minimize the number of applicants.



director of *Hidden Sorrows*, I sought to make a connection between the viewers and the former Romani victims of the Antonescu regime by personalizing the story of the Romani genocide. I also wanted to eradicate the myth of the so-called “good deed” of Antonescu, as many today view the deportations of Roma, by depicting the attempt at genocide and all its horrors. One university student who later attended a screening of *Hidden Sorrows* commented that it was very powerful to hear in his language, Romanian, the experiences that the Roma suffered. It made their story more real for him.<sup>187</sup> In a recent teacher-training seminar on Holocaust education in the Romanian port city of Constanța on the Black Sea, I facilitated a session on majority-minority relations. I opened the discussion by inviting teachers to tell me how they teach their students about the Holocaust.<sup>188</sup> One teacher called out: “Films and photos are the best methods,” and another added: “Yes, they really reach the student like nothing else does.”

### ***Hidden Sorrows* in Classroom: American Foreign Policy and the Holocaust**

In 2005, I finished *Hidden Sorrows* and began screening it in Romania.<sup>189</sup> Since then, the film has been broadcast on public television channels, and screened at cultural institutions, museums, teacher-training seminars, film festivals, conferences, universities, high schools, and in Romani communities across the country.<sup>190</sup> *Hidden Sorrows* was duplicated for Romanian high schools in 2007, and is currently endorsed and distributed by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research.<sup>191</sup> My hope for the documentary was to start a much-needed dialogue about the place of Roma in both Romanian and Holocaust history. Indeed, it has provoked strong reactions among Romanian audiences wherever it has screened. *Hidden Sorrows* may not have had such a successful run if the timing of its release had not coincided with a melding of American and Romanian foreign policy interests, and with the release of the Wiesel Commission’s final report.

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<sup>187</sup> Screening sponsored by Project Think Tank, May 2006, University of Bucharest Faculty of Political Science.

<sup>188</sup> Teacher training seminar “Teacher training session in Holocaust, Tolerance and Anti-Discrimination Education,” held in Constanța, Romania May 14-16, 2010.

<sup>189</sup> The one-hour documentary was also produced by Alexandru S. Alexe.

<sup>190</sup> See Appendix A for a listing of the screenings and media coverage of the film.

<sup>191</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Bucharest, Romania generously donated funds for duplication of the film.

A few months prior to completing the film, I had returned to Romania on a Fulbright fellowship to continue interviewing Roma about the Holocaust for this dissertation and my research took a new turn towards Holocaust education, thanks to the film. The timing of my scholarship was fortuitous, as my interest in the Holocaust coincided with those the State Department, and thus of some foreign-service officers who had supported the work of the Wiesel Commission. Embassy personnel were involved with the commission because the Romanian-born Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, who wields considerable cachet in American politics, was the figurehead of the investigation.<sup>192</sup> Additionally, two high-ranking U.S. government employees at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington were influential in the commission's establishment, and later became commissioners. Four weeks after my arrival in Bucharest, Romania commemorated its first Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 9, a significant date for the Romanian Holocaust as it marked the beginning of Jewish deportations to Transnistria.<sup>193</sup>

When Mr. Wiesel came to Bucharest that fall, he gave a talk to the students at the American Studies Department of the University of Bucharest, where I was teaching a course. At the lecture I met Embassy staffers who invited me to a reception at the Ambassador's Residence in honor of Mr. Wiesel. Over wine and cheese, one chat led to another, and soon thereafter I was scheduled to meet with Mark Tauber, Cultural Affairs Officer in the Public Diplomacy section of the U.S. Embassy. Mr. Tauber and his boss, Public Affairs Officer Mark Wentworth, were keen to hear of my work with Roma, having supported both Holocaust research and education through a small grants program ran by the State Department, which also covered human rights development among Romani non-governmental organizations. Tauber was particularly interested in my then unfinished film, and that spring I had a final version to give him. Tauber and Wentworth conferred after viewing it, and suggested hosting a launch of the film at the American

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<sup>192</sup> Born in Sighet, Romania in 1928, Elie Wiesel was deported by the Hungarian-occupying forces to Auschwitz in 1944. He survived, and went on to become a journalist and renowned author, eventually settling in the United States. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed Wiesel Chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Nearly a decade later, he would win the Nobel Peace Prize and receive the highest medal of honor for a U.S. citizen, the Congressional Gold Medal. Wiesel's book *Night* has been a best-seller, translated in over two dozen languages, and is routinely used in schools across the world to educate about the Holocaust.

<sup>193</sup> Due to the 9<sup>th</sup> falling on the Sabbath, commemoration ceremonies were on the preceding days in 2004.

Cultural Center in Bucharest, to which I enthusiastically agreed. The April debut went well, and the next suggestion was for me to do a small speaking tour funded by the Embassy in Romanian schools, screening the film and leading a follow-up discussion with students. I jumped at the opportunity to take the show on the road (pardon the cliché) and recruited my assistant Marioara to co-lead discussions, alongside her father-in-law Dumitru Tranca (Vică) who was a survivor featured in the film. Given the anti-Roma climate in Romania, I worried about the film's reception. The audience for the first screening at the Embassy had been stacked with foreign diplomats, expatriates, and friendly others, but I thought it would be a harder sell to strictly Romanian audiences.

### **Romanian Audiences Respond to *Hidden Sorrows***

Understanding the life experiences of Romanians is critical to understanding their reactions when confronting an almost unknown portion of their history. Certainly cultural theorists would argue that the view point from which one sees a film, or another cultural object, depends on the cultural repertoire that is available (Schudson 1989). Media researcher Elizabeth Bird writes that her work informs us how people interact with the media to make meaning in their every day lives given the complex role that culture plays in media formats (p.8). She espouses the belief that media can help individuals frame and organize their thoughts on either more mundane or difficult topics that are personal, cultural, and I would add to her perception, historical (p.17). Bird conducted a study to ascertain how stereotypes that are presumed to exist worked in a given media depending on a group's ethnicity. She looked at audience responses among both Whites and Indians to representations of Native Americans in certain television shows and films. She discovered that when portrayals of Indians conformed to certain stereotypes such as "noble" and "stoic," Whites found the media source credible while Indians did not. While the perceptions of Indians by Whites were not necessarily negative, Bird found them to be limited in scope (p.89). She also found that in those same media sources portraying Indians led to the validation of White viewers' identity, while Indian identities were "denied and erased" (p.90). She concludes that Whites are unable to imagine Indians in non-stereotypical ways not because they watched one particular program, but because

“their cultural tool-kit” was limited, which had “worked together over time and across media to produce a recognizable cultural script about Indians” (pp.116-117).

I argue that through the viewing of *Hidden Sorrows*, like White viewers in Bird’s study, non-Roma Romanians are also constrained by stereotypical images that they hold of Roma, making it difficult to conceptualize Roma in a different manner. The cultural script in the Romanian media regarding Romanian Roma is predominantly negative. In 2002, the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology in Romania completed a study of mass media attitudes toward Roma, finding that media plays an important role in the integration process of ethnic minorities.<sup>194</sup> Researchers surveyed 12 national newspapers and found that 62% of articles negatively mentioned Roma, 37.7 % were neutral and the miniscule rest were positive. Romanian media perceptions of Roma were not only stereotypical, but negatively so appearing “always in connection with violence, crime and danger.”<sup>195</sup> The report summarized that Roma were mentioned with negative stereotypes and cultural clichés that conformed with already existing social prejudices, which researchers cautioned could lead to provocation or even exacerbated discrimination and racist actions against Roma. In 2009, the group Stop Prejudice Against the Roma Ethnicity (S.P.E.R) released a follow-up study of television and print media attitudes toward Roma. Researchers found some improvement in negativity, but were concerned with the predominant attitude of Romanian journalists that “Roma are not one with Romanians. In fact, Roma are Gypsies *țigani*” (*țigani* is used here in a pejorative sense).<sup>196</sup> This exclusion of Roma from the political corpus of the nation would be a theme that all audiences who saw *Hidden Sorrows* would also vocalize.

In 2006, I screened my documentary and held a discussion at a seminar for Romanian journalists, designed to help them better understand the Romani minority. Overall the audience, comprised of Transylvanian media representatives, reacted predictably by articulating negative stereotypes about Roma and displayed not only an ignorance about Roma, but failed to show interest in their current plight (which begged the question of why they were attending the seminar!). That same year, *Hidden Sorrows*

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<sup>194</sup> CURS from June 2002, accessed on July 1, 2010 <http://www.scribub.com/sociologie/Imaginea-romilor-in-massmedia-1624716.php>. For more on the Center, see their site <http://curs.ro/>.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> S.P.E.R. Imaginea etniei rome în presa scrisă și în stările tv (Raport de analiza media) Decembrie 2008 – Mai 2009, p.5. Accessed on July 1 2010 at <http://sper.org.ro>.

was rejected for broadcast on Romanian Public Television, as the head of programming told me that she'd had enough of interests in Roma, and that there were too many documentaries on Roma and "Romanians had suffered, too."<sup>197</sup> Fortunately, not all media sources were against the subject of Roma and the Holocaust, and some major media outlets covered the film. In 2007 Alin Gelmarean, the Director of Romanian Public Television-Transylvania, not only asked to broadcast my film, but he also set up a televised pre-programming discussion around it on *Good Evening Transylvania*. The journalist who interviewed me suggested that audiences would be upset as *Hidden Sorrows* depicts yet another black spot in Romania's history.<sup>198</sup> He wasn't wrong. Certainly, emotional responses have been the most conspicuous in discussions, but nevertheless many viewers attempt to make sense of a portrayal of their history that differs drastically from the one they knew beforehand. While some knowledge of the deportation of Roma has woven its way into collective consciousness (comments such as "too bad Antonescu didn't finish the job," are commonly heard) I believe that there is a misconception about the deportations and that Romanians actually know little of their wartime history.<sup>199</sup> Romanians' reactions to the film reflect rather current perceptions of non-Roma towards Roma. The language used to describe the events that took place between 1941 and 1944 signifies how Romanians conceptualize the Holocaust.

Many use the term *deportation* (*deportare*) when referring to the Holocaust. One hears of talk of "the deportation of Jews and Gypsies."<sup>200</sup> While indeed both groups were deported, the term *deportation* avoids the direct connection with murder and death intrinsic to the more powerful terms *Holocaust* or *genocide* (*holocaust sau genocid*).

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<sup>197</sup> Telephone conversation with with C. X. , Romanian Public Television.

<sup>198</sup> TVR Cluj: *Good Evening Transylvania*. Taped on July 5, 2007.

<sup>199</sup> It is hard to believe that large segments of the Romanian population actually espouse the most radical approach to ridding a nation of an unwanted group, which would mean they espouse genocide as a solution to the so-called Roma problem. While no polls exist on this topic, I believe that it's more likely that most Romanians perceive "deportation" in today's context as relocation within or removal from a territory, and not as a genocidal campaign.

<sup>200</sup> *Deportarea evreilor or deportarea țiganilor* are the Romanian terms. In November 2005, Lavinia Betea from *Jurnalul National* interviewed me for a special issue her newspaper published on the Holocaust. Betea asked me to clarify for the edition why deportation was not the correct term for the Holocaust in Romania. She told me after the interview that Romanian academics were not clamoring to change the terminology, and she needed a foreign scholar to convince audiences that a terminology change was necessary. I argue that Romanians do not use the term Holocaust or genocide because they do not fully understand what happened during the Antonescu regime due to the communist government's re-scripting of history, and deportation is not the appropriate term to describe the events.

After WWII in Romania, many groups faced deportation. German-speaking Romanian citizens accused of collaboration with the Nazi regime were deported to camps the USSR.<sup>201</sup> Romanians who protested the heavy hand of the Soviet occupation during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 were deported as forced laborers. Others were forcibly relocated within Romania, from cities to remote villages, for their opposition to communism. Romanians came to equate deportation with misery and sometimes death. These deportations were terrible events that produced much pain and suffering, but unlike the deportation of Jews and Roma, these later deportations were not part of a larger genocide of ethnic minorities. In contemporary terms, many people get deported from Western countries to Romania, and especially Roma. But today the existence of these deportations is even used to refute the severity of the Holocaust due to the implied meaning that those deported from Romania were just being resettled and did not suffer very much, which is clearly not true in the case of the Roma 1942-1945. Antonescu implemented genocides of Jews and Roma. The misconception of the Holocaust in Romania today is rooted partially in the manipulation of history by the communist regime whose propaganda blamed Germany for the commission of genocide and absolved Romania of any guilt or responsibility for crimes against Jews or Roma (Braham 1997, Eskenasy 1997, Cioflâncă 2004).<sup>202</sup>

In a 2007 survey conducted for the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania even though 65% of respondents reportedly had heard about the Holocaust, only 28% of agreed that the Holocaust happened in Romania. Of those, 79% considered the Germans responsible while only 11% identified the Antonescu regime as being responsible.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, most Romanians do not realize that the Holocaust took place in their country and even if they know about it, the Antonescu regime is not held responsible for the crimes. While the study is informative for understanding general perceptions, it provides few clues about the level of current understanding of the

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<sup>201</sup> See Jill Massino, "Gender as Survival: Women's Experiences of Deportation from Romania to the Soviet Union 1945-1950," *Nationalities Papers*, March 2008, pp.55-83.

<sup>202</sup> This is not unique to Romania as omissions about the Holocaust were common across communist countries. For more about the Polish case, see Genevieve Zubryzcki (2006), *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Jan T. Gross (2001), *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*.

<sup>203</sup> "Survey of opinions regarding the Holocaust in Romania and perceptions of inter-ethnic relations," National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, May 2007, pp. 33, 37.

genocide against Roma during the war. Of the 65% of Romanians who noted that they had heard about the Holocaust, half reported that the Holocaust meant “the extermination of Jews by Germany” while only two percent responded that Holocaust included “the persecution of *țigani*,” a rather nebulous definition compared to the ones the survey uses for the fate of the Jews.<sup>204</sup> The “persecution of Gypsies” was also the only definition offered by the survey authors about the genocide of Roma. Furthermore, when the survey asks respondents who agreed that a Holocaust happened in Romania to identify what it meant, authors failed to include a survey response regarding the genocide against Roma. All possible responses focused solely on the fate of the Jews.<sup>205</sup> Thus the survey, while being informative on many levels, unfortunately fails to provide an adequate portrait of Romanian perceptions on the Holocaust in Romania since it did not include Roma as part of Holocaust history. This omission is surprising because the author of the study, the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, is an outgrowth of the Elie Wiesel Commission, which devoted a chapter of its 2004 report on the Holocaust to the fate of the Roma.<sup>206</sup> Also, Roma are included in the Romanian’s government’s legal definition of the Holocaust.<sup>207</sup>

To understand if a conceptualization of the Holocaust was present in textbooks, I analyzed history books used in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (for world and Romanian history, respectively) from 1991-2006, and found that that the Holocaust was inadequately covered in most volumes. If Roma were mentioned at all as victim category, their fate merited at best one line in a few texts.<sup>208</sup> Even more disturbing is the trend to exclude Roma entirely from Romanian history. This is particularly troubling as Roma were enslaved in the Romanian territories for 500 years, yet few texts mention either their enslavement or the emancipation process in the mid-nineteenth century. Romani activists are working to increase awareness of issues regarding Roma by introducing a separate

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, p.34. The Romanian terms are: the extermination of the Jews and the persecution of the Gypsies *exterminarea evreilor de către germani*, and *persecuție țiganilor*.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p.36

<sup>206</sup> Final Report, *op.cit.*

<sup>207</sup> In 2005, President Traian Băsescu sent back to parliament the Emergency Ordinance 31/2002, stating that it left out Roma as victims of the Romanian Holocaust. A few months later, an amended version of the legislation that included Roma in definition of the Holocaust was signed by Băsescu. I was part of a working group that initiated and lobbied for this legislative change. My colleagues were Ciprian Necula, Ruxandra Radulescu, Petre Petcuț, Florin Botongou, Florin Manole and Magda Matache.

<sup>208</sup> I surveyed the Romanian Ministry of Education’s approved texts.

mandatory history subject of minorities in schools, on par with the curricula for national history.<sup>209</sup> One exception from the silent majority of texts is a manual for an elective course entitled Jewish History (*Istoria evreilor*), which features a few pages on the fate of Romanian Roma during the Holocaust.

### **“Gypsies have a history”: High School Students Awaken to Romani History**

In April-May 2005, *Hidden Sorrows* was screened in three high schools in Bucharest, two in Târgu Mureș, and three in Sibiu, with a follow-up discussion led by myself and one or two survivors from the film. All of the students had received some Holocaust education from their teachers, a few even had an elective, semester-long course on the Holocaust. Two teachers told me that they had attended trainings on Holocaust education, while the rest knew only what they had learned on their own. Most of the high schools we visited were considered some of the ‘best’ in the city, meaning their pupils mostly went on to higher education. Indifferent of the type of school or its geography, written comments were fairly similar among the youth with themes converging on an ignorance about Roma and the Holocaust, prevalent anti-Romani attitudes, cognitive dissonance, and attitudinal change.

One of the most predominant themes running throughout the written observations from high school students is their lack of knowledge of the plight of Roma during the Holocaust. These young people have had limited or no exposure to collective memory of the Romani Holocaust, and many expressed that *Hidden Sorrows* was their first exposure to the subject:

Before seeing this film, I didn’t know about the history of the Gypsies. I didn’t have any idea about the fact that they suffered so much and about this important part of history. It would be good to learn more about this subject and maybe it can be discussed from someone “higher up” who can give us permission to have more hours in school covering this subject. (female, age 17)<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Interview with Florin Manole, historian and assistant at the Center for Roma Studies at the University of Bucharest. July 10, 2007. Bucharest, Romania.

<sup>210</sup> Unless otherwise specified, their age and gender is unknown.



The most important thing that I learned is that our country is a liar and that the Gypsies are neglected. History was hidden from us and this is a painful thing. (female, age 16)

The history of the Gypsies that we know is totally different than the reality. They are people with souls who suffered although they weren't guilty, they aren't just thieves and bad people, like the majority consider them to be. (female, age 16)

I learnt that the gypsies<sup>211</sup> have a history. (female, age 16)

As evidenced by the student comments, many either had never conceptualized 'Gypsies' as a people with a rich history to be studied, or had imagined that the only history belonging to 'Gypsies' was a negative one punctuated by stereotypical characterizations of Gypsies as "thieves and bad people." After viewing the film, some students began to understand that Roma are not all the same, and, certainly they do not possess the negative personas many ascribe them. In evaluations, several students commented that they would like to learn more about Romani history. The theme of deception also surfaced, and some students speculated that school curricula had been manipulated to hide historical events that put Romania in an unfavorable light.

These students' ignorance of both the Holocaust and Romani history was disconcerting, given that the subject of the Holocaust has been mandated in school curricula beginning in the seventh grade; regarding the Holocaust they are arguably the best informed segment of Romanian society. Several factors converge, though, to render Romani Holocaust history nearly invisible to Romanian students. First, Romanian history texts fail to cover the deportation and incarceration of Roma in camps. Second, teachers raised and primarily trained under the communist system possess scant knowledge about general Holocaust history. According to Gabriel Stan, a history teacher and school inspector in Bacău county, by 2006 only around 517 of Romania's 10,000 history teachers had received supplementary training in Holocaust education.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>211</sup> Students wrote evaluations either in English or Romanian. When I quote from their English, I have not corrected for grammatical errors. For instance, I have left their writing of "gypsy" with a small "g" as they do it so often do even though it is a mistake in English. When "Gypsy" is capitalized, it is because I translated it from the Romanian word *țigăn*, which some, such as historian Shannon Woodcock, argue doesn't translate well. I do not believe the mistake with the small *g* is because the students are non-native speakers of English since they write with a capital *J* when they wrote the word *Jews*.

<sup>212</sup> Presentation by Gabriel Stan in Iași, Romania at the conference "The Iași Pogrom 28-29 June 1941," given on 28 June 2006.

just as Holocaust history was censored from texts, so too was the history of national minorities.<sup>213</sup> If teachers wanted to do lessons on the fate of Roma, they would have few resources to draw upon. Surveys I conducted in teacher-training seminars on the Holocaust reveal that the majority of teachers report having little knowledge of the Romani Holocaust.<sup>214</sup> Third, many teachers carry the same anti-Gypsy baggage as the rest of Romanian society that shows high levels of intolerance towards Roma (Petre 2004; Word Bank 2005). One cannot presume that teachers are immune to stereotypical, prejudicial, and racial thinking, and these attitudes may hinder some from teaching about Roma. According to historian Shannon Woodcock, teachers' "racism isn't a latent baggage that they labor under, it's an active tool they wield to enable certain nationalist discourses to flourish, for example 'we Romanians are honest people in Italy and the *țigani* are embarrassing us in Europe.' This is a stereotype actively wielded and taught to others to facilitate a specific Romanian nationalist identity."<sup>215</sup>

Another theme that disturbingly threads its way through the reactions to the film is that after viewing *Hidden Sorrows*, some students only now think of Gypsies/Roma as human beings:

I learned little history and I saw the life of gypsy. It is very interesting. In fact they are human. (female, age 18)

I learned the fact that Roma are people, they have a soul the same as others. I now have an admiration for their strength to have survived those problems and I also have a feeling a pity for them, their children, and their fate. (male, age 17)

The most important thing I learned today from the movie is: all gypsies are humans like all of us. (male, age 17)

For over twenty-years, Geoffrey Short has been researching Holocaust and anti-racism education in the United Kingdom, studying both student and teacher perspectives. Short (1995) noted that among British students learning about the Holocaust that it cannot be

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<sup>213</sup> Before the publication of Viorel Achim's book, *Țigani în istoria României*, Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedica 1998; nearly fifty years had passed since a serious scholarly work emerged on Roma.

<sup>214</sup> Surveys were done from 2005-07 while I was the director of the Association for Dialogue and Civic Education. We did teacher-training seminars on the Holocaust in seven cities, reaching some 400 teachers.

<sup>215</sup> Email interview with Shannon Woodcock, March 23 2010. I have a copy of this exchange in my personal archive.

assumed that students will “recoil in horror at what they learn,” and it is important to understand that their reactions “will depend crucially on the way they perceive Jews and Judaism,” or in other words, on their cultural repertoires (p.169). The comments that Romanian students make about Roma in Holocaust education suggest parallelisms, as preconceived notions of Roma affect whether and how they are viewed as former victims. The perception of these student commentators regarding Roma is clear: after viewing the film they now considered Roma to be people. Is it that students have no empathy for Roma or is it that they truly believe what they write: that Roma are not human? From where does the image of the subhuman Roma come – their families, teachers, media, historical references, society at large? More research is needed to delve deeper, and de-humanization of Roma, if shown to be a widespread phenomenon should be promptly addressed by policy makers, as in history it has been known as a precursor to violence against the respective group.

While the majority of comments were fairly positive about the impact of the film on the students’ learning experience, a few expressed divergent opinions about the subject or the manner in which it was presented:

I consider that this incident should rather be forgotten. (male, age 17)

[I]n my opinion the movie was disgusting. It has too many negative scenes involving people’s terror. We all know about the destructive effect of the holocaust and we are all sorry for what those people went through. It is not my fault that it all happened, so why now should you try to create a positive discrimination towards gypsies and Jews?

I wasn’t there to see the film, but I did hear something about it from my classmates. I’ve heard of horrible traumas the gypsies have passed through; really terrible things seem to have happened to them...I can’t even believe humanity can turn into that in such harsh condition...yet, why were they sent there? Were they absolutely innocent? Nobody ever explains that. Moreover, why can’t we just pass over the Holocaust? It happened 50 years ago! I know in those times terrible murders have happened and this shouldn’t be repeated ever again. But then again...why are gypsies like that now? It’s like they didn’t evolve at all, like they’re living in their everlasting world. With their primitive culture, not integrating (I wonder if they actually do want to integrate). I don’t want to be mean and I’m not discriminating them. I accept them, but I don’t quite like them

because they as well don't respect our culture, our rules and the good manners. At least most of them.<sup>216</sup>

Researcher Elizabeth Crowie notes that the 'reality' of the Holocaust documentary can have many effects on viewers, sometimes even the opposite one of what filmmakers may have conceptualized. Crowie writes that for viewers seeing a film, it is "not a matter of simple objectivity but also of affect, of an emotional response and with it, perhaps, a defensive reaction of denial, or even anger at the victims for the anguished horror they have aroused" (Crowie, 2005:183). With Romanian youth, this appears to be a strong possibility given the willingness to forget, feelings of guilt, and blame cast on the former victims. The second and third comments above demonstrate a failure to understand that the present-day negative attitudes toward minorities are a direct result of their histories. While in the second comment the student expressed sorrow over the suffering of victims of the Holocaust, he or she undercuts this empathy in the commentary that follows. The viewer feels guilty (although the film never states that the Romanian people were at fault for the deportations and incarcerations) and rejects this guilt by stating that the blame lies elsewhere for the suffering. This attitude is reminiscent of the defensive reactions of some whites in the United States who reject the notion of a white privilege that accords to color of their skin (Johnson 2005). Some of those same whites refuse to concede that racism exists as it is not their daily experience, and they do not see history as a determining factor shaping current social problems for people of color.

Similarly, Romanian students appear unable to see the present situation of Roma and Jews in Romania as a direct result of history, and perceive the teaching of the Holocaust is an attempt to manipulate attitudes of Romanians in favor of "gypsies and Jews" rather than a correction of an inaccurate historical record. Guilt is probably induced indirectly because Antonescu, whose regime was responsible for the deportations, has been presented as a hero since 1990, and therefore Romanians have been encouraged to identify with him – so the subjects feel compelled to rationalize his deeds (i.e., if Antonescu was good and he deported the Gypsies, he must have had a

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<sup>216</sup> Although the respondent didn't view the film, I selected the comment because it was one of the harshest opinions about Roma received. It made me wonder why this person, who didn't see the film, had such strong anti-Romani feelings and also if the film then helped to mitigate other opinions registered.

reason...) or if the evidence against him overwhelms them, they would feel guilt as they had identified with him.<sup>217</sup>

Although the third reviewer did not view the movie, he/she is adamant that there is nothing to be gained in studying the Holocaust presently, and remarks that it should be passed over as a topic of study. In the comments above, however, we see the intrinsic value of studying the Holocaust that most of its educators cite; namely, that for the principles of tolerance to flourish, the origins of prejudice and discrimination must be understood.<sup>218</sup> While the student claims that he or she is “not discriminating,” in fact the comments are racist since Roma are labeled as having a “primitive culture” that disrespects “our culture, our rules and the good manners.” Although the meaning that the author assigns to culture, rules, and good manners is unknown, it is clear for this student the term “our” that modifies them (“[Gypsies] don’t respect our culture, our rules and the good manners”) refers to “Romanian” as a national category exclusive of Roma. The use of the word “our” leaves little doubt of the attitude present – integrate and conform to *our* Romanian society, or we Romanians might not like you, just as the student expresses dislike for Roma. The comment reflects historian Victor Neumann’s theorization of the construction of Romanian national identity, namely that it is structured around being ethnically Romanian (Neumann 2004). Even though Romania officially recognizes eighteen national minorities, the idea of being Romanian is still built on ethnic lines.

Another theme to emerge is that the Holocaust acts as a springboard for discussion regarding students’ current perceptions about Roma. From the comments it is clear that often students have trouble separating their perceptions of Roma from the history that they have confronted on screen. Some students begin exploring these discrepancies in their writings by bringing up stereotypical attitudes of Roma as thieves, Roma as unnaturally wealthy, Roma as victimizers of Romanians, or Roma as anti-social

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<sup>217</sup> The Antonescu cult was encouraged actively by the ruling politicians in the early 1990s, with dozens of Romanian cities naming streets after the former dictator, statues erected, films portraying him as a hero for trying to recapture territories which had been invaded by the Soviet Union. His myth was possibly entertained for political reasons as a tool against the resurgent popularity of King Michael, who was met by more than 1 million people on his first return to Romania in 1992. Antonescu also ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in a 2006 popularity contest trying to determine the greatest Romanian in history.

<sup>218</sup> Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/teachers/index.php?content=guidelines/menu.php>, USHMM’s *Teaching about the Holocaust*. [http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/teachabo/part\\_2.pdf](http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/teachabo/part_2.pdf), p. 2

people who do not want to assimilate into the dominant society. These attitudes, which hark back to the justifications for the genocide of Roma offered by Nazis and their allies, reveal the social stigmatization that Roma face today from the majority population as well as the non-Romani students' perceptions of Roma. Furthermore, the comments inaccurately locate the blame for the current low socio-economic status of Roma within their communities. These students are either unable (for a variety of reasons) or unwilling to understand how complex historical events such as five hundred years of Romani slavery in the Romanian territories and the extermination policy undertaken during WWII have produced the present situation of Roma. Not surprisingly, they conflate their present perceptions of Roma with their perceptions of historical events:

The movie was very interesting and it presents a side of the story some of us didn't know at all. However there are certain aspects that were omitted such as: gypsies can not fit in our society because they don't want to let go of their traditions. Plus, they are not qualified to get jobs, any kind of jobs. In addition to this, most of the gypsies are robbers, thieves. They steal from us, threaten us with knives, and that's why we are so reluctant to welcome them in our society. Some of them are wealthy and live better than some Romanians. So – yes there are poor gypsies that don't have anything to eat, but so are Romanians. And there are rich gypsies the same as Romanians. Either way, I would be scared to live in the same neighbourhood[as Gypsies]. They have the tendency to pick on everybody and give kids hard names. In conclusion I am sorry for what happened to them as human beings because they were treated like animals, but nowadays as gypsies I would not defend [them] in any case.

I think that the information was useful, I didn't know those things about gypsies, however the documentary did not make me like them more. There are plenty of problems gypsies raise in the society and I'm sure their actual [state] is not because of the Holocaust. A reason for that is that Jews also suffered a lot and they have not become what gypsies have become.

[T]he movie we saw was interesting. However, one thing bothered me. How can they complain they're poor and have many mouths to feed when they make dozens of children who they send to beg.

In the comments above, students view Roma as a homogenous block of people guilty of a multitude of violations – theft, assault, bullying, freeloading – against the unarticulated but implied ethnic Romanian society. This is apparent in the first quote, “They steal from us, threaten us with knives and that's why we are so reluctant to welcome them in our

society,” and in the second, “There are plenty of problems gypsies raise in the society....” These stereotypical and prejudicial attitudes are not atypical, according to the results of a recent survey done by Ioana Petre at the University of Bucharest.<sup>219</sup> Petre and her colleagues did a study comparing Hungarian and Romanian youths to discover levels of tolerance towards people of other nationalities and ethnicities. A commonality among both youth groups was the staggering figures of intolerance towards Roma: 85% of Hungarians and 79% of Romanian youth reported have no ability to trust Roma. These figures were nearly one fourth higher than the lack of trust reported about other ethnic or national groups in the survey. In 2005, the World Bank commissioned a public opinion survey as part of its recent initiative, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, in eight of the participating countries, among which was Romania.<sup>220</sup> The findings of the Romanian study concluded that the overall representation of Roma in Romania was negative: Roma were depicted as “troublemakers, sources of conflict and social deviants.”<sup>221</sup> Roma were also viewed as “contributing to an increasing deterioration of human relations and behavior” and as jockeying for advantages at the expense of non-Roma.<sup>222</sup> Like the students who commented above, most of the World Bank focus group respondents also mentioned the low socio-economic status of Roma. However, recognition of poor living conditions for the most part did not lead to an acceptance of change to improve the living conditions of Roma.<sup>223</sup>

*Hidden Sorrows* challenged many students to make an unpleasant confrontation with their history, and it shook up the conventional wisdom or what they thought they knew about Roma. Instead of reinforcing the victim role of Romania during the war, the film depicts the Romanian regime as a perpetrator of the Holocaust. Instead of reinforcing negative stereotypes about Roma as victimizers of Romanians, the film presents Roma as a group of people who were brutally victimized by Romanian authorities. These presentations contradict the knowledge and feelings most students possess about their country’s history and about Roma, leading to cognitive dissonance, a phenomenon that

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<sup>219</sup> See Ioana Petre (2004). “Incredere si toleranta fata de altii natiuni sau etnii,” *Sociologia Românească*, pp.197-209.

<sup>220</sup> For more on the Decade, see the project website at <http://www.romadecade.org/>.

<sup>221</sup> World Bank Final Report: Qualitative Survey (Focus Groups) Attitudes Towards the Roma in Romania July 2005, p.5.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

occurs when any two pieces of knowledge are inconsistent with one another. The theory states that the greater the inconsistency, the greater discomfort or tension that one will experience. This tension must be reduced by either sculpting the new information to assimilate it into the old belief system by adding consonant cognitions (making it seem like something known), by rejection of the new information (keeping original belief intact), or by making an attitudinal change (Cooper 2007: 6-7). Some students wrote tellingly of their struggle to integrate what they saw in the film:

Well since now we couldn't find out more things about the history of the gypsies who live in our country and I [am] really struggling the things I found out today. (female, age 16)

[T]he movie was well made from all the points of view. I didn't know about their suffering, I mean I suspected, but I never saw it, I never really understood what that period meant for them. I guess my reaction is a pretty normal one: I feel pity for them, and a little disgust at the fact that they still haven't been given money and stuff. Although I feel this, I still can't totally feel sorry for them. They beat me up at night or do other things related to physical injury and I can't not consider that when they ask for help. Furthermore, they complain about not having enough food for their many children...why do you have kids if you know you can't feed them?! There are condoms nowadays. Anyway, the movie was really nice, and it is important to show that not only Jews were the ones who were persecuted.

[T]he documentary actually impressed me, but when I talked to some adults about it, they were all like "Antonescu took the gypsies there, but instead of being leveled, they multiplied" or: "he should have killed them all" or: "they went there like on a holiday" etc. this is actually confusing because you say "come on, they are adults, they should know more things than you do", and then a foreigner comes and "commercializes" other views of the Holocaust in this movie... You don't know what to think anymore until further proofs or something.

This battle to accept or reject the new information provided by *Hidden Sorrows* is apparent in the above statements. On the one hand, the second student labels the film as "well-made" and "nice," and concedes the importance of knowing about the suffering of Roma, but on the other hand, he or she is conflicted, torn between feeling pity for Roma suffering and feeling angry over perceived social deviance on the part of Roma who "beat me up at night" and "complain about not having enough food for their many children..." The student has added consonant cognitions to make sense of the film. If the predominant stereotype (knowledge) is that Roma are thugs and beggars yet the film shows Roma as



craftsmen and victims, then the student resorts to fitting the new information back into the dominant belief that is held about Roma to reduce the discomfort of dissonance. In this case, the film hasn't shaken the student's original attitude enough to cause a rupture with past knowledge and beliefs "I still can't totally feel sorry for them."

The third comment also displays this conflict between filtering new knowledge through the dominant collective memory of the event. The student writes that the "documentary actually impressed me," but the respondent is torn over the divergent perceptions that some adult non-viewers of the film have about Roma and the Holocaust, views that are extremely disturbing as they either advocate genocide ("he should have killed them all") or the denial of genocide ("they went there like on a holiday"). This student professes confusion amid the conflicting information received and withholds analysis until "further proofs" are forthcoming. Thus dissonance is temporarily set aside until the discrepancies are resolved, and no inroads are made into the erroneous collective memory.

Yet another theme to emerge from student evaluations centers on the nationality of the director. My foreignness was perceived as either positive or negative, depending on the viewer. For some, my American identity brought me credibility, rendering me a presumably unbiased filmmaker looking at the history of Roma, which has been ignored far too long by Romanian scholars. For others, my nationality discredited me on the grounds that foreigners cannot 'understand' the issue of Roma in Romania:

I liked the documentary but I am not sure that the "director" understands the Romanian society as it really is. At some point I had the feeling that she was blaming Romanians for the gypsies' drama. I felt as if she was saying, "look Romanians too have committed some [un]just things" (I had this feeling when listening to her speaking after the film was over). Personally, I think that there are some aspects about gypsies' image in nowadays Romanian society that she doesn't fully understand.<sup>224</sup>

To begin with, I want to draw the attention upon the fact that I do not like gypsies as human beings. I do not like their traditions, their culture or their lifestyle....All the more this documentary made me change my perception about gypsies in a way,

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<sup>224</sup> I hear this often from Romanians who say that as an outsider, I cannot conceive of the injustices inflicted upon them by the Roma. My standard answer is that I understand well the situation of Roma, having worked for seven years in Romani communities. As a sociologist coming from a country long troubled by racism, I understand very well how racism functions in societies.

and I kind of started to feel pity for them. But that doesn't mean that I will accept them as a nation; their lack of education and good tastes isn't due to the Holocaust or to the Romanians. They always wanted to live in that kind of environment: wagons, tents and craftsmen. Not to mention the fact that their hands slip easily in other people's pockets. To conclude, the gypsies weren't the only ones who would get hurt from the Holocaust. For the Jews the impact/shock was even bigger. Nobles, living in luxury, were transferred into concentration camps, while the gypsies were transferred in the same poor conditions of living.

I consider it very important for people [who] live in cities to see this film, because many have the wrong image of gypsies because of the negative members of this ethnicity in their community. Maybe the movie lacked more information on how gypsies are doing right now, how much have their past tragedies affected their life and maybe it should propose some solutions to how the gypsies could better integrate in society and how they could erase their bad impression that many people have about them.

Once again, the students' statements are punctuated with prejudice and misinformation. In the second statement, the respondent writes, "They always wanted to live in that kind of environment...." He or she has not learned that nomadic Roma were allowed only a few days encampment in areas before local authorities forced their caravans to move on. Also disturbing is the discourse of relative suffering as the student implies that Jews suffered more than Roma because the Roma were used to "the same poor living conditions." This demonstrates that the student, despite having been presented with genocidal policy of the Romanian regime in the film, besides receiving lessons from their teachers, still did not grasp how the Holocaust played out in Romania. The third student, while more sympathetic, still views "the problem" of Gypsies, and tries viewing Romani-Romanian relations as a social and racist construction that influences the majority population's perception of Roma. He or she would like the director of the film to propose solutions for "how the gypsies could better integrate in society and how they could erase their bad impression." The burden thus falls on the minority to change, according to this student, and for society at large to do nothing.

Some students were able to overcome their cognitive dissonance once new information was presented to them through acceptance of it. Thus the film demonstrates its use for reaching some educational goals of Holocaust education, which is an increase awareness of racism and tolerance. Whereas before the viewing *Hidden Sorrows* some

students harbored stereotypically negative sentiments about Gypsies, after learning more about Romani history and the suffering during WWII, some students believe they now think differently about Roma:

I have totally changed my attitude towards Roma. I didn't expect this at all. However, I know that there are still Gypsies who out of fear or something else don't behave like they should...luckily these are exceptions. (female, age 16)

I guess Romanians have been used to believe that the gypsies are divided and don't actually care so much for what happens in their families. I've learnt that they are really like us. I think today's session has helped me to consider carefully my attitude towards them. Though I can't help adding that none of the gypsies I've ever met was as interesting and worth helping. (female, age 16)

I learned about the hard life of gypsies. I never knew that the Holocaust and their deportation in Russia had casted so many dead souls. I had a bad opinion about the gypsies but it never crossed my mind what a terrible life they had to face... As I said my opinion about gypsies wasn't so good but through this film my interest for those poor souls arose. I would really like to have and to gather more information about this theme. (female, age 16)

In her work on audience reception of Holocaust films, Anna Reading found that young people, Jews and non-Jews, in the U.S., UK and Poland had distinct 'socially inherited memories' of the Holocaust, which they accrued primarily through cultural forms such as television, film, and literature, as well as through their parents and family members, teachers, and encounters with survivors (Reading 2005:213). Reading's study showed that one's identity and 'interpretive community,' or socio-cultural environment, was important for forming the contextual understanding and meaning of Holocaust films. Reading found that unlike feature films, which generate much critique and debate, documentaries on the Holocaust are generally well received. They "restore the humanity" to the survivors, as they are typically interviewed at home and in color, which contrasts with historical black and white images shot mainly by perpetrators (p.212). Reading was interested in culturally situated understandings of how youth receive Holocaust films, based on their cultural legacies of the event. She looked at Poland, a country whose memories were constructed on communist revisionism (denial of local participation and blaming only the Nazis), and the UK and the US, which were constructed under capitalism and had freer access to information. Surprisingly, she found little difference

among non-Jewish respondents for desire for information about the Holocaust, despite their differing cultural inheritance of the Holocaust. For non-Jews who might not have had prior exposure through “memories handed down in everyday life,” Holocaust films contributed to the structure of acquired understanding of the event (p.216). Contemporary young people, the study revealed, “feel that they should know about the events and should speak out about them” (p.216). While acknowledging that cultural background and even gender structure contributed to young people’s understanding and interpretation, Reading concluded that films about the Holocaust were more important to those who did not have a “historical endowment” (such as were found in Jewish families) of the Holocaust as part of their social inheritance of history. In turning to my work on Romania, it seems that Romanian young people, like their counterparts elsewhere, are influenced by their cultural background when interpreting and processing information about the Holocaust, and that film is an influential medium for some youth. Unlike Reading’s study, my own data from Romania are inconclusive as to what extent Romanian youth feel it is important to study the Holocaust as part of their social inheritance of history.

As a filmmaker, it is gratifying to know that *Hidden Sorrows* had an impact, however limited, on attitudes of some non-Roma towards Roma. After all, one of my goals was to start a conversation about Romani history and I believe that this was successfully achieved having reviewed students’ written evaluations. One young woman even wrote thanking me for making the movie, and added that she “kept on thinking at what I saw for five days.” As a sociologist, it is interesting to note that the awakening declared by students may not “overturn apple carts” to borrow Schudson’s expression by provoking permanent change unless positive messages about Roma are reinforced at home, in school, or through the media. As Schudson (1989) correctly points out, the audience is also the actor and the participant in society, thus it falls on Romanians to implement further changes in society. The inclusion of Roma into Romanian historiography and into the body politic appears promising. In 2004 Romania designated a national day to commemorate the Holocaust, and in 2009 a Holocaust memorial in central Bucharest was completed. Institutionalization may just re-adjust the cultural construction of the Holocaust in Romania.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed how filmmaking as social action has affected how Romanian high-school students relate to part of their country's history. Based on the written evaluations of student viewers of *Hidden Sorrows*, I assessed both the previous levels of knowledge about Roma and the Holocaust in Romania and students' current views regarding Roma. In sum, Romanian students know almost nothing about the troubled history of Roma, who were subjected to 500 years of slavery in the Romanian territories before emancipation in 1855-56, and then were targeted for extermination by the Antonescu regime during WWII. Even though some general societal knowledge of the Romani genocide has entered into Romanian collective memory, as demonstrated through comments on Antonescu as the solution to Romania's so-called Gypsy problem, students' responses reveal that Romani narratives about their suffering have not entered into Romanian collective consciousness. While overall students professed to have had a positive learning experience viewing the documentary, the majority of the comments were disturbingly racist and characterized Roma as social deviants.

Some students were able to view *Hidden Sorrows* as a credible representation of their past, while others did not. To my surprise, the majority of youth rejected the myth that the Holocaust had not been perpetrated in Romania and that Antonescu was a national hero. However, they were less ready to provide space for Roma as victims of the former regime due to the current low socio-economic status of Roma in society and high levels of prejudice against Roma by the majority. Furthermore, the research illustrates that despite the historical facts, Roma are not widely recognized by Romanians as a legitimate victim group. Fortunately, the dominant narratives regarding both WWII victimhood and Romanian-Romani relations are not static as some students professed attitudinal changes that demonstrate transformability of collective memory and collective consciousness. The data in this study can be extremely useful for educators, activists, and policymakers as more information about not only the Holocaust, but also Romani history, language and culture should be incorporated into the national curricula to address widespread racism in Romanian society. Additionally, the celebration of diversity needs

to be enforced through a variety of public venues to ensure that its accompanying message of tolerance is heard, especially by young people.

Holocaust historian Peter Novick (1999) has been very critical of drawing lessons from the Holocaust, writing that he is not sure that there are lessons to be learned at all in such extraordinary events. Furthermore, he disavows the notion that the mere act of “going to a Holocaust museum or watching a Holocaust film” will be “morally therapeutic,” or if this is multiplied several times, it “will make one a better person” (p.13). Longitudinal studies of the effects of Holocaust education on students have yet to be undertaken, so it is difficult to judge whether bringing awareness of this indeed fulfills goals of building a more just, democratic society as the literature purports Holocaust education should do, among other aspirations (Short and Reed 2004, Schweber 2004). I harbor no illusions of what kind of attitudinal changes that a one-time screening of *Hidden Sorrows* can foster among Romanian youth, as indicated by the data presented above, however I would contend that the study of filmic mediums that clearly present messages around serious themes such as the Holocaust is one type of effective source in education. Historian Stephen Feinstein (2004) summarized well in his belief that all colleagues in Holocaust and genocide studies “have a stronger commitment to human rights. The ultimate frontier, however, is to not allow this subject to remain purely academic and theoretical, but to have some discernible human impact” (p.63). As a scholar actively involved in dissemination of information, I view film an excellent means of bringing academic knowledge to the public and having it foster dialogues.

## **Chapter Four: Romanian Teachers and Holocaust Education**

To the extent that the Holocaust itself comes in some sense to be "canonized," one may expect that (as in the case of texts) certain issues tend to be avoided, marginalized, repressed or denied.  
- Dominick LaCapra<sup>225</sup>

### **Introduction**

One December morning in 2005, I was on my way to a teacher-training seminar on the Holocaust at the University of Craiova in southern Romania to screen and discuss a documentary film I had created about the genocide of Romanian Roma (also known as Gypsies) during WWII.<sup>226</sup> Accompanying me were Dumitru Trancă, a Romani survivor, and his daughter-in-law Marioara, both featured in the film. Forty Romanian teachers had gathered to learn about their nation's past, so they could teach their students what they had not learned under communism about the Holocaust and their country's participation in it. From 1941-44, the pro-Nazi regime of General Ion Antonescu deported hundreds of thousands of Jews and tens of thousands of Roma to camps in occupied Ukraine, where many fell victim to genocide.<sup>227</sup> Having screened *Hidden Sorrows* previously to high

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<sup>225</sup> Dominick LaCapra (1994). *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. New York: Cornell Press, p.23

<sup>226</sup> *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies 1942-44* (2005) is a one hour documentary that focuses on the plight of Roma who were deported by the Romanian administration, led by Ion Antonescu, to part of the occupied Ukraine. In 2007, the film was broadcast on Romanian National Television-Transylvania and Hungarian National Television. The Romanian Ministry of Education distributes it widely, alongside an accompanying teachers' guide I co-authored, to Romanian history and civics teachers.

<sup>227</sup> For more on Roma and the Holocaust in Romania, see Michelle Kelso (1999). "Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria: 1942-44" in Donald Kenrick, ed., *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press; Radu Ioanid *op.cit*; Viorel Achim (2004). *Roma in Romanian History*, Budapest: Central European University Press. On the deportation to and murder of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in Transnistria, see, for example, Jean Ancel, the German-Romanian Relationship and the Final Solution, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 19:2 (2005) 252-75; Dennis Deletant, Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18:1 (2004) 1-26; Vladimir Solonari, An

school students, we were cautiously enthusiastic about our first meeting with Romanian educators, whom we expected to be curious, but not very knowledgeable about the subject. We hadn't expected overt discrimination to almost halt the screening before it even started, and to permeate almost all of the follow-up discussion after the film.

As we were running late, I entered the university first, expecting my Romani colleagues to soon join me after parking their car. Several minutes had passed, but they failed to show up. I backtracked outside, where Marioara and Mr. Trancă were arguing with the security guard who, Marioara informed me, had forced them out of the building. "It's not because they are *țigani* (Gypsies)"<sup>228</sup> the guard volunteered before I could question his motive. He said that it was because they weren't students. As a middle-aged white American woman, I hardly looked like a fresh-faced Romanian collegiate. I reminded the guard that I hadn't been stopped, and proceeded to explain the purpose of the seminar to no avail. The guard declared that unless the university president personally came downstairs, *they* were not coming inside. Words were exchanged (reminding him that his job was at risk, not mine) and the guard relented. We informed our ethnic Romanian hosts of the encounter, and they apologized adamantly for the guard's bad behavior, excusing it as an unfortunate part of life in Romania.

For me, this scene was emblematic of the reasons I had made the film and wanted educators to see it. The very roots of prejudice and discrimination that led to the Holocaust were still present in Romania. The discrimination that many Roma faced was distortedly viewed as 'normal' by non-Roma.

In this chapter I examine how Roma are, if at all, incorporated into learning schemata and what institutional forces, internal and external, influence this process. To understand the incentives and the obstacles in including the Romani genocide into

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Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21:2 (2007) 268-297; Rebecca L. Golbert, Holocaust Sites in Ukraine: Pechora and the Politics of Memorialization, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 (2004) 205-33.

<sup>228</sup> In this chapter I will use the Romanian word *țigani*, or the German equivalent *Zigeuner*, which translates into English as *Gypsies*, when referring to WWII-era documents and policies. I will also use the word *Gypsy* if it is used by another. Otherwise, I will use the *Roma*, which comes from the Romani language, based on Sanskrit, and in the plural can be taken as 'people.' This is the term preferred by Romani elites and activists, however it is seldom used by average Roma to describe themselves as they prefer the term *Gypsy*. For more on this, see János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi (2006). *Patterns of Exclusion: Constructing Gypsy Ethnicity and the Making of an Underclass in Transitional Societies of Europe*. Boulder [New York]: Columbia University Press.



courses, I closely follow training seminars offered to Romanian teachers on Holocaust education, as well as distributed materials. Regarding Roma, some important questions that need to be answered are: Why are most teachers ignorant about the Holocaust and how do they view it today? What attitudes and perceptions do some teachers have about Roma? Why do some teachers resist learning about Roma as former victims? Moreover, I ask whether this is an issue that is unique in the Romanian education system or, alternatively, whether it is more widespread throughout Europe. Briefly, I will delve into the historiography of the Holocaust in Romania, exploring the avenues of silences immediately following the war, through communism and the transition to democracy until today.

My research on Romanian teachers differs from that of scholars who work on the Holocaust and the effect of its discourse on nationalism and identity in Romania. By speaking with teachers, my research strategy differs from the data used by others. Political scientists and historians often use official rhetoric and published research to examine discourse (Tismăneanu 1997, Shafir 1997), while cultural specialists often examine media discourse (Totok 2005). I aim to discover what Eric Hobsbawm (1990) calls *the view from below*, or the interpretation by ordinary citizens of this nationalist discourse and their understanding of the Holocaust as an event and its aftermath on Romanian society. It is through this understanding of beliefs and values that I believe educational materials can be adapted to better accommodate new European narratives that are supposed to be endemic in Romanian education policy. This chapter differs from my earlier writing examining students' perceptions of Roma as Holocaust victims, as there students were grappling with changes in the national narrative. Students' views mainly overlap with those of the teachers, who tend to reject more strongly the new doctrine of embracing Holocaust studies. However, teachers are the linchpin in the (re)production of the national narrative, be it the old one or the revised one. By the very nature of their profession, they are called upon not simply to accept changes in the official narrative, but to reproduce them in the classroom. Therefore it is essential to look as well at structural and institutional constraints on the Romanian education system, and international influences that shape it. This new paradigm of the Holocaust in Romania moves closer to what sociologists Levy and Sznajder (2007:329) deem "cosmopolitan

memories,” or a more universalistic, global human rights perspective of the Holocaust. It is, as we shall see, a tough sell for a former communist state that has constructed national identity on an ethnic Romanian platform to the exclusion of its national minorities (Neumann 2004).

My research builds on the work of scholars such as sociologists Fatma Muge Gocek (2006), who examines contested history and memory of the Armenian massacre by looking at its present reconstruction in Turkish society, and Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) whose study of collective memory about Auschwitz in Poland during a pivotal moment reveals the underpinnings of the construction of national identity and religion. My examination of the Romani genocide and its cognition in the field of education will contribute to a better understanding of how concepts such as identity, race and ethnicity, victimhood, as well as socio-economic inequalities play into national consciousness of the event as well as how the national narrative adapts to it.

### **Majority Attitudes, Minority Marginalization**

Racist perceptions of Roma as “dangerous” and “criminal” permeate Romanian attitudes toward Roma, beliefs that are not surprisingly reflected in the media (World Bank Report 2005, CURS 2002). One recent World Bank study (2005:5) found the overall representation of Roma in Romania is negative: Roma were depicted as “troublemakers, sources of conflict and social deviation.” Roma were also viewed as “contributing to an increasing deterioration of human relations and behavior” and as jockeying for advantages at the expense of non-Roma. In reality, Roma are the most marginalized group in Europe (Euro-Midis 2009). In Romania, they have the least amount of schooling (less than 1% go on to higher education), the highest infant mortality rates, the worst housing situations, and the highest unemployment rate of any group (Gabriel Bădescu et al. 2007, UNDP 2002;2006). In attitudinal studies, Roma continually are rated as the least tolerated minority in European societies (Petre 2004, World Bank 2005, Eurobarometer Report 2008). One out of every two Roma in Europe report experiencing discrimination during the course of a year, and one in five report being crime victims due to their ethnicity (EU-Midis Report 2009). By screening *Hidden*

*Sorrows* with teachers, I aimed to force a conversation about the Romanian national narrative that privileges ethnic Romanians to the exclusion of Roma in an attempt to-a re-configure both historiography and the place of Roma in Romanian society.

The post-screening conversation in Craiova was nothing less than fiery. I expected a heated discussion of Holocaust history, but that morphed into one about the “Gypsy problem” in Romania.<sup>229</sup> It seemed that everyone, including another invited speaker, jumped on the anti-Gypsy bandwagon. *Why do the țigani always steal cell phones? Why don't țigani kids come to school? Why don't the țigani integrate? Why do we have to teach about them at all?* One teacher commented that he could fathom teaching about a rich Jewish culture, but there was no Gypsy culture to teach.<sup>230</sup> Another said she couldn't use *Hidden Sorrows* in class because she had no țigani students. When I countered that the film was about Romanian history since Roma were Romanian citizens who were deported by the Romanian regime to Romanian-run camps, I received a blank stare. There appeared to be simply no conception among these high school history teachers that Roma merited a place in Romanian history, which is primarily taught as a history of ethnic Romanians to the exclusion of the country's 18 national minorities. The majority of teachers acknowledged in anonymous questionnaires never addressing subject of the Roma as victims of genocide in their classrooms. Given the dominance of prejudicial comments during discussion, it wasn't surprising that we encountered strong resistance to incorporating Roma into the Holocaust education seminar.

As the primary site for forming collective memories of the suffering of Roma and the Holocaust for current and future generations, the Romanian school system, its silence around the history of the country's largest minority is problematic. The absence of

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<sup>229</sup> Author Ovidiu Voicu, part of the social science team that produced the 2007 OSI report *Roma Inclusion Barometer*, stated that: "Currently in the Romanian public political or journalistic discourse the reference to our fellow citizens of Roma origin is made through the phrase "the Roma problem in Romania". It is most probable that the phrase has lost its negative connotation and has the functional role to include in a succinct formula the idea that in the Romanian society Roma people are still a marginalized minority, in whose case we cannot talk about a real social inclusion (p.17). Teachers with whom I worked rarely used the term Roma, and often talked about the "problema țiganilor," "the Gypsy problem."

<sup>230</sup> Petre Petcuț, a Romani doctoral student of history and a speaker at the conference, countered that if the teachers had the time, he would be happy to expand upon 4000 years of the history of India to prove that Roma did come from a rich cultural heritage.

discussion is particularly disturbing, since Roma suffered both 500 years of slavery in the Romanian territories and an attempted genocide during WWII.<sup>231</sup>

Since 1998, Holocaust education has been mandatory, yet the Romanian theatre of Holocaust is often ignored by teachers, who instead talk about Nazi crimes, which is the exact same line that Communist-era textbooks were mandating after the mid 1960s, and Romanian historiography continued even after 1989 to be dominated by those same nationalist historians (Livezeanu 2003). Romania's acceptance of Holocaust education was pushed by international forces, as it became a requirement for membership in both NATO and the European Union (Chioveanu 2003). The compliance did little to stem the tide of Holocaust denial that had flourished under communism and through the 1990s (Cioflâncă 2003). In 2003, the Romanian government made an international gaffe by publicly denying the Holocaust had happened in Romania. An international outcry ensued, forcing Romania to examine its role in the Holocaust. Former president Ion Iliescu created a Holocaust commission, headed by Nobel-laureate Elie Wiesel. A year later the Wiesel Commission presented its finding that the Romanian regime of Ion Antonescu (1940-44) had perpetrated the Holocaust in Romanian-controlled territories, killing more than 200,000 Jews and 10,000 Roma.<sup>232</sup>

Even after gaining this official recognition, as well as an apology from Romanian President Traian Băsescu in 2007 for their persecution by the state during the Holocaust, who stressed that the Holocaust was part of the country's collective memory, and the state owed it to Jews and Roma to preserve that memory, Roma are still barely mentioned in history courses and textbooks.<sup>233</sup> Despite official rhetoric and institutional mandates, the reality on the ground about teaching the Holocaust differs drastically from policy. Thus seeing what teachers think about the Holocaust provides a good starting point to

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<sup>231</sup> The population of Romania is around 21 million, and official census data record that Roma comprise just 2.5% of the population. However, specialists agree that Roma are underrepresented in the census figures, and the unofficial population estimates are around 8%, which make Roma the largest minority, followed by the Hungarians at 6%. Roma were enslaved in Romanian territories from the 14-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For more on this, see Viorel Achim, *Țigarii în istoria României*. Bucuresti: Editura Enciclopedica, 1998

<sup>232</sup> *The Final Report* can be accessed at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's website [www.ushmm.org/research/center/.../title\\_foreword.pdf](http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/.../title_foreword.pdf). The Holocaust was then officially recognized.

<sup>233</sup> Basescu said in the Romani language: "Forgive us, brothers and sisters, for what was, since we will construct the future of Romania together." The full text can be found in Radu Ioanid, Michelle Kelso, Luminița Cioaba eds. (2009). *Tragedia Romilor Deportați în Transnistria 1942-1945 [The Tragedy of Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-45]*, Iași: Polirom.

recognize Holocaust education as kind of *field* in Pierre Bourdieu's sense.<sup>234</sup> It is a way to place relationally conceptual constructions alongside and even embedded in one another that shape action (Swartz 1997:119). Although Bourdieu construes a field in a national schema, as an institutionalized state, I propose to open this framework to incorporate international actors, keeping Romania at the center of the field. By doing so, I can incorporate the struggle in the field of education between Romanians espousing a nationalistic perspective of Holocaust denial (a category in which many bureaucrats and teachers fall), Romanians trying to change this narrative to align with Western actors to gain cultural and economic capital (elected officials), and foreign actors advocating for acceptance of a more globalized Holocaust narrative, which in reality is representative of the power that those actors have on the Romania government. Players in this field are Romanian politicians, Romanian state functionaries who set, implement, and fund policy (i.e.: Romanian Ministry of Education and Research- MER), Romanian teachers who are required educate about the Holocaust, foreign players such as governmental representatives that lobby and influence Romanian politicians (i.e. U.S. State Department officials), foreign institutions (i.e.: Holocaust museums), intergovernmental entities (i.e.: the Council of Europe). These actors are constantly struggling to have their often competing viewpoints incorporated into the curricula, and as a result, MER has undergone sweeping changes in policies over the past eleven years.<sup>235</sup> By adopting Holocaust education as seen from a Western perspective, and thus accepting Romania's role as a perpetrating nation which victimized Jews and Roma, the latter being the marginalized masses in the country today, what is at stake is the imaginary of Romanian

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<sup>234</sup> As Bourdieu and Wacquant describe it, "each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form. Two properties are central to this succinct definition. First a field is a patterned system of objective forces (much as in the manner of a magnet field), a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter it. .... the structure of the game... a field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition, .. in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it -- cultural authority in the artistic field, scientific authority in the scientific field, sacerdotal authority in the religious field, and so forth -- and the power to decree their hierarchy and "conversion rates" between all forms of authority in the field of power." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:17).

<sup>235</sup> For an overview of the battle over history books and conformity to EU standards, see Razvan Paraiianu, "The history textbooks controversy in Romania. Five years on." *Eurozine* on-website, accessed on 20 June 2010 at <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-11-11-paraianu-en.html>.

identity. Since the European narrative has been accepted by the polity, one of the last bastions holding out in this struggle is the corpus of bureaucrats running the education system at national and local levels and teachers, many of whom espouse the nationalistic perspective of Holocaust denial in the Romanian arena of history.<sup>236</sup>

I concentrate specifically on teachers as professionals implementing directly social practices as they are gatekeepers of information, occupying influential positions over students, and thus having power over the reproduction of knowledge of the Holocaust. Teachers are directly or indirectly linked with all of those listed above in the field of Holocaust education. As employees of the MER, forced to teach a national curricula dictated from Bucharest, teachers are thus beholden to policies driven by political winds (as was Holocaust education) even when they don't necessarily agree with them. However, they can and do subvert top-down directives by struggling for control in their classrooms. As we shall see later in the chapter, it is crucial to understand their ideological beliefs. Before teachers can implement Holocaust education policy, they must first recognize its importance. If teachers reject it, this, in turn, maintains the exclusion of its victims (Jews and Roma) in education, which is a replication of societal stratification that benefits ethnic Romanians. Here I will bring in the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). According to Michele Lamont and Annette Lareau (1998), cultural capital for Bourdieu, who would continue developing it over the years, is "alternatively an informal academic standard, a class attribute, a basis for social selection, and a resource for power which is salient as an indicator/basis of class position" (p.156).

At first glance, cultural capital seems difficult to apply to the Romanian case, since teachers as a group have relatively low economic and social status in today's capitalist environment that favors professionals with high salaries. The features that form the nucleus of cultural capital - that is, the emphasis on high status and privileged positions that produce an education system that seeks to replicate the dominant class, rooted in class conflict - are not particularly salient in the Romanian context today. However, if we set aside professional status and concentrate instead on the ethnicity of

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<sup>236</sup> For an interesting look at how nationalism has played out in American schools in defining the contours of national identity, see Jeffrey Mirel, "Civic Education and Changing Definitions of American Identities 1900-1950," *Educational Review*, Vol.54, No.2, 2002; and Mirel's latest work *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010.

the teachers, the majority of whom promote a nationalistic view of history based on an ethnic Romanian perspective, then the concept of cultural capital becomes more useful. By rejecting the new national narrative, teachers are privileging the ethnic position of the majority group, the Romanians. In fact, the lack of cultural capital among Roma, a large number of whom are illiterate, is a formidable obstacle in their inclusion in history. Unlike other groups that endured Nazi persecution, who have numerous spokespersons and Holocaust scholars and writers, there are few Roma who have the cultural capital to publicly challenge dominant official narratives (Barany 2002, Laydányi and Szelényi 2006).

Throughout four years of working with teachers, I have seen two stumbling blocks to incorporating the Holocaust in Romanian classrooms. The first is public resistance to changing the national historical narrative, which scholars often link to formations and contestations of national identity (Young 2004). The second is that symbolic boundaries between groups not only reproduce a dominant narrative of the majority who are ethnic Romanians, but also maintain symbolic space between them and other minorities that leads to exclusion (Lamont 1998). These boundaries can be assessed in Holocaust discussions with Romanian teachers in which anti-Romani and anti-Semitic racist schemata surface. By allowing Romanians to define their own history and culture through silencing the Holocaust experience of others, it creates symbolic violence, concealing the power relations that benefit Romanians in comparison to other groups (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970).

The hegemonic discourse that prevailed in the education system under communism and until 2004 with the publication of the Wiesel Report, was that Romanians were victims of the war and the Holocaust was solely the responsibility of Nazi Germany.<sup>237</sup> This eliminated collective guilt by promulgating a view of ethnic Romanians as the innocent victims—rather than treating them as complicit, making them discursively superior to several ethnic groups in Romania. Communist “history cleansers” erased the ethnicity of the victims and the perpetrators (Braham 1997). Thus the murder and suffering of Romanian Jews and Roma perpetrated by ethnic Romanians

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<sup>237</sup> For a better understanding of Romanian consciousness about the Holocaust, see Viorel Achim and Constantin Iordache, ed. (2004). *România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului*. București: Curtea Veche.

could not compete for a place in history texts of the postwar period with the ostensible victimization of ethnic Romanians. The denial is preserving a core of dominance and power by excluding Jews and Roma, and the main avenue for perpetuation is through the education system. The denial of Romania's role in the Holocaust through the deportations to Transnistria was also used by the Communist regime in its political battles with regional rivals. The national narrative of Romanian superiority, taken to the extreme under the Antonescu regime through the implementation of Romanianization through genocide, remains intact. Romanians preserve a core of dominance and power by excluding Jews and Roma, and this is perpetuated through the education system. The denial of Romanian perpetration of the Holocaust in Transnistria also denigrated two other ethnic minorities during the communist period. The Holocaust as it played out in northern Transylvania under Hungarian occupation (1940-44) was discussed under the socialist regime in order to point out that Hungary deported Jews to German-run camps, while Romania didn't. Of course, the official reports failed to mention the deportation to Romanian-run camps in Transnistria.<sup>238</sup> Since the mid-1960s, the Hungarian deportation issue was also used to keep the ethnic Hungarians at bay, as they could always be accused of Nazi collaborationism, a charge which had previously been used by the Soviets in Romania against the ethnic German population immediately after the war, when thousands of ethnic Germans were deported as forced laborers to the Soviet Union during 1945-1949 for supposedly supporting Nazi Germany during the war and to help compensate for war damages caused to the Soviet Union to stain ethnic Hungarian Romanian communities, while Transnistria was not mentioned. Some 80,000-90,000 ethnic Germans were also caught in the victimization narrative of Romanians, as many were deported as forced laborers to the Soviet Union post-war for supposedly having supported the German army and Nazi efforts.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> For more on the Holocaust in northern Transylvania, see *The Final Report*, op.cit.

<sup>239</sup> For more on this, see Jill Massino, "Gender as Survival: Women's Experiences of Deportation from Romania to the Soviet Union 1945-1950," *Nationalities Papers*, March 2008, pp.55-83.



## Methodology

After the 2005 Craiova conference, I took a more active role in Holocaust education, thus playing a role in shaping how the Holocaust is taught in the classroom.<sup>240</sup> As director of a Romanian non-profit, the Association for Dialogue and Civic Education (ADCE), I partnered with the Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies (GGC) at the University of Bucharest, a main organizer of Holocaust education.<sup>241</sup> A year later, ADCE and GGC began holding trainings in provincial cities throughout Romania, where Holocaust education seminars had not been previously offered. Since 2006, we have become the largest Holocaust education trainers in Romania, as over 550 teachers have attended our courses with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Research (MER). In addition to the trainings, in this period I also (co)produced Holocaust education materials.<sup>242</sup>

I thus situate my work among those doing community-based, participatory action research (CBPAR).<sup>243</sup> Although a variety of other methods to evaluate Holocaust education exist, such as curricular development and textual analysis (Friedman 1979, Braham 1997), qualitative and quantitative surveys teacher and student attitudes (Short 1991; Lange 2008), classroom observation (Scheweber 2004.), ethnographies (Stevick

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<sup>240</sup> A grant from the U.S. Embassy allowed me to duplicate my film for every Romanian high school. I co-authored with Ana Maria-Popa a teacher's guide to accompany *Hidden Sorrows* that had oral history excerpts from Romani survivors, classroom activities, and supplemental texts.

<sup>241</sup> ADCE is a legally registered non-profit in Romania, and one of its main goals is to strengthen civil society through tolerance promotion. Holocaust education is one pillar from which we work to achieve results coinciding with our mission statement. I am the only American in the NGO, although I have Romanian residency, and Romanian and Roma collaborate to define all our projects.

<sup>242</sup> In addition to my documentary film *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies*, in 2007, I co-authored a teachers' guide to be used in conjunction with the film and co-edited a book. I also collaborated on an edited volume bringing together documents and oral history on the Roma Holocaust in Romania. See Radu Ioanid, Michelle Kelso, Luminița Cioaba, eds. (2009). *Tragedia Romilor Deportați în Transnistria 1942-1945 [The Tragedy of Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-45]*, Iași: Polirom.

<sup>243</sup> Sometimes this type of research is also called action research, participatory action research, or community-based research. While the terminology changes, the ideas behind them are similar: to pursue research alongside instead of from above members of groups, communities, and peoples who are not typically stakeholders in research agendas, that contributes to a positive development for those its lives are about and invades. For more information, see: Barbara A. Israel et. al, Community-Based Participatory Research: Lessons Learned from the Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 113, No. 10 (Oct., 2005), pp. 1463-1471; Leonard A. Jason et. al, eds. *Participatory Community Research: Theories and Methods in Action*, American Psychological Association (APA); 1 edition (December 2003); Heron J, Reason P. 2001. The practice of cooperative inquiry: research 'with' rather than 'on' people. In: *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (Reason P, Bradbury H, eds). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.179-188.

1997, Misco 2008), I have chosen CBPAR to better understand how teachers and their students make meaning of the Holocaust. Barbara Israel and her colleagues have defined CBPAR in the field of public health as being “a partnership approach to research that equitably involves, for example, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process, in which all partners contribute expertise and share decision making and responsibilities (Israel et al. 1998, 2003).”<sup>244</sup> This definition can be equally applied to social science research, and it is well suited for the educational arena as policies do not always coincide with the realities teachers face or the communities that policies anticipate to affect. I thus am among the cadre of professionals producing scholarship on the Holocaust while simultaneously working with the “stakeholder community,” which I define to be teachers, students, and former victims categories (especially Roma) to drive pedagogical change. My partners in this process are primarily Romanian academics and teachers; Israeli and Romanian teachers who have become experts on methodology; Romanian officials; as well as Jewish and Romani survivors. Collectively we plan lectures and seminars at the trainings, and decide what materials will be distributed to teachers.

I use primarily qualitative methods, employing narrative analysis in a case study approach in what Gotham and Staples argue provides a “reference to the global context as well as the local circumstance” (Gotham and Staples 1996: 491-92). In addition to using participant observation when I organized 14 teacher trainings and participated in two others, I also conducted two focus groups in Bacău County in 2007, each with five teachers, to get a deeper understanding of teachers’ attitudes toward the Holocaust and trainings in general. The first group was entirely comprised of men (they are the ones who volunteered) and the second group had four women and one man. I did not find gender differences in attitudes towards either the Holocaust or Roma. I recorded post-screening discussions on digitally on audiovisual mediums whenever possible. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers to probe further levels of knowledge prior the screening about the topic.

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<sup>244</sup> See Barbara A. Israel et. al, Community-Based Participatory Research: Lessons Learned from the Centers for Children's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Research, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 113, No. 10 (Oct., 2005), p. 1464.

For comparison on how European educators view and receive information about Roma and the Holocaust, I did an ethnography of a conference on Roma and the Holocaust sponsored by the Council of Europe (COE) and the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture, held in Budapest from 31 July to 3 August 2008. Several data collection methods were employed, including participant observation and interviews. I spoke with fourteen educators, several speakers and two COE officials in open-ended interviews covering their prior knowledge of the fate of Roma, materials available in their countries on the subject, their impressions about the seminar, and their classroom teaching experience about Roma.

### **The Holocaust and Romanian Roma**

Between 250,000 and 500,000 Roma and Sinti were killed in the Holocaust.<sup>245</sup> From 1933-1945, the Nazis and their allies persecuted Roma and Sinti because of biology (Milton 1991;1992, Burleigh and Wippermann 1991). In their conceptualization, *Zigeuner* (Gypsies) were ‘asocials’ and racial ‘inferiors’ who threatened German ‘purity.’ Nazi eugenics were part of the final solution that applied to Roma as well as Jews (Friedlander 1995, Milton 1991;1992). In Romania, the regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu deported over 25,000 Roma to Romanian-run concentration camps in Transnistria, a region in then-occupied Ukraine.<sup>246</sup> Allied with Nazi Germany, the Antonescu regime was encouraged to rid Romania of “undesirable populations,” primarily Jews and Roma. In 1941 Antonescu ordered the ethnic cleansing of Jews in the north and eastern provinces, accusing them of having had collaborated with the Soviet Union when it had invaded those territories a year earlier. The Jews residing in these recently liberated provinces (Bessarabia and Bukovina were recaptured in 1941 when Romania entered the

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<sup>245</sup> Sinti are a subgroup that live primarily in Germany and Austria.

<sup>246</sup> Ion Antonescu (1940-44) was a military leader who came to power after King Carol II abdicated in 1940. Antonescu had a brief alliance with the fascist party The Iron Guard, a xenophobic and anti-Semitic group that espoused Romanianization of the country. After a failed coup d'état by Guardists, Antonescu took control of the country and allied with Nazi Germany in 1941 for the invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941. For more on the Antonescu regime, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44*, Houndmills [England]; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

war alongside Germany) were then subjected to mass deportations to Transnistria.<sup>247</sup> Housed in camps and ghettos, they were subjected to mass killings, forced labor, starvation, and disease.<sup>248</sup> Jews residing in the rest of the country were also subjected to multiple restrictions and adults were forced into slave labor. In 1942, the Romanian government expanded its cleansing policy by deporting two categories of Roma to concentration camps in Transnistria: all nomads and settled populations of Roma deemed “dangerous” by the regime.<sup>249</sup> The latter category included Roma with criminal records and primarily indigent families. Over half of the deportees were children. Upon their arrival in Transnistria, authorities made Roma slave laborers to further the war effort. Shortages of housing, food, petrol, medicine and other necessities translated into abysmal living conditions for the deportees. The Roma disintegrated from the forces of hunger, cold, brutality, disease and wretchedness. In 1944 when the Eastern front fell, the camp prisoners were liberated, and more than half of those deported had survived (Final Report 2005: 236).

### **Holocaust Consciousness in Romania: 1945-2009**

Romania’s thaw from what Buřhaw (2004:153) calls the ‘historical refrigerator’ of communism concerning Holocaust knowledge really began in 1998, when Holocaust education programming began to be implemented. Prior to that, the communist-era version of Holocaust history followed a “sanitized” Soviet bloc model which blamed Nazi Germany for the destruction of Jews and barely mentioned Roma at all as victims (Final Report 2005, Braham 1997). Information about the Antonescu government’s genocidal policies was eliminated, only to be brought out in limited scope during the mid-1970s as Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu used it as bargaining chip for more political cachet with the West (Eskenasy 1997:275). Post-communist countries, which political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu (1997) deems as “protodemocracies,” have seen a re-emergence of nationalism that has an unhealthy dose of denial of the past, replete with

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<sup>247</sup> For more on this, see Vladimir Solonari. “An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21.2 (2007). See also Final Report, *op.cit.*

<sup>248</sup> Between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were murdered by Romanian troops.

<sup>249</sup> Romanian National Archives, IGJ, 126/1942, p.209

debates like those once found in Western Europe over complicity in WWII genocides (p.311). In Romania, this had meant a division of scholars into two camps, one that espouses the myth of Antonescu as hero and savior of Romanian Jews (purporting various forms of Holocaust denial), the other camp that argues that Antonescu authored and perpetrated genocide of Jews and Roma (Shafir 1997).<sup>250</sup> Historian Irina Livezeanu (2004) charges that academics studying the Holocaust in Transnistria rendered the issue more confusing for the public because those who believe that a Holocaust happened are so busy trying to fight the negationists that they fail to have heated debates, or “family fights” as she calls them on the topic, debates that would further academic inquiry (p.93). Additionally, Livezeanu states that the absence of dialogue with Holocaust scholarship outside of Romania has caused the advancement of knowledge about the Romanian case to become “stuck.”

There were several silences around the victimization of Jews and Roma during the Holocaust in Romania and in the reconstruction of their suffering postwar. Concerning Roma, there was the silence that begins with the event itself. Perpetrating authorities ordered the operations to be carried out in secret, so as not to alert either Roma or the surrounding locals to the impending doom (Ioanid, Kelso, and Cioabă 2009).<sup>251</sup> There was then the silence of the construction of the historical event: after a brief window of trials post war in which crimes against humanity were discussed publicly, the communist regime shut off discussion of the Holocaust almost altogether by blaming Nazi Germany exclusively (Final Report 2005, Iordache and Achim 2004).

As in any field of study, there is a canonic literature of Holocaust studies, which promotes certain texts while avoiding, marginalizing, repressing or denying others. If Roma have always been absent from texts, then the canon that researchers draw on to examine the Holocaust are also likely to reproduce this absence, a cycle that historian

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<sup>250</sup> Felicia Waldman and Mihai Chioveanu, “Public Perceptions of the Holocaust in Post-Communist Romania,” unpublished book chapter, forthcoming 2010, ed. Jean Paul Himka. The debate has slowly fizzled out since the Wiesel report was published in 2004, and legislation was passed in 2005, making it a crime to deny the Holocaust in Romania.

<sup>251</sup> Although authorities ordered it to be done in a secretive manner, they failed at this as locals quickly discovered the deportations of their Romani neighbors. Some local authorities, church leaders, and even local politicians protested the deportation of Roma. For more on this, see Viorel Achim “Atitudinea contemporanilor față de deortarea țiganilor în Transnistria, in Constantin Iordache and Viorel Achim eds., (2004). *România și Transnistria: problema Holocaustului*. Bucuresti: Curtea Veche, pp.201-233.

Dominick LaCapra (1996) identifies with overall representations of historical trauma. In the case of Roma, a few academic texts make a nod to the number of Romani victims, for instance in Romania they might read “*and 12,000 Roma were killed,*” but they do nothing to further the understanding the event. The dominant Holocaust and genocide research, by expunging the persecution of Roma or reducing it to an appendage, creates an artificial split of what was viewed by Romanian authorities after 1942 as a relatively comparative policy of ethnic destruction. Jews and Roma were singled out by the Antonescu regime for death (Deletant 2004, Ioanid 2009, Achim 2004). Although the methods of destruction differed, as historian Jean Ancel (2006) noted, the end result was the same.

### **The Holocaust in the Classroom: Democracy Building Through Civic Education**

Experts on Holocaust education are generally in agreement that teaching the topic is beneficial for a variety of reasons, from making students better citizens through studying history to prevent future genocides by sensitizing students to individual and governmental responsibilities (Totten and Feinberg 2001, Totten 2002, Short 1991, Schweber 2004). Although not all agree on which lessons should be extracted, many focus on the mechanisms behind the Holocaust and morality lessons that can be produced in a post-Holocaust world (Short and Reed 2004, Schweber and Findling 2007). Anti-racist education is also a strong motivator for many teachers to educate their students about the Holocaust (Brown and Davies 1998, Short 2000). A major underpinning of Geoffrey Short’s research on Holocaust education has been just that: if taught well, the Holocaust can bring about anti-racist goals (Short 1991; 2000). Schweber and Findling (2007) also point to merits of students learning “to defend the rights of minorities, speak out against injustice and oppression in all its forms, safeguard the freedoms of democracy” and to “fundamentally to preserve the dignity and to uphold the sacredness of all human life (p. 2). Others focus on the methods of teaching, such as Dori Laub (2009), who advocates using survivor narratives in the classroom because they are a “compelling, engaging, and powerfully mobilizing process” and that it “calls out to the massive destructiveness at the core of this experience” (p.141). If, as Karlsson and

Zander (2004) argue, the growing base of European identity is grounded in the Holocaust, then lessons such as those mentioned above could be essential in structuring an informed citizenry that is actively cognizant of the dangers of prejudice and discrimination.

In the case of Romania, education specialist Thomas Misco (2008) undertook an ethnography of the classroom to ascertain how the Romanian education system was integrating the Holocaust into its curricula. He found that while institutional support existed from the Ministry of Education and Research, obstacles still made teaching about the Holocaust difficult, such as overcoming the legacy of communism, the place of Antonescu in the curriculum, and limited opportunities for procuring new knowledge, among other reasons. Misco also discovered that the quality of the teacher (knowledge and devotion to the topic) is essential in teaching about the Holocaust. The prejudices expressed about Roma concerned Misco, who noted the lack of curricular devotion to Romani history, linking the anti-Romani attitudes to Romanian nationalism which voids Roma (and others) from Romanian identity. Absences speak volumes - the lack of references to Roma in academic and educational texts is part and parcel of institutionalized racism, which rather looks like but is not a victimless crime.

### **The Romanian Educational System: Between policy and praxis**

The theme of the persecution of Roma during the Holocaust cannot be separated from the overall teaching and learning that occurs around the topic of the Holocaust in general. The Holocaust must be contextualized and discussed, as part and parcel of the racist policy of persecution implemented by the Nazi regime and its close allies. The 2005 Craiova seminar wasn't the first nor the last time when unbridled racism permeated discussions about Roma in Romanian history (Kelso 2007). History teachers across the country in various training seminars told me that they knew almost nothing about the 600-year history of Roma in their country. Several factors converge to render Romani Holocaust history nearly invisible to Romanian teachers and students. First, Romanian history texts fail to cover the deportation and incarceration of Roma in camps. An

analysis of history textbooks used in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (for World and Romanian History, respectively) from 1991-2006 reveals that the Holocaust is poorly covered in most volumes. If Roma are mentioned at all as a victim category, their fate receives at best one or two lines.<sup>252</sup> Second, teachers raised and primarily trained under the communist system possess scant knowledge about general Holocaust history (Waldman 2004). Furthermore, just as Holocaust history was censored from texts, so too was the history of national minorities.<sup>253</sup> Teachers who wish to do lessons on the fate of Roma have few resources to draw upon. Surveys I conducted in teacher-training seminars on the Holocaust reveal that the majority of teachers report having little knowledge of the Romani Holocaust.<sup>254</sup> Third, many teachers harbor the same anti-Romani attitudes as the rest of Romanian society that shows high levels of intolerance towards Roma (Petre 2004, Word Bank 2005).

When Holocaust education began in earnest in 1998, the Romanian Ministry of Education was not unaware of its problems with incorporating Holocaust history into textbooks and classrooms. A Romanian-Israeli commission provided policy recommendations for the mandatory pre-university curricula on the Holocaust placing the subject within the purview of WWII, and a year later the legislative reforms were officially in place (Waldman 2004). The Holocaust would be covered for 1-2 hours in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade during Romanian history, and the same in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade during World history. The subject was also required of 12<sup>th</sup> graders during Romanian history. Teachers who persuaded students and their parents of the merit of an optional course on Jewish history also had the option of offering such a course (in 2004, the official title of the course became *Jewish history: The Holocaust*).

According to researcher and teacher trainer Felicia Waldman (2004), while the intentions of the Ministry were laudable, their efforts to equip educators for their jobs were very weak. She found that what was needed most to ensure successful completion

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<sup>252</sup> I surveyed the Romanian Ministry of Education's approved texts.

<sup>253</sup> For example when looking at the history of Roma in Romania, there was nearly a fifty-year gap in serious scholarly research on Roma. In 1998, after nearly sixty years of complete a complete void in academia, Viorel Achim wrote his book *Țigăni in istoria României*, București: Editura Enciclopedica.

<sup>254</sup> Surveys were done from 2005-07 while I was the director of the Association for Dialogue and Civic Education. We did teacher-training seminars on the Holocaust in seven cities, reaching some 400 teachers.



of the task at hand, qualified teachers and balanced textbooks, were missing. Waldman writes that teachers were in an awkward position:

[T]hey have to teach what they know nothing about (or worse, they are misinformed about!). Under the influence of communist education and a hectic media running from far right extremism to philo-Semitism and with no expert guidance, they are “lost in translation” (p. 89).

Romanian political scientist Mihai Chioveanu (2003) in his assessment of the myth of Antonescu puts it more bluntly: “Romanians have problems with history. They don’t know it” (p.119). In a 2007 survey conducted for the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, even though 65% of respondents reportedly had heard about the Holocaust, only 28% of agreed that the Holocaust happened in Romania. Of those, 79% considered the Germans responsible while only 11% identified the Antonescu regime as being responsible.<sup>255</sup> Most Romanians who know of the Holocaust correctly identified Jews as former victims, but only 2% place Roma in a category of persecuted groups. This is hardly surprising since the subjects of Roma and the Holocaust are almost never covered.

Aware early on of the challenges to (re)educate teachers about the Holocaust, in 2000 the Romanian government began encouraging professional training courses. Trainings can be effective in forcing a shift in mentalities among educators.<sup>256</sup> Nearly ten years after the implementation of Holocaust education, one teacher reached a turning point after attending a 2008 training session in Bucharest:

I have never negated the existence of the Romanian Holocaust. However, I didn’t really understand what the big fuss was over this subject, especially why it should be taught in schools. It’s good that at this seminar I understood that the Holocaust isn’t just a Jewish problem. Antisemitism is a socio-political phenomenon that should be studied, understood, and combated!<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> “Survey of opinions regarding the Holocaust in Romania and perceptions of inter-ethnic relations,” National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, May 2007, pp. 33, 37.

<sup>256</sup> Every training seminar that ADCE organizes asks teachers to write anonymous evaluations in questionnaires distributed. Most report positive learning experiences regarding topics covered and note their usefulness for classroom application. Some also email organizers with more specific details and comments for future seminars.

<sup>257</sup> Email from E.C. to Michelle Kelso, 27 May 2008.

Initially most teacher trainings were held outside of Romania at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Institution in Israel, and at the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC) in France. However after 2001, in-country initiatives began at the Universities of Cluj, Bucharest and Craiova, with partnerships with Yad Vashem, the CDJC, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (Waldman 2004:90). Since 2000, more than 1000 of Romania's 10,000 history teachers received some professional education in Holocaust education (Stan 2006:290).<sup>258</sup>

The teacher training system functions, lumbering slowly along, but it is rife with problems. First and foremost, the MER does not require attendance, relying on voluntary participation. Encouraged through a system of points that each teacher must acquire for advancement in rank and salary, institutions that provide training on Holocaust education are accredited with the MER, and this can provide important incentive to attend for those who may be hesitant for various reasons to teach about the Holocaust. An additional stimulus for attendance has been the possibility of receiving more extensive training outside of Romania, which is now predicated upon already having received in-country training certification. Recruitment for seminars is dependent on local county school inspectors, who are charged by MER to announce the courses. Once announcements are sent, it is up to local principals to inform their staff and grant them leave. If school principals agree with Holocaust education, seminars are promoted. If not, the recruitment stops.<sup>259</sup> In some counties, this had led to a specialization of a few teachers whom local administrators have then selected as their resident Holocaust "experts" in teaching, although the results have fallen short of the mark in some cases.<sup>260</sup> As Anca Ciuciu, an experienced teacher trainer noted, "The same faces appear year after year at trainings hosted by various organizations."<sup>261</sup> This concentration of resources flowing to the same persons may be problematic on the one hand if it impedes other teachers from developing professionally, while on the other it may be beneficial if it eventually results in qualified teacher-trainers who can help offer guidance to their colleagues.

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<sup>258</sup> Bacău County History Inspector Gabriel Stan estimated in 2006 that 365 teachers had received training however his calculations did not include all the trainings sessions up to that point by GGC/ADCE.

<sup>259</sup> A reoccurring topic of discussion at the seminars is principals' resistance to Holocaust education. Many teachers reported having to fight their superiors to teach about the Holocaust.

<sup>260</sup> Phone conversation with D.P., school inspector of Galați County; May 2008, Bucharest, Romania.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Anca Ciuciu, May 2008, Bucharest, Romania.

Secondly, social science and humanities faculties are not required to provide coursework on the Holocaust, or even cover it in history courses. Only two of the 69 history faculties offer courses on the Holocaust (Misco 2008). Several years ago, universities lobbied and won their independence from MER, making higher education curricula theirs to set. University students graduate with teaching certificates in history having minimal or no instruction on the Holocaust. Thus the problem of having trained teachers becomes cyclical. A shortage of university professors specializing in the Holocaust outside of certain centers in Bucharest, Cluj, and Iasi compounds the problem, leaving provincial universities nearly void of faculty willing or able to lecture on the Holocaust.<sup>262</sup> Ad-hoc trainings act as mere band-aid solutions at best. Institutional reforms are necessary, the minimum being the introduction of the Holocaust into standard university curricula when dealing with 20<sup>th</sup> century history.

Finally, there is a lack of sustained funding for trainings from MER, which is beset by a multitude of administrative demands. Therefore monies must be procured mainly abroad to ensure that Romanian educators receive training about the Holocaust. In recent years, the U.S. State Department and The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF) were the primary donors for such seminars. However, they are not necessarily sustainable grantors as budget restraints by the former and fiscal priority by the latter are subject to change.<sup>263</sup> Unless MER prioritizes Holocaust education, as it claims it does (Misco 2008), trainings will be harder to do, which will be a step backwards in terms of keeping to task with international commitments towards Holocaust education.

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<sup>262</sup> To address this problem, ADCE with the Goldstein Goren Center began Holocaust education caravan in 2006, traveling to areas such as Șimleu Silvaniei deep in Transylvania where teachers hardly have the opportunity to participate in nation-wide trainings.

<sup>263</sup> The MER does pay for partial expenses for the trainings at Yad Vashem. Seminars of ADCE/Goldstein Goren Center in Bucharest, as well as those held in Bacău County by the School District (*Inspectorat Școlar*) received funds from the U.S. Embassy-Bucharest. Both ADCE/Goldstein Goren Center as well as the University of Cluj seminars also received funding from the International Task Force. The U.S. State Department has paid for seminars in 2004 in Sibiu by a local NGO, in 2005-06; 2007 through the Casa Corpului Didactic and the County School Inspector of in Bacau, through Goldstein Goren Center in 2005, through ADCE/GGC in 2006, 2007; and the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania in 2006.

## The Impact of Teacher Trainings

Assessment of teachers' impressions and usefulness of what they were learning at ADCE/GGC trainings came from in-session discussions as well as through distributed questionnaires. Over 300 teachers completed our surveys, with questions ranging from ranking lessons by importance to time allotted to discussions. By and large, these revealed tastes and preferences, as participants reported that trainings were useful both for their professional development and for their classroom lessons, with requests for further lectures on methodology of teaching the Holocaust. To our surprise, fewer than half of the respondents reported that they taught the number of required hours on the Holocaust mandated by the MER. The survey revealed little teacher pre-occupation with either nationalistic narratives or xenophobic schemata, and comments were overwhelmingly positive about sessions even when discussions were about Roma.<sup>264</sup>

These positive responses in the survey were out of step with the types of loaded discussions that occurred during lectures around Romania's participation in the Holocaust. Comments often spoken by teachers in seminar, presented below, typically reveal the former communist/ultra-nationalist rhetoric regarding the Holocaust:

- Antonescu was a savior of the Jews in Romania
- Antonescu deported the Jews because they were communist insurgents
- The Hungarians in Transylvania perpetrated the Holocaust, not us
- There wasn't a Holocaust in Romania because the definition of Holocaust is 'to be sacrificed by fire,' and there were not crematoria in Romania, so...
- Concerning the Iași Pogrom<sup>265</sup> - it was really German agents and some renegade Romanian Iron Guardists who did that, not Antonescu
- The Jews in the Old Kingdom<sup>266</sup> were not deported, and since all Jews were not deported, it wasn't a Holocaust

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<sup>264</sup> Overwhelmingly, methodology seminars were preferred by participants, closely followed by lectures involving pedagogical materials such as the presentations I gave on Roma and the Holocaust. Teachers who filled out the questionnaires could have answered positively as they were genuinely enthusiastic. Conversely, those who weren't so positive may simply have not done a questionnaire. It is also possible that those who answered positively may not have liked all of the programming, but out of obligation ranked it positively. Romanians are generally less familiar with these types of attitudinal/evaluation surveys as they are infrequently conducted by organizers.

<sup>265</sup> In June 1941 after Romania entered the war, some 12,000 Jews were killed in the county of Iași over several days where they were rounded up and shot, or shoved into "death trains" which in the heat of the summer were transported from place to place, causing victims to die from dehydration, suffocation, etc. For more on this, see Radu Ioanid (1993). *The Holocaust in Romania: The Iași pogrom of June 1941*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Romanians experienced a genocide, too, in 1940 when the Soviets took over Bessarabia. But no one talks about that.<sup>267</sup>
- My [relative] was a POW during the war and was starved also. Romanians suffered, too, so why don't we talk about this?

To probe further, I decided to conduct two focus groups of five teachers who participated in trainings organized by Bacău County's Teacher Training Center during 2007.<sup>268</sup> I found that teachers were more forthcoming in this context with exploring the idea of Holocaust, its victims, and the adjustment of the national narrative than were these same teachers (as well as others I observed) in training seminars or written evaluations.<sup>269</sup> Major themes emerged, ranging from the plausibility of a Romanian-authored genocide and the credibility of the lecturers and victims themselves, to the types of subjects covered and their applicability in classrooms.

For one group, the ethnic identity of the majority of the lecturers, who were mostly Jewish-Romanian scholars, produced a heated debate. Some felt that the presentations were unjustly biased to prove the case of a Romanian-authored genocide against the Jews, while others commended the efforts of those same presenters. The debate interested me because it went directly to the credibility of the source, and really to the heart of the Romanian consciousness about the Holocaust. Field notes reveal the line of discussion:

Dan: Do I have the face of a killer? All these people from the [Romanian Jewish] Federation live in the past. They are trying to make us feel guilty and it's

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<sup>266</sup> The areas of southern and eastern Romania which were part of the country before WWI. Jews living in these provinces were considered more Romanianized than those from provinces that had joined Romania after 1918 and were subsequently not deported.

<sup>267</sup> The Soviet Army invaded the area in 1940, and persecuted ethnic Romanians. An estimated 5000 were killed. International Holocaust and genocide scholars do not label those killings as a genocide.

<sup>268</sup> The seminar was organized by the Bacău Country School Inspector and the *Casa Corpului Didactic-Bacău* [Teacher Training House], partnered with the Romanian Jewish Federation.

<sup>269</sup> In this case, I believe that as I am a white, American non-Jewish woman, focus group discussions in a more informal setting made our discussion of training topics and their analysis "easier," as during trainings teachers raised few of these issues that they brought up in the focus group. Two main issues were at play: ethnicity and status. I believe that, in part, teachers self-censure in trainings, sometimes out of deference to organizers and presenters with whom they disagree. Also, there is a definite divide between the presenters, who were specialists in their fields, and the teachers, most of whom only had undergraduate degrees and routinely expressed difficulties in addressing professors and lecturers due to status differences in the professions.

not our fault. We don't have the faces of the killers. The guy from Bessarabia [a Jewish survivor] was very vehement in his talk.<sup>270</sup>

Ioan and Alex, teachers from the same county, nodded in agreement with Dan, a senior teacher who holds a doctoral degree. Several others had commented about Dan's expertise and experience in both academia and teaching, routinely deferring to Dan when questions were posed to the focus group. Gheorghe, the youngest teacher present and the least senior, seemed uncomfortable with this line of discussion of guilt, and looking at me he switched the conversation to methodological presentations.

Gheorghe: Did you see how Chava<sup>271</sup> presented? She gave some pictures. It was really interesting and something that I can use in class.

Dan: Anca's presentation was interesting.<sup>272</sup> The architecture stuff was like – why aren't there any Jews in those neighborhoods anymore? They could have been more of an accent on tolerance and their culture today. I understand that they were victims, but it was right out of the Cold War. I didn't feel that I was part of it. I felt like I was a prisoner.

At the Bacău conference, which preceded the focus group discussions, I noticed two distinct pedagogical classifications among speakers. The first I will label the *shock therapy approach*, and the second I will call the *slow and steady approach*. Most presenters preferred the former pedagogical style. One example of the shock therapy approach was the presentation of Alexandru Florian, Director of Research at the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. His powerpoint presentation focused on the barbarism of the Romanian administration's slaughtering of Jews, and was peppered with graphic images of Jewish corpses. Florian, like many others, believes that 'shock therapy' is the only way to teach Romanians the about the Holocaust and incorporates this into his teaching style.<sup>273</sup> Oftentimes, the shock therapy approach involves a lecture with little to no follow-up discussion, or what Paulo Freire would label a "banking" concept of education (Freire 2006). The lecturer imparts facts and figures to

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<sup>270</sup> I have changed the names of the teachers as requested by my respondents.

<sup>271</sup> Dr. Chava Barach gave a visual presentation about Jewish life and culture before the Holocaust.

<sup>272</sup> Anca Ciuciu is a research at The Center for the Study of Romanian Jewish History, of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania. She presented about the Jewish community in Bucharest.

<sup>273</sup> Discussion with Alexandru Florian, May 2007. Slănic Modova, Romania.

the audience with little interactive discussion.<sup>274</sup> The slow and steady approach, in contrast, espouses that the road to recognition of the Holocaust should be a gradual awakening. Long-time trainer Chava Baruch, from Israel's Yad Vashem School of International Holocaust Studies, uses this approach. Baruch favors a socio-cultural approach to teaching about the Holocaust, lecturing about Jewish life before the war through photography and documents, to foster emotional and identity ties between audience members and the former victims of the Nazis and their allies. She does this before delving into details of the destruction of Jewish communities. Baruch's philosophy is transparent, as in her lectures she states her belief that 'shock therapy' both "destroys the soul" and impedes interesting students in the subject of the Holocaust. The slow and steady approach employed by methodologists also leaves room for discussions around the issues presented, and falls into a more liberationist approach to teaching. For teachers in the focus group discussions, the slow and steady approach resonated clearly, as they voiced a preference for presenters such as Baruch and Ciuciu, who both employ this technique. The shock therapy approach, however, resulted in some teachers' rejection of information given in lectures or in testimony from survivors, and also created a backlash against those delivering the message, whose credibility or educational capital was then challenged.

In returning to the focus group discussion, Dan's brief willingness to engage Gheorghe about "interesting" presentations seemed to release some of the tension present, which was high after Dan's initial comment about presenters trying to make them feel guilty. Both Dan and Gheorghe liked the methodological lectures, which were the only two presented during the training, made to be directly applied to the classroom. Both presentations were also the least fraught with historical frictions as they were not accusatory toward the former Romania regime. Dan, however, refused to let Gheorghe switch the topic of conversation that he had begun, coming back to one of the perceived emotional manipulations on the part of the presenters, most of whom were from the Romanian Jewish Federation. Once again, Dan went to the credibility of the presenters, referencing propaganda techniques of the Cold War and expressing his sentiments of

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<sup>274</sup> The method of teacher/professor as central imparter of wisdom, or the banking method as coined by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is by far the preferred style of teaching in the Romanian education system.

feeling trapped during sessions. Ioan tried to ease the tension developing again between Dan and Gheorghe:

Ioan: There has to be a consensus on the way they were looking at the events.

Dan: This isn't the only genocide. There was Rwanda and Cambodia. The Armenians. I saw that Holocaust education is about talking about the effects of genocides. But we aren't doing that here. We could have emphasized more these other sufferings. And there was no talk of what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians.

Gheorghe (clearly agitated): Who's organizing this conference? A people who are presenting their point of view of their history. Anyone can be in this situation. It can happen that the Armenians are doing it this way too, but it isn't my fault that they don't finance a conference that I can attend. I came here on my own free will, and I see what happens with Hitler - the ideology that can reappear at any time. This is the idea behind racism. The idea that the myths might be forgotten. We have to know about this.

Dan: The Israeli state promotes anti-Arab policy.

The discussion appeared to come to a stalemate over current Israeli politics and the welfare of the Palestinians. Dan was adamant that the perspective of the training was unfairly biased toward Jewish suffering, while failing to look at international human rights concerns over Israeli-Palestinian issues. Then the conversation turned to the idea of citizenship and nationhood, based on ethnicity. Gheorghe supported the political foundations behind the Romanian Jewish Federation's presentation of the Holocaust at the training and questioned the future of Romanian ethnicity, as he related remembrance of history to nation-building:

Gheorghe: It is disastrous not to remember for the self-protection of a people. The saving of a people is fantastic, which is what the Jews are doing. It's possible that in a few years we will all be assimilated into Europe. We don't have a future policy for this ethnicity – no clear plan for Romanians. This conference is not for everyone, but people are saying calmly a clear message.

Ioan: Why should they make me feel guilty? I didn't do anything. This is the impression that I get.



Dan: Otto [a speaker and survivor of Auschwitz] said, “Why didn’t anyone ask me about the culpability of people?” He talked about the way that the Germans did it with Nuremberg. With the Antonescu regime, they couldn’t do it otherwise.<sup>275</sup> All this talk of Hitler is supposed to make me feel guilty. It was a situation where men fell into barbarity, the same people who behaved badly with the Romanians in their commitments. It shows that man is a mechanism....

The notion of guilt re-occurs in several places among discussants. Some mentioned that lecturers made presentations to make them feel ‘guilty’ for the Romanian Holocaust, and they resented this pedagogical approach as they didn’t see themselves as responsible for genocidal acts committed over 60 years ago. The discussion on responsibility and why they would even identify with and try to defend the Antonescu regime shows that some teachers were struggling to process the new information which was colliding with what they were taught before, a history where Romania did not have a role in the Holocaust, with added information post-communism which presented Antonescu as a hero for having acted to protect Romania from the Soviet Union, savior of Jews, etc.

Also, the teachers adeptly ‘felt’ the ideological division among the lecturers at the training regarding the best methodology to using to teach about the Holocaust. As mentioned above, this led them to question the credibility of both the lectures and the information they imparted to participants. One topic some teachers challenged was the proposed number of Jewish victims of the Romanian regime. One teacher rejected various speakers’ estimated numbers of Jewish victims,<sup>276</sup> requesting that “a rigorous base needs to be covered, for instance the level of numbers of the victims.” He believed that presenters were biased and ignored demography, as he phrased it, because “one person may be counted as dead from Herzog, but in fact is living elsewhere.” Another brought up the subject of changing of Jewish names post-war. He said, “After the war they might have had a different name. There is a problem with the documentation with the statistics.” When I asked why these issues weren’t raised during the trainings, respondents said that they felt there was little space for a “true” dialogue as the majority of lecturers were perceived as being closed to alternative perspectives. Additionally, as

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<sup>275</sup> Ion Antonescu and his top collaborators were executed after a Soviet-style trial found them guilty of war crimes in 1946.

<sup>276</sup> Several speakers presented statistics of victims at the training, all associates of the Jewish Federation, including Lia Benjamin, Alexandru Florian, and Liviu Rotman.

Jewish survivors were present throughout the training, teachers said it was sometimes harder to pose questions out of respect for them.

Among history teachers in focus groups, some skepticism was expressed not only as to the plausibility of the Holocaust, but especially regarding Romania's role, echoing again discourse of the Holocaust denial camp, comprised of ultra-nationalist scholars, influential individuals and politicians (Tismăneanu 1997, Shafir 1997). Teachers' opinions reveal what Eric Hobsbawm's (1990) calls *the view from below*, or the interpretation of ordinary people on discourse around the nation. While Hobsbawm states that one cannot presume that official ideologies of states (in this case communist) and movements (ultra-nationalists post-communism) have an effect on the objects (average citizens) they attempt to persuade, my findings point to the direction of influence from above during communism and the period immediately following it how teachers conceptualize the Holocaust.

### **Adding Roma: Teachers' reactions to Roma as Victims of the Holocaust**

Since 2005, the Goldstein Goren Center and Association for Dialogue and Civic Education have used my documentary film *Hidden Sorrows: The Persecution of Romanian Gypsies During WWII*, followed up by a discussion, in trainings.<sup>277</sup> To summarize, for the first forty minutes the film focuses on the interwar and wartime history of Roma as it unfolded in Romanian-controlled territories, and the remainder of the film concentrates on Romani survivors' lives during the late 1990s as they applied for humanitarian funds for surviving victims of the Holocaust living in Eastern Europe.<sup>278</sup> Survivor narratives feature prominently, providing viewers with Romani accounts of their

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<sup>277</sup> Depending on availability, Dr. Viorel Achim, a specialist on the Roma and the Holocaust in Romania, has also given lectures. See Viorel Achim (2004). *The Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest: Central European University Press. Additionally, at least one Romani survivors was always asked to co-present after the film.

<sup>278</sup> The film covers the application and distribution campaigns of two humanitarian funds: The Swiss Fund for the Needy Victims of the Holocaust/Shoah, which distributed over 180\$ to survivors living primarily in Eastern Europe, and the German Humanitarian Fund for Former Victims of Nazi Persecution. Two other programs emerged after the bulk of the filming of the documentary occurred in the late 1990s, which awarded nearly US\$ 7 billion to some 1.5 million beneficiaries in the German Forced Labour Compensation Programme and the Holocaust Victims Assets Litigation, also known as the Swiss Banks Settlement. See Michelle Kelso, "Holocaust-era Compensation and the Case of the Roma" *Studia Hebraica*, Issue 8: 2008, pp. 298-334.

lives before deportation, during incarceration in camps, and for the survivors, their return to Romania. In this documentary, I attempt to breach ‘official history’ by inserting back into the national narrative the fate of the Roma during the Holocaust, which should be embedded in historical discussions, but which is almost absent from Romanian historiography.<sup>279</sup> While categorization of approaches to the teaching cannot be applied as there was at most one lecture delivered per training, reactions of teachers both to the presenters of information and to the Roma as a victim category can be analyzed.

There was one predominant difference in training session discussions regarding teachers’ responses, depending on which victim group of the Holocaust was the subject of lectures. Even when teachers did not agree with information imparted during lectures in which Jews were victims, they were subdued and appeared respectful toward survivors. In contrast, when Roma were presented as former victims of persecution, teachers did not self-censor. Instead, they were open with their predominantly negative opinions regarding Roma, even when Romani survivors were present. Most discussions regarding Roma were emotionally charged, and mirrored the same kinds of themes that were raised in the post-training focus groups that I conducted in Băcau, such as doubts about the credibility of the sources (in this case Roma survivors and the filmmaker). History and civic education teachers reacted similarly in 14 training seminars across the country, demonstrating low levels of knowledge of Romani history and culture, as well as their own prejudicial beliefs about the Romani minority. Repeatedly, negative stereotypes were put forth depicting Roma as ‘asocials,’ echoing the Nazi-era discourse against *Zigeuner* and current perception of Roma. In addition to the comments on Antonescu, which were outlined above, typical comments raised were:

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<sup>279</sup>Since 2006, my film has been distributed, alongside a teacher’s guide that I co-authored on the Romani genocide, by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research. There are several other films available on the fate of Roma in Transnistria, including one done by a national television station and two by Romani activists, however they are unavailable for the public to view.

<sup>279</sup> Screening venues in Romania include but are not limited to: 2010 The Republic of Moldova Public Television, Yale University, Memorial de la Shoah (Paris); 2009 Best Fest Film Festival, 2008 UCLA Human Rights Film Festival, 2008 & 2007 Astra Ethnographic Film Festival; 2008 & 2007 Romani Arts Festival; 2007 Hungarian Public Television, 2007 & 2009 Romanian National Television Transylvania (TVR-Cluj); 2006-07 Project Think Tank traveling festival. In addition to being used by educators, I have screened it at over 15 high schools, 6 universities, 5 conferences, as well prestigious institutions in Bucharest such as the Romanian Cultural Center and the Romanian Peasant Museum.

- Roma do not want to integrate in society
- Roma steal things and are violent
- They are really wealthy, as they beg in the West
- Roma make a bad name for Romanians abroad, as Westerns think that they are Romanians
- They don't want to be educated.<sup>280</sup>

In April 2007, ADCE/ GGC organized a training seminar in Târgu Mureş because the city and county were sites of inter-ethnic violence after the fall of communism. In March 1990, violence broke out in Târgu Mureş between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians. In 1993, ethnic conflict occurred once again, this time in the village of Hădăreni, involving ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians who converged to attack the Roma residents.<sup>281</sup> Four Romani men were killed and several Romani families were burned out of their homes.<sup>282</sup> Historically, Mureş county has had a diverse ethnic population, and as of the 2002 census, it had a majority ethnic Romanian population (53.3%), followed by ethnic Hungarians (39.3%), and then Roma (6.95%), which means that Mures county has one of the highest percentages of Roma in the country.<sup>283</sup> Since our program concentrates on the Holocaust and legacies for today, we felt that area teachers would benefit from a training given the past upheavals. Some 40 teachers, a mix of ethnic Hungarians and Romanians, came from both the city itself and the surrounding area.

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<sup>280</sup> One comment to me was: “You are an American. Why don't you talk about how you killed the Indians?” To which I always answer: “I'd be happy to do so when we have a course on comparative genocides. Today we are here to talk about the Holocaust.”

<sup>281</sup> This was not Romania's only site of post-communist violence against the Roma minority. From 1990-1996, some 40 incidents of anti-Roma violence broke out across the country, leaving several Roma dead, some severely beaten, and others homeless after their properties were destroyed by their non-Roma neighbors. Over the last decade various foreign governments and institutions have pressured Romania to improve the country's dismal human rights record toward Roma, which has prompted much national debate in the media about the place of Roma in Romanian society. The Hădăreni case is the most well-known, as the European Court of Human Rights in 2005 ruled in favor of Roma plaintiffs, victims of the violence in Hadareni, awarding them €238,000. For more on Hădăreni, see Petru Zoltan “Romania: An Open Wound,” *Transitions Online*, issue: 11/29 / 20050, at [www.ceeol.com](http://www.ceeol.com).

<sup>282</sup> We started covering Transylvania in the trainings as there is little education in Romania today regarding what happened under Hungarian occupied Transylvania during WWII, despite this being one of the focal points of the communist regime's educational coverage of the Holocaust. As our program concentrates on the Holocaust and lessons for today, we felt that area teachers would benefit. Our choice was apt, as we organizers sensed a lot of tension regarding Holocaust discussions between ethnic Romanian and Hungarian teachers.

<sup>283</sup> According to Economic expert.com, accessed on December 28, 2009 at <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Mures.htm>.

In Târgu Mureș, like at all trainings, there was one slot for presentation about the Antonescu regime's persecution of Roma. I showed my documentary and led a post-screening discussion, which reflected similar sessions we held across the country. Instead of commenting on information presented, the teachers who spoke out were mainly critical of Roma today as a minority.

A theme of *generalizing Roma into a stereotypical group* emerged in the discussions. From the comments it is clear that often teachers cannot separate their perceptions of Roma from the history that they have confronted on screen:<sup>284</sup> As media researcher Elizabeth Bird (2003) states, the social status of the presenter of information is very influential on audience reception of information.

Teacher 1: You cannot believe everything that they [Roma] say, because they exaggerate. I don't know in this case, but in general.

Teacher 2: They don't want to integrate.

Trainer (Michelle): If you go into the archives, you find reports written by gendarmes, monthly reports written by Romanian gendarmes<sup>285</sup> to Bucharest, which communicate the state of the spirit of a population, that say the same things that [the survivors] say. There is cannibalism. [Roma] are dying of starvation. They are walking skeletons. If you don't believe the survivors, go into the Romanian archives and find documents written by Romanians that confirm their stories.

Teacher 2: It's not true that they were not deported. It's true that many of them were really deported. What is true is that today their lifestyle is one that they had even then, let's say with a few differences. But they don't want to integrate now either in society.<sup>286</sup> They get school materials, they get computers, and they sell them. They are helped. Do you understand me? Compared to other children who aren't....<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Of course, other teachers may have had differing views; however they did not speak out in the session.

<sup>285</sup> The Romanian gendarmerie was partially in charge of the deportation of Roma from Romania, and oversaw the incarceration of both Jews and Roma in concentration camps in Transnistria (this was pointed out in the documentary). And two reports from authorities were presented in the documentary, which describe the miserable conditions of Roma deportees. In the discussion, I referred teachers to monthly reports written by gendarmes stationed in Transnistria to headquarters in Bucharest.

<sup>286</sup> In 1942, Ion Antonescu commissioned a report on Roma by demographer Sabin Manuila, who concluded that the danger facing Romania from Roma was that they were too integrated into the population and this integration must be stopped (Kelso 1999:98).

<sup>287</sup> Excerpt from training seminar recording "Problems with Teaching the Holocaust," organized by ADCE and the GGC, Târgu Mureș, Romania: April 2007.

The excerpt above demonstrates some of the teachers' difficulties in accepting the new narrative as their first instinct is to challenge the credibility of the sources, while also exposing prejudicial and ignorant views. The first teacher challenges the authenticity of the Romani Holocaust experience, as presented in the on-screen testimony of Romani survivors who recount their sufferings. He doesn't believe the survivors' accounts, as he stereotypically asserts that all Roma are prone to exaggeration. Thus in his eyes, Roma are not reliable sources of information. This teacher might not be rejecting the overall acceptance of the Holocaust, rather he may just be rejecting Roma as legitimate victims of it because of their low socio-economic status today.

The next comment jumps to the present, with the accusation that *all* Roma, as noted by the speaker "do not want to integrate," meaning Roma do not want to be part of Romanian society. There are two issues at work in this comment: ignorance of Romanian history and ignorance of Roma as a heterogeneous minority.<sup>288</sup> The history teacher is unable to link the present dire situation of Roma in Romania to the historic treatment of Roma in Romania, which includes 500 years of enslaving Roma, a lack of public policy to assist emancipated Roma to improve their socio-economic conditions after liberation and throughout the interwar period, and then during WWII an attempted genocide. Historian Viorel Achim (2004) writes that the marginalization of Roma occurred in the 1840-60s, after liberation, when they had to settle on the margins of villages and even bury their dead at the margins of cemeteries (p.119). He notes the lack of proper policies to assist former slaves after emancipation led to future problems that are still present in Romania today. In early census reports, Achim writes that "former slaves assimilated into the Romanian masses, considering themselves to be Romanians and registering as such in statistics and censuses" (p.199-120). The teacher projects a misunderstood present situation back into the past, without understanding that former state policies, such as forbidding nomadic Roma from staying more than a few days in one location, might

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<sup>288</sup> For more on Romani identity, see Margaret Beissinger, "Occupation and Ethnicity: Constructing Identity Among Professional Romani (Gypsy) Musicians in Romania," *Slavic Review* Vol. 60, No. 1. (Spring, 2001), pp. 24-49; Alaina Lemon (2000). *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism*, Durham: Duke University Press; Shannon Woodcock, "Romanian Romani Resistance to Genocide in the Matrix of the *Țigan* Other," *Anthropology of East European Review*, Fall 2007.

have contributed to their lack of permanent residency, or “integration.”<sup>289</sup> By lumping all Roma together, the educator also demonstrates little understanding about the Romani minority, which has much internal diversity. According to a survey done by the Open Society Institute (2007), some 45% of Romanian Roma consider themselves assimilated into the Romanian culture (p.7). They no longer speak the language or customs of their ethnic group, which they use as cultural markers to indicate Romani identity. Less than 40% of Roma speak Romani, an Indic language based on Sanskrit. The report found that non-Roma, however, identify Roma based on physical traits, such as skin color, and stereotypical ideas of what constitutes Romani ethnicity.

Another theme was *challenging perceived historical and contemporary inaccuracies* in my presentation, which I attribute to maintaining symbolic boundaries on the part of the teachers by excluding Roma. One teacher even suggested that the entire genocidal campaign against Roma was “debatable,” which moves back into the realm of Holocaust denial that benefits ethnic Romanians. *Hidden Sorrows* contradicts the knowledge and feelings most possess about their country’s history and about Roma, leading to cognitive dissonance, a state of psychological discomfort which happens when any two pieces of knowledge are inconsistent with one another. Teachers who commented in the discussion, by and large, rejected the new information. For example, one teacher believed the myth of the cult of Antonescu, that former military dictator had “saved a large portion of the Jewish population from extermination. About this, no one says anything.”<sup>290</sup> Another rejected the statistical information I presented on Roma poverty, commenting, “There was a sentence presented that really disturbs us ‘that they are marginalized in Romanian society.’ It isn’t true.”<sup>291</sup> To this, I responded that the information presented in the film came from a study done by two Romanian

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<sup>289</sup> For more on this, see Michelle Kelso “Hidden History: Perceptions of the Romani Holocaust in Romania Viewed Through Contemporary Race Relations,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Fall 2007, pp.44-61.

<sup>290</sup> The myth of Antonescu as “savior” of the Jews comes up typically in all of the teaching seminars. Many Romanians erroneously believe that Antonescu was a protector of Jews rather than the reality that he was the author of their extermination, primarily due to historical revisionism under communism and thereafter by ultra-nationalists. On this topic, see Mihai Chioveanu, “A Deadlock of Memory: The Myth and Cult of Ion Antonescu in Post-Communist Romania,” in *Studia Hebraica Vol III*, 2003, pp.102-137.

<sup>291</sup> The phrase from the film was: “They live on the fringes of Romanian society.”

sociologists.<sup>292</sup> Another teacher came back to this idea of inaccuracies, stating: “In the film all the Roma are presented as if they were beggars.<sup>293</sup> But a large part of them are really rich, then and now.” This is pure misperception, as all academic studies show that the majority of Roma live in poverty.<sup>294</sup> One UNDP report even likened the living conditions of Roma in southeastern Europe to those of sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2002).

The third and last theme that I will cover here is the *exclusion of Roma from Romanian national identity*. This re-occurs across trainings, often prompted by the idea that when Romanian Roma travel abroad, the nationals of other countries believe Roma to be “Romanians.” Although the term “ethnic” isn’t used before the word “Romanian,” it is inferred by the speakers, as the general construction of Romanian national identity and citizenship rests upon being ethnically Romanian, as noted by historian Victor Neumann (2004). Even though Romania officially recognizes eighteen national minorities, the idea of being Romanian is still built on ethnic lines. The clear separation of Roma from the body politic is sadly apparent, as, of course, Roma are Romanian citizens. When teachers employ the term Romanian, they conjure up a citizenry void of Roma.<sup>295</sup> In Târgu Mureș, there was a heated debate on how Roma self-identify. Some teachers claimed that Roma identified as ethnic Hungarian to receive financial assistance from Hungary, and another recognized that in history courses, too little attention is paid to minorities:

Female teacher 3: It’s true. We are preoccupied with teaching the history of Romanians, not the history of minorities.

Michelle: But the minorities, aren’t they Romanians?

[Silence and then a lot of talking at once. Tape is unclear.]

Male teacher 2: If they are Romanians, then they don’t need a separate history.

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<sup>292</sup> Statistics from the film came from a study done by Catalin Zamfir and Elena Zamfir (1993). *Țigani: Intre Ignorare și Ingrijorare*. Bucharest [Romania]: Editura Alternative.

<sup>293</sup> Present socio-economic situation of survivors was reviewed in the film.

<sup>294</sup> For more details on this, see Dena Ringold, Mitchell A. Orenstein, and Erika Wilkens *Roma in an expanding Europe. Breaking the Poverty Cycle*. World Bank. Accessible at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/roma\\_in\\_expanding\\_europe.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/roma_in_expanding_europe.pdf).

<sup>295</sup> In the Târgu Mureș discussion, I was not able to ascertain the ethnicity of the speakers. I don’t know if teachers commenting were of ethnic Hungarian or Romanian origins. It would be interesting to discover if the two groups had similar perceptions of Romanian nationality.



Female teacher 1: The Roma where I live declare themselves to be Hungarians so that they can receive assistance from Hungary. They don't identify themselves as Gypsies. What can you tell me about this?

Michelle: It's their right. Everyone self-declares [their ethnicity]. But everyone who lives in Romania is Romanian. You have Romanian citizenship. Regardless of ethnicity, you are Romanians.

Female teacher 4: They are then Hungarians; they aren't Gypsies.

Female teacher 5: If they would give them money for being Gypsies, they would declare themselves Gypsies.

Once again, the issue of identity emerges. The non-Romani educators in the seminar create little space for conceptualizing Romanian identity to include their Romani compatriots, slicing them out of the image of an integrated society. As Gamson (1995) points out, the consequences of continued exclusion, even if informal, have cultural as well as social psychological impacts on a society when the "cultural code of 'otherness' remains the same" (p.17). Teaching is not the only profession that seemingly excludes Roma. A recent study of the image of Roma in the media found that Romanian journalists also excluded Roma from the Romanian corpus as well, clearly separating ethnic Romanians from *țigani* (S.P.E.R. 2009). A look into the historical record illustrates that current perceptions of Roma as not wanting to assimilate are rooted in the present, as historical analysis by Viorel Achim (2004) demonstrates that Romani assimilation during the interwar period and beyond was strong.

Regarding self-identification of ethnicity, research undertaken by the United Nations Development Program on Roma in Eastern Europe found that more affluent Roma are less likely to self-identify as Roma, while others also do not self-identify to avoid a "ghetto stigmatization" (poverty, marginalization, etc.) when the terms for Roma are associated with negative characteristics (UNDP 2002:23). They know that non-Roma have low opinions about Roma and do not declare themselves for fear of being labeled. Thus the teacher's comment on the way that Roma identify fails to understand the historical self-categorization, and also demonstrates a lack of an understanding of the deep prejudice in society, and the levels of true poverty in which most Roma live.

## The European Arena: Recognizing and Teaching the Romani Genocide

For years I have worked with multi-state institutions that play significant roles in the promotion of Holocaust education in Europe since they support the inclusion of Romani genocide in educational materials.<sup>296</sup> The three most prominent are the Council of Europe (COE), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF). Romania, as a member state of all three, is influenced by policies they have adopted. Often these entities interact closely on issues pertaining to the Holocaust since they share many of the same member states, as well as sharing similar goals in their doctrines, such as the promotion of remembrance and education of the Holocaust, and the promotion tolerance and respect among individuals. Some of the institutions have more influence than others in the daily practices of their member states (influence comes primarily through priorities set in fiscal policy by the entities themselves, but also through more esoterically ascribed prestige by governing elites about the political importance of the institutions), and certainly influence differs based on individual states' histories with larger interstate organizations. Although space does not permit a detailed analysis of all three bodies and their work on Holocaust educational policy, I have chosen to focus on the Council of Europe because of its extended activity in advocating for Roma.<sup>297</sup>

Since 1969, the Council of Europe has had a long-standing interest in Roma history and culture, ranging from sponsorship of publications - notably the Interface

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<sup>296</sup> Here I should make a disclaimer that I worked on projects concerning Roma and the Holocaust with all three of these entities precisely because they recognize the importance of Romani inclusion in Holocaust education. I co-edited with Radu Ioanid of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum an OSCE-sponsored Romanian language publication entitled: *Tragedia Romilor Deportati în Transnistria 1942-1945* [*The Tragedy of Roma Deported to Transnistria 1942-45*. Iași: Polirom 2009. In 2009, I also worked as a consultant for the COE on a website on Roma and the Holocaust. Under the auspices of the Interface collection, sponsored by the COE, I published a book chapter, "Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria: 1942-1944," in Donald Kenrick (ed.), *The Gypsies during the Second World War: Volume 2: In the shadow of the Swastika*. Herfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1999. In 2006-08, as the director of a Romanian NGO ADCE, my organization received ITF funding for teacher training seminars on the Holocaust and for a database of Romani survivors in Romania.

<sup>297</sup> The Interface Collection was put together through the now defunct *Centre de recherches tsigane* (1979-2003) that was founded by M. Jean-Pierre Liégeois and housed at the University Paris-Descartes.

Collection,<sup>298</sup> teacher training seminars, the development of curricula for Roma school children and more recently of a website on Romani history. In its advocacy on behalf of Roma, the COE reinforces some its core goals, including the recognition and promotion of human rights, and the prevention of their violations. Since 2001, the teaching and recognition of the Holocaust in educational arenas has surfaced as one of the most important topics in education for the forty-seven member states “to prevent recurrence or denial of the devastating events that have marked this century, namely the Holocaust, genocides and other crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and the massive violations of human rights.”<sup>299</sup> The COE urges member states to assist in the development of students’ understanding about the history of the past century and the ideologies that led to the crimes, to train educators so that they can better assist their pupils in this awareness of events, to designate days for Holocaust remembrance annually, and to foster collaboration with the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research,<sup>300</sup> (the COE has observatory status at the ITF).

The COE’s focus on the Holocaust and Roma provides an excellent venue for understanding the role of transnational institutions and their influence over Holocaust educational policy not only in formerly communist countries, but also throughout the rest of Europe. The Council, alongside the Roma and Sinti Office at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has a leading role as either financiers of projects or direct producers of materials about Roma and the Holocaust. Although the COE has produced several books and worked with various countries to fulfill its goals in Holocaust education,<sup>301</sup> over the years it has become like the poor-step child of European institutions as other entities have grown in power and budgetary might. Monetary constraints hinder the amount of pedagogical production the COE does, and partnerships with other institutions, such as the OSCE, enable modest projects on Holocaust education. While some Western scholars lament facing “Holocaust fatigue” (Schweber 2006), interest in parts of Europe has not drastically dwindled, and may even be

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<sup>299</sup> COE website, Council of Europe resolution 2001/15

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> See for example, *Factsheets on Roma History (2007)*, a publication of the Council of Europe. Also see the series *The Gypsies During the Second World War*, edited by Donald Kenrick and published via the University of Hertfordshire Press.

increasing as countries such as Romania, which were formerly in the communist bloc, revamp their curricula. As new states also fold into the European Union, the merger means that their educational policies must meld into existing frameworks. Austrian historian Gerhard Baumgartner views teaching of the Holocaust as part of the process as supra-nation building, as the Holocaust becomes a starting point for “a common European identity.”<sup>302</sup>

For COE officials such as Romanian-born Aurora Ailincăi, Project manager for “Education of Roma children in Europe” program, it is important to bring Romani history into the classroom. She believes that European teachers need information about Roma:

Most Europeans know nothing about Roma and their history. They have only stereotypes or bad information. The COE has a project on the education of Roma children that involves the history and culture. And during our meetings on this with the experts, and there were many opinions, we decided we had to speak about the Roma genocide. In the Council’s legislation for the remembrance (2001/15) we are speaking not only about the Jews, but about all the victims of the Holocaust. We have the legal framework [to act].

The COE does a lot of teacher trainings, and there are the goals of respecting human rights, dignity, and the prevention of crimes against humanity. From the very beginning, Roma were a privileged subject. They had no state to represent them. They are the most numerous minority in Europe.<sup>303</sup>

Over the past several years, Ailincăi and her colleagues have initiated projects to ensure that Europeans will learn more about Romani history and culture. In 2008 the COE released their five-year project *Factsheets on Roma History*, which cover Romani history from the departure of Roma from India and their outward migration, state policies towards Roma including slavery in the Romanian territories, the Holocaust, the fate of Roma during communism, and present struggles of Roma against discrimination and for the full realization of their human rights. Partnering with the OSCE, the Council of Europe is also at work on a website on Roma and the Holocaust which will be available in several major languages. The work of the COE provides a steady institutional presence among member-state countries working for inclusion of Roma in educational forums.

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<sup>302</sup> Lecture given on 2 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>303</sup> Interview with Aurora Ailincăi, 3 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

Teacher trainings are also a part of the agenda to bring more focus on Roma in education. From 31 July- 3 August 2008, the COE hosted in partnership with the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture a teacher-training session on the Roma and the Holocaust in Budapest, Hungary.<sup>304</sup> As director of ADCE and thus coordinator of trainings in Romania, I was invited to participate so that could integrate materials used in other countries into the Romanian teaching seminars. The goals of the four-day seminar were to assess the extent to which of the Roma Holocaust is taught in schools, to familiarize European educators with the materials and evidence of a Romani genocide, to provide quality teaching examples on this topic, and to disseminate materials for further use in the home-countries.<sup>305</sup> It was the first training seminar of its kind sponsored by the COE, allowing twenty-five Hungarian and fifteen non-Hungarian participants to come together to learn and enter into a dialogue about the facts surrounding the persecution of Roma by the Nazi regime and its allies.<sup>306</sup> While primarily history teachers attended, the seminar was open to researchers, teacher trainers, and journalists as well. Seminar organizers worked hard to include Romani participants, and several of the Hungarian participants declared their Romani ethnicity during the self-introduction period of the seminar, and two Hungarian Romani representatives were invited as guest speakers. The seminar was bilingual, with Hungarian and English as the working languages, and blended on-site learning (visits to museum and commemoration programs), as well as lectures and methodological seminars.

Prior to arrival the conferences, participants were asked to evaluate their countries' textbooks, remembrance days, and sites of commemoration concerning the Nazi genocide of Roma. The results of the questionnaire showed that across Europe, Roma were nearly absent from Holocaust-related events and educational materials. For

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<sup>304</sup> The conference was funded in part through the COE Pestalozzi Program. The organizers of the Budapest seminar have chosen to designate the persecution of Roma by the Nazis and their allies by using the term *genocide* as well as *samudariopen* in the English language translation of the materials. Dr Carol Reich of the COE said, "It is a political process at the Council of Europe and we must have consensus on terminology." It was interesting to note that nearly all of the participants, however, used the word *Holocaust* when discussing the attempted extermination of Roma by the Nazis and their allies.

<sup>305</sup> Concluding remarks of rapporteur, 3 August 2008. Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>306</sup> Countries of origin for the non-Hungarian participants were: Albania, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom. Several of the non-Hungarian participants introduced themselves as part of their country's Task Force Commission, either as part of the Educational or Academic Working Groups.

instance, in only two of the fifteen countries represented at the seminar were there up to two to four lines in textbooks covering the plight of the Roma during the Holocaust.<sup>307</sup> The majority of participants noted that there was little to no mention in their country's educational materials about the Holocaust concerning Roma. This was hardly surprising given the lacunae in research about Roma.

In interviews that I conducted with seminar participants, most revealed having little knowledge about the fate of the Roma prior to their participation at the seminar. However, they were eager to learn more.<sup>308</sup> The most prominent theme discussed in all interviews was the absence of materials available about the genocide of Roma. Françoise, a social studies teacher from Belgium said:

I don't teach about Roma and the Holocaust. We have no books on this topic. It is not easy to find information about the Roma Holocaust before coming to this seminar. Here I got information. I have never talked to my students about Roma and I'm not sure that my students know about them. We need information on who the Roma are. In Belgium, it is not a big problem with the Gypsies, so we don't speak about it. When I was a student in my school books I never heard about this. They only spoke about the Jews.<sup>309</sup>

Although Françoise lives in Brussels at the heart of the European Union, an institution advocating improvement for Roma rights among its member nations,<sup>310</sup> she reported not having teaching materials, which led to students not learning about the largest ethnic minority in Europe in her classroom. The seemingly invisibility of Roma as a social "problem" in Belgium meant that they were off the radar for Françoise both as a private citizen and as a social science teacher.<sup>311</sup> From Françoise's perspective, the Holocaust had only one victim-category in her country's educational system. The COE seminar was

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<sup>307</sup> Results of the questionnaire compiled by Yvonne Schuchmann were distributed to participants in the packet of conference materials.

<sup>308</sup> I interviewed at least participants from each country participating with the exception of Romania (I was the official participant for Romania) and Turkey, as she had departed prior to my being able to discuss with her.

<sup>309</sup> Interview with Françoise 3 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>310</sup> See the EU website <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=518>, which provides sundry information on EU summits, reports, coordination of policies, and other human rights issues concerning Roma.

<sup>311</sup> Roma arrived in Belgium in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and today approximately 12,500 Roma live there. For more information on the history of Roma in Europe, see: Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass. USA : Blackwell, 1992. Brussels is the home of The European Roma Information Office (ERIO), an advocacy organization that promotes political and public discussion about Roma. For more information, see: [www.erionet.org](http://www.erionet.org)

the only means for her to both advance her knowledge of the topic and collect pedagogical materials that she could integrate into her lessons.

As noted, the absence of Roma in textbooks was frequently mentioned. Arthur, a retired school inspector from the United Kingdom and a long-time advocate of Romani rights, said:

There is nothing about the Roma Holocaust in school texts. In terms of knowledge about the Roma Holocaust it would be around 5% [in the UK] who would know about it. Often one understands only about the Jews, and then the Roma and the homosexuals are added a bit in there. There was once something – the COE introduced an international remembrance day – and the UK appointed a woman from the MOE. She was providing materials and she did include the Roma, about 20% of the material for the commemoration day had something about Roma.<sup>312</sup>

Arthur told me that the Ministry of Education did not show a sustained commitment to the inclusion of Roma, as demonstrated by the failure to develop pedagogical materials. He feared that in future years the UK would be accused of exacerbating the social isolation and marginalization of Roma because the MOE failed to cover the basics of Romani history into the teaching texts. He sees little change ahead because “the UK is not interested in Europe, the United Nations, the UNDP [United Nations Development Program], or the COE. It couldn’t care less about the international community.” As the group’s general reporter, Arthur questioned why none of his compatriots participated at the seminar. Moreover, in his concluding remarks regarding the conference, Arthur stressed the need for inclusion of the Roma genocide in the curricula for all students in secondary schools, but added that there should also be an emphasis on lessons of diversity, discrimination, and tolerance in pre-schools and elementary schools.

Teachers were also quick to point out problems of prejudice against Roma in their classrooms, which they identified as a challenge in teaching about the Romani Holocaust. Katalin, a Hungarian history teacher who lives and works in Budapest, told me that it was neither a lack of resources nor of knowledge about Roma as a national minority that made teaching about the fate of Roma during the Holocaust difficult. Rather, it was racism that caused a stumbling block in her classroom. She commented:

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<sup>312</sup> Interview with Arthur, 3 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

Every year I teach about Roma and the Holocaust. There are a lot of opinions when I teach this. It depends on the person how they react. It is a deeper problem in society – there are many racist ideas. It is difficult to [teach] about the Holocaust because there are some Jews and Gypsies in the classroom and they are silent in the lessons.<sup>313</sup>

Hungary is home to half a million Roma, some 5% of the country's population,<sup>314</sup> who often face prejudice and discrimination. A recent survey of tolerance of minorities among young people found that some 85% of Hungarian youth display intolerance towards Roma (Petre 2004). Few inside or outside of Hungary know that an estimated 50,000 Hungarian Roma were killed by the Nazis and their Hungarian counterparts.<sup>315</sup> Hungary is just one of the many new members of the European Union grappling with its difficult past, one that communism sought to obscure and obfuscate. Decades of victimization rhetoric cloud the issue; like many in the region, Hungarians often see their former regime as victims of a Nazi invasion rather than as co-perpetrators of genocide. Although a state-of-the-art Holocaust Memorial Center recently opened in Budapest that details the fate of the country's Jews and Roma during the Holocaust and whose main task is to assist the Hungarian educational system, changing long-held prejudices does not come overnight.<sup>316</sup> Katalin, as part of a small yet growing cadre of professionals trying to realign public consciousness about the Holocaust through classroom teaching, told the

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<sup>313</sup> Interview with Katalin, 3 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>314</sup> Monitoring Education for Roma: A statistical baseline for Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, 2006, Open Society Institute report, page 6.

<sup>315</sup> For further reading on the Hungarian case, see János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi, eds. (2008). *Pharrajimos: The fate of the Roma during the Holocaust*, New York: International Debate Education Association; Katalin Katz, (2007). "Story, history, and memory: A case study of the Roma at the Komárom camp in Hungary" in Vago, R. and Stabuer, R. (eds.), *The Roma: A minority in Europe: historical, political and social perspectives*. Budapest; New York: Central European University Press. For more on the Holocaust in Hungary, see Brewster S. Chamberlin and Randolph L. Braham, eds. (2006). *The Holocaust in Hungary: Sixty Years Later*, New York: Columbia University Press; Randolph L. Braham and Scott Miller, eds. (1998). *The Nazis' last victims: the Holocaust in Hungary*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

<sup>316</sup> The recently opened Holocaust Memorial Center opened in Budapest centers solely on the Hungarian theatre of the Holocaust. I was surprised to see coverage about Roma. For example, the fate of five families can be followed through the divisions of the museum, and one of those is a Romani family. The museum guide explained that a concerted effort was made for Romani inclusion. However, there were a few disturbing comments about Roma on photographs. For instance, at the entrance of there are two photos, one of some Hungarian Jews and the other of some Hungarian Roma. While the former has an appropriate tag, the caption of the latter says that Gypsies are beggars. I had the impression that the original photo captions weren't changed at all. The museum, overall despite featuring Roma, adopts the disappointing position of some scholars, such as Gunter Lewy, that only Jews were victims of the Holocaust.



group during that she had anticipated in advance the reaction of her students when teaching about Roma. Most of her pupils come from affluent ethnic Hungarian families, and the discussions around the Holocaust provoked “very intensive emotions.”<sup>317</sup> She said:

I cannot change their attitudes but maybe I can have some impact on them. There will be a fight or an argument when we raise these issues. I can only be strong in my opinions. I am alone on the pulpit [and] to tell you the truth I don't have any other tools for fighting this other than trying to silence the bad opinions.

In our conversation, Katalin asserted the necessity for a civic education approach to teaching the Holocaust. Without reinforcement from other areas of the educational system, dispelling historical misconceptions remains for her an arduous task due to present prejudices against Roma.<sup>318</sup>

Even experts on the Jewish Holocaust, such as Vasili, a member of Greece's ITF Commission, did not understand the Nazi policy toward Roma. Vasili credited the seminar for advancing of his knowledge on the subject and for creating a forum for personal interaction with Roma. He said: “I have heard about the Holocaust of the Roma, but I had no clear picture before this seminar.” For others participants who said they possessed sufficient information about Romani life and culture, teaching about the Holocaust still presents difficulties. Palma, a Spanish vocational teacher from Granada - a city with a historically important Romani presence,<sup>319</sup> said that instructing her students in social interventions with marginalized groups doesn't come easily. She explained that her students come from diverse backgrounds - Spanish, Moroccan, Argentinean, and even Roma, and are sensitized to work with groups that are socially excluded. Palma, determined to teach about Roma, had searched out Holocaust education materials through local Romani NGOs. She told me: “We don't have enough public materials to teach

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<sup>317</sup> Seminar notes, 2 August 2008.

<sup>318</sup> Katalin's experience with her students reminds me of the issues Romanian teachers face regarding attitudes of their pupils. For an analysis of young Romanians' perceptions of Roma and the Holocaust, see Michelle Kelso, *Hidden History: Perceptions of the Romani Holocaust in Romania Viewed Through Contemporary Race Relations*, in *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Fall 2007, pp.44-61.

<sup>319</sup> For centuries, Granada has been home to a Romani community. The northern area of the city called *El Sacromonte* Roma lived in caves that overlooked Granada.

about [Roma and the Holocaust]. You have to have a personal interest to find out something.”<sup>320</sup>

An important sub-theme that emerged during interviews was the need for examination of Romani history before and after Holocaust throughout Europe, as participants reported anti-Romani policies of persecution in their countries that were far too often under-explored areas in research and teaching. Erik, a researcher at the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Norway, explained that civic education provides an avenue for further exploration of one’s country’s complex historiography:

In teaching the Holocaust, it needs to be contextualized and put in a large historical perspective into modern times in Norway and in Europe. It is demanding and takes a lot of leg work. In Norway, there is a continuity in discriminatory policies [towards Roma]. We had Romani Rose’s exhibit at our center and we had kids coming.<sup>321</sup> We need to teach who Roma are.

We [at the Center] found 17<sup>th</sup> century legislation about Roma and Sinti. It was taken at the same time as the Jewish legislation was taken to keep them out of the country.<sup>322</sup> The Roma were described as *thieves, magicians, and beggars*. We took those categories and put them on the board and then looked at the newspaper archives from the 1950s to today. And we took all those headlines and we see *beggars, thieves, magicians*. Except for one thing – the Holocaust.

The disconcerting realization by Erik and his colleagues that centuries’ old stereotypes about Roma were still infiltrating Norwegian conceptualizations today through media sources is not unique to Norway: similar themes have been found in Romanian media (CURS 2002, S.P.E.R. 2009.) The exception of the Holocaust that Erik noted was ironic,

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<sup>320</sup> Interview with Palma, August 3, 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>321</sup> The traveling exhibition entitled “The Holocaust Against the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) and present-day racism in Europe” was produced by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, located in Heidelberg Germany. The group has been active in promoting the genocide of Roma and Sinti during WWII.

<sup>322</sup> Erik Thorstensen kindly emailed me a photo of the original document “The Norwegian Law of Christian V – 1687” and alongside it his painstaking translation of the law which stated that: “No Jew must enter into the kingdom, or be taken into, without a recommendation letter from the king.” Punishment for breaking this portion of the law was a fine. Concerning Gypsies, the law stated: “Gypsies, who stray and deceive people with fraud, lies, theft, and magic, should be taken by the local authorities, wherever they must be, and those that are taken by the countryside public, should be handed over to the farmer bailiff who should lead them to the magistrate with the help of the farmers. All that they [the gypsies] carry with them shall be impounded and their leader shall pay with his life; and the others must within a given time flee the country. If they are seen or heard of in the country after this time period, then their leader shall pay with his life and whoever is housing or lodging them must pay for each night and each person the same amount as the one that is lodging outlaws.” The document can be accessed online at: [http://www.hf.uio.no/PNH/chr5web/chr5\\_03\\_22.html](http://www.hf.uio.no/PNH/chr5web/chr5_03_22.html).

since Nazi racial policy against Roma was based on rhetoric of *Zigeuner* or Gypsies as “work-shy” or “antisocial,” which spilled over to allied and occupied countries. In the Romanian case, authorities deported *țigani* deemed “dangerous” to society, those who had itinerant lifestyles (thus no permanent work establishment), as well as those who had been previously incarcerated.<sup>323</sup>

Claude, a Swiss participant who teaches high school in Geneva and is also a member of his country’s Task Force Commission, was also troubled by both his students’ perceptions of Roma and his country’s troubled past in dealing with them. Like Kaitlin, he specified that his students “show ignorance” about Roma, having “very stereotypical images” of them.<sup>324</sup> Claude said that his students describe Roma as “thieves and beggars” who are “are always moving.” He felt that the country seemed not to “know what to do with them” as Switzerland, since the turn of the last century, implemented several discriminatory policies that contributed to the attempted genocide of Roma by the Nazis through its refusal to let Roma enter its cantons as refugees during the war, and by the state’s own earlier enacted eugenics policy.<sup>325</sup> Claude clarified his personal struggle to process Swiss-authored atrocities against Roma in his classroom:

We had an issue with Roma. Collaboration with the Reich in not letting them get into Switzerland during the war.<sup>326</sup> And Roma children were taken from their families. It was a governmental policy, which was aborted as late as 1972. It was a federal policy in all the states, run by a NGO program *Pro Juventute*. It had funds from the state as well.

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<sup>323</sup>Antonescu’s deportation orders thus differed from German deportation orders as nomads were the first targeted under Romanian policy while nomads were initially spared in Germany, which later changed exposing them to the same genocidal policy as was meted out to the rest of the Third Reich’s Roma and Sinti. For more insight on Nazi policy towards Roma, see Sybil Milton, “The Gypsies and the Holocaust,” *The History Teacher* 24, no.4 (August 1991), pp.375-387; and Correspondence *Ibid* 25, no.4 (August 1992), pp.515-521.

<sup>324</sup> Interview with Claude, 3 August 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>325</sup> From 1926-1973, the children’s charity Pro Juventute Foundation carried out a clandestine federal policy *Kinder der Landstrasse*, or Children of the Road, that forcibly took young children from their Gypsy households (Gypsies are also known as Yenish in Switzerland), and placed them in orphanages or in foster care as part of a state-sponsored eugenics program targeting Jews, homosexuals, and nomads. Some 600 Yenish children were taken in these campaigns that were partially paid for through the sales of postage stamps by school children who unknowingly assisted in the immoral actions of the government and its collaborators. Pro Juventute foundation receives even today partial funding from the sales of postage stamps. In 1988, the Swiss government officially apologized and recognized its role in the destruction of Yenish families. For more on this, see Thomas Meier “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the open road’ campaign,” *Romani Studies* 5, Vol.18, No.2 (2008), 101-121.

<sup>326</sup> For more on the Swiss policy during WWII, see Donald Kenrick, ed. (2006). *The Gypsies during the Second World War. Volume 3. The Final Chapter*. Hatfield: The University of Hertfordshire Press.

When I was a child, I was participating unknowingly. They gave us the stamps at schools. The sales of the stamps were used to pay for taking the Roma children away from their families. I was selling these to neighbors and family. Without knowing it, you would sell the stamps that permitted the talking of children from their families.

It has to be known – an appropriation of the problem and with the identification of history. It is one of the approaches that I use in teaching. I teach about the other genocides as well. I really like the comparative approach to genocide studies. In this way I avoid competition between victims. I have Muslims, Africans – there is the issue of Rwanda, and of Bosnians and Srebrenica.

In his teaching about Roma, Claude stressed that he tries to rectify ignorance of historical events by teaching several pivotal points in his countries' past that negatively affected Roma: the 1906 discriminatory policy that banned Gypsies from entering the country and forbade Gypsies from using public transportation;<sup>327</sup> closing the borders during WWII, which left thousands of Jews and Gypsies exposed to extermination by the Nazis; Swiss collaboration with the Nazis through selling and saving gold confiscated illegally from Nazi prisoners; and the forty-seven-year Swiss policy of removal of Yenish children from their families.<sup>328</sup>

All respondents reported that the seminar was informative and useful for their classrooms, and COE organizers proposed continuing with a follow-up meeting to create a cadre of teacher trainers to work in their respective countries, an endeavor that is greatly needed, remembering that one of the goals of Holocaust education that most scholars agree upon is tolerance promotion. Over the past two years, violent attacks and anti-Romani rhetoric have increased.<sup>329</sup> In April 2009, EU Commissioner Vladimír Špidla spoke out, stating that:

There is a pattern of violence targeting Roma, and that this is not a phenomenon which concerns only one or two Member States. I am particularly concerned that the public debate in various Member States is continuously being influenced by

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<sup>327</sup> For more on the 1906 and other discriminatory legislation, see: *Roma, Sinti and Yenish-Swiss Gypsy policies at the time of National Socialism*, a report by the Independent Commission of Experts: Switzerland—World War Two, as part of the Berger Commission's work into Switzerland's refugee policies.

<sup>328</sup> The Yenish are a subgroup of Roma living in Switzerland.

<sup>329</sup> Some members of the Roma communities Czech Republic and Hungary have been violently attacked, and Ireland and Italy have had increasing hostilities toward Roma migrants.

populist anti-Roma rhetoric which might be taken, in extreme cases, as instigation to hate crimes. The issue of personal safety of Roma is directly related to the broader problem of their being persistently discriminated against and marginalised in European societies. Unless both the EU and the Member States make significant efforts to overcome the exclusion of Roma, they will remain particularly exposed to attacks on their lives and property.<sup>330</sup>

These anti-Romani sentiments that Špidla discussed show little sign of abating. In June 2010, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution to improve conditions of Roma in member nations. This resolution and recognized the increasing seriousness of the plight of Roma, linking current xenophobic acts to those of the Holocaust and issuing a resolution that expressed shock at anti-Romani violence in several member states.<sup>331</sup> The COE attributed worsening economic conditions and the rise of extremist political parties to the increase in hostility toward Roma. Sociological reports confirm that throughout Europe, Roma face issues such as discrimination, with 50% of Romani respondents in one survey reporting discrimination against them at least once during the previous 12 months, and 20% reported themselves as crime victims due to their ethnicity (EU MIDIS Report 2009). These results are not out of sync with European perceptions, as some 62% view the most widespread form of discrimination to be based on ethnic origin (Eurobarometer Report 2008:7). Furthermore, a striking 77% of Europeans associate being Roma as a disadvantage in society (p.44). This same survey notes Europeans are comfortable with diversity, with the exception of having Roma neighbors (p.11). More education about Roma and their history and culture can only be beneficial given the present circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

In Romania, recent conceptualizations of Romanian victimhood go against the grain of the history of state-sponsored deportation, internment, and killing of thousands of Roma. The idea that Roma were victims of the Holocaust also contradicts the schema

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<sup>330</sup> See the EU and Roma website, which has the entire speech, accessed on 8 July 2009 at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=518&newsId=489&furtherNews=yes>

<sup>331</sup> See Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe Resolution 1740 (2010) The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe, accessed on July 5 2010 at: <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/eRES1740.htm>.

of Roma, which during and after the war boxed them into a template of a lazy, asocial people who are parasitically living in Romanian society. Indeed the everyday schema depict Roma as anti-social perpetrators of crime and Romanians as their victims. The investigation of the WWII genocide committed by the Romanian state against Roma inverts this perpetrator-victim relationship, placing Roma in the role of the unjustly persecuted victims of racist policy, a policy partly inspired by the Nazi regime and molded into a Romanianized version of ethnic cleansing by Ion Antonescu and his associates. By depicting Roma as a victim category of the Antonescu regime, the notion of Romanian victimization also raises new questions about the little known historical relationship between Romanians and Roma, while simultaneously calling for a reformulation of the current status of Roma in Romanian society.

The decades of denial of Romania's role in the Holocaust, the low socio-economic status of Roma today and the widespread negative attitudes of the general Romanian public toward this ethnic group are negatively affecting the acceptance of Romania's role as a perpetrator and Roma's victimhood status. As the above excerpt from the Târgu Mureş training illustrates, many Romanians have trouble reconciling their views on Roma with the new information about Romani suffering. Teachers attempt to maintain these symbolic boundaries of "them and us" when confronted with an unknown and unpleasant portion of their country's history that continue to privilege the dominant majority. Unfortunately, ignorance about Roma is not just a Romanian problem. Interviews with other European educators demonstrated that even when there is good will to teach about the fate of Roma during WWII, there are many obstacles still to overcome, such as a lack of materials and anti-Gypsy attitudes held by students and others.

The (re)insertion of Roma into Romanian history is a counter-narrative to the national narrative of the Romanian nation. By correcting imbalances in official versions of history, this counter-narrative has the potential to both empower the former victim-group and eradicate long-held misconceptions about them due to biased historical sources. However, it is important to raise one caveat: this counter-narrative will succeed only if racist schemata can be overcome. As this chapter has shown, overt racism and prejudice were apparent in the comments of seminar participants, as was a conceptualization of Romanian identity that centered on ethnic Romanians rather than on inclusive citizenship.

Are Roma a people without a rich cultural history, as suggested by one teacher, or are they a people with a rich cultural history that have been expunged from Romanian history due to their lack of cultural capital? I believe it is the latter. Fortunately, the dominant narratives regarding both WWII victimhood and Romanian-Romani relations are not static, as groups often reconfigure cultural spaces (Sewell 1999). I believe that Holocaust education, with continual reinforcement of civic and multicultural education, can act as Geoffrey Short (2000) suggests as a buttress against anti-racist attitudes. However, in the classroom we must be prepared to address underlying socio-cultural tensions present today.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

The Holocaust Memorial is a monument that confirms Romania's decision to recover its real history. It is a difficult process which means changing mentalities and the capacity to accept reality after 50-60 years when history was falsified. - President Traian Băsescu<sup>332</sup>

### The Holocaust Monument

In October 2009, the Romania government unveiled a \$7.4 million Holocaust Memorial to commemorate over 280,000 Jews and 11,000 Roma who died as victims of the Ion Antonescu regime. The monument was an outgrowth of the 2004 Wiesel Commission's Final Report, which recommended that a national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Romania be erected as part of the country's efforts to raise public awareness of the event through both commemorative and educational endeavors (Final Report 2005:389). Located in central Bucharest, the concrete structure, resembling a mausoleum, was the source of much controversy during its planning and construction. Issues such as the steep price tag, the prime location, and even the necessity of such as work of public commemoration were debated after the competition for the monument was announced in 2006. Most advocates of the creation, including Elie Wiesel, were adamant that it would serve its intended purpose of doing public memory work by honoring the victims and educating future generations. While I had seen the design plans a year earlier, I was curious to see the completed structure and to discover public reception to it. I attended the launching, eager to absorb the atmosphere of the ceremony.

As I approached the cordoned off area around the monument that was heavily guarded by police, I scanned the crowd looking for Marioara Trancă, my long-time friend

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<sup>332</sup> This was a speech given by Traian Băsescu for the inauguration of the Holocaust Memorial on 8 October 2009.



and research associate, Dumitru Trancă, her father-in-law, and his sister Ioana Văduvă, also a Romani survivor. Dumitru, known as Vică to his family, was just twelve at the



Figure 5.1 Mr. Trancă speaks at the Holocaust Monument 8 October 2009. At his right, President Traian Băsescu and Liviu Beris, from the Association of Jewish Survivors and a former deportee in Transnistria.

time of his family’s deportation to Transnistria, and he had the distinguished honor of being invited by the Romanian Presidency to speak on behalf of Romani victims at the ceremony. He was the only Roma accorded this distinction. After I flashed my invitation at an entry point and was waved in by a guard, I received a call from Marioara, who was furious as she told me: “The guards wouldn’t let us inside the area near the monument.” She explained that their invitation hadn’t arrived in time to their home, but as informed by organizers, they had come directly to the event. The police refused their request to check the invitation list for their names, even after they were told about Dumitru’s role in the ceremony. “They told us that we had no right to enter. They wouldn’t even let us stay near the ropes,” Marioara continued. “They told us to please move a few streets away, some 250 meters, so that no one will see us.” Twenty minutes later the group, dressed in their traditional customs, was spotted by one of President Traian Băsescu’s aids, who immediately brought them inside. “My father-in-law felt very badly. It was pure

discrimination. It was the day of commemoration of the Holocaust, and they were telling us that we had no right to be there,” said Marioara. That afternoon when I questioned Dumitru about the incident, he told me that he had been saddened by it, but it was nothing new. Switching the topic, his face lit up with pleasure: “Did you see me with the President? He stood by me the entire time and when we went inside the monument he said, ‘Let me help you *tataie* [grandfather]’ giving me his arm to help me down the steps.”

Dumitru had been heartened by the respect he was shown by Romania’s top official, as well as the kind treatment that he was awarded by other speakers at the ceremony. Reporters flocked around him trying to get a quick interview. Dumitru had told the crowd gathered at the site in his off-the-cuff speech that he would never forget what happened to his family and that Transnistria “was a tragedy for Roma.” A large screen displayed the speakers to the audience, showing close ups of Dumitru next to Bănescu. Marioara and Ioana told me that their chests were tight with emotion, as they were overwhelmed with the magnitude of seeing Dumitru speak so eloquently about his experiences. “Imagine,” Marioara told me as we stood watching the speakers, “maybe Romani children can see this, too.” For the Trancă family, who had participated alongside me at every step of my research and action outreach, that is from the beginning of my work in gathering oral histories, then assisting me with the film, and finally in taking the Romani Holocaust experiences represented in *Hidden Sorrows* into high school classrooms and to teacher training seminars, for them this day was the pinnacle of all their hard work. “I cried from happiness watching Dumitru up there. We are finally receiving a right for when we were wronged,” said Marioara. “I felt that Romania is finally recognizing our sufferings.”

The next day when Dumitru's grandson Alexandru visited the monument to see the spot from where his grandfather's speech had been televised, the twenty-year old walked away feeling proud that Romani history was on public display, but he had some doubts as to how many people might see it. “Why is our part of the monument at the back where nobody will go?” He asked me. Alexandru's question was a poignant one, bringing up issues of cultural and political capital of Roma. The Trancă family hadn't realized that the recognition that they were so grateful for had almost not come about. The initial plans

drawn up by German sculptor Peter Jacobi featured commemoration only for Jewish victims. An intersection of interests advocating to add Roma victims, coming from various institutions and Romani interest groups, forced a re-examination of the government-approved plans. A compromise was eventually found.

A representation of the Romani persecution would be added at the back of the monument. A rusted wagon wheel, detached by a few feet from the tomb-like structure itself, had been incorporated into the monument's design along with a plaque telling of the Romani deportations. The wheel is an emblem adopted by Romani movements as a symbol of their migration out of India through Asia into Europe, and in this sculpture, in addition to signifying the Romani nation, would symbolize Roma deportations since nomads were expelled with their caravans. Paul Shapiro, Director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Memorial Museum and member of the Wiesel Commission, told me that the museum fought hard to ensure Romani remembrance was part of the memorial, as Shapiro and others believed that the low status of Roma would hinder the state's incorporation of them into the sculpture. "It's important to remember that Roma were also victims of the Antonescu regime. They suffered and died in Transnistria as well," he said. Shapiro went on to add that the monument was paid for by the Romanian government for the Romanian people "to remember what happened in their history. Roma are a part of that history."<sup>333</sup>

The erection of the monument was another mark of official recognition of Roma as survivors of the Holocaust in Romania, and only time will tell if it helps alter the resistance to incorporation the Romani narrative into the national narrative of the country. Experts often debate the usefulness of monuments and other works of public art in memory work (Young 1993, Cole 1999, Carrier 2005, Bucur 2009), and I foresee that a deeper examination of the Romanian site is just one of many avenues for future research about the on-going process of Romani recognition.

I chose the monument and its unveiling as an episode for the conclusion of the dissertation because it illustrates all the major threads running through this writing: recognition, exclusion, inequality, discrimination, etc. As we see from the reaction of the police at the ceremony, even though the Romanian state commissioned a work of public

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<sup>333</sup> Interview with Paul Shapiro, November 2009, Washington, D.C.

art for recognizing the Holocaust of Jewish and Romani victims, there is still a long way to go until this recognition, or “right” as Marioara tagged it, enters into public consciousness and changes mentalities of the majority group, if, indeed, it will be able to do so. We also learn that the inclusion of Roma was not part of the original conception for the monument, and that Roma were added onto it only after influential figures, such as Paul Shapiro of the Holocaust Museum in Washington and others, requested to the Romanian government that Roma be commemorated as well. As we know from the work of Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006), Fatma Muge Gocek (2006) and others, it isn’t simply a matter of gathering information and disseminating it, making a film and screening it (Kelso 2007), or building a sculpture and launching it (Young 1993). While those endeavors are fruitful for the process of recognition, as we have seen in the Romanian case, it will ultimately take more to overcome the deeply ingrained denial of the Holocaust to change the national narrative.

### **The Narratives**

I began my research by collecting oral testimonies of Roma survivors to build up a repository of accounts that assisted in complementing the archival record of the destruction of part of the Roma community during the war, and these are the ties that bind this dissertation together. Unlike what many scholars write about Romani memory (being absent or silenced within their own culture) I found that Roma survivors with whom I worked *do* recall their wartime tragedies, and they *are* telling their stories, and have been since their liberation from camps in 1944. This recent inclusion of Romani narratives and the recognition of their trauma at the highest levels of Romanian politics may act as a catalyst for other advancements in state policies for Roma as it has been the case for Jewish narratives (Stein 2007:91). My method of engineering space for Roma narratives was to find a cultural tool through which to feature the Romani voices that would allow for an emotional and intellectual engagement of Romanians with the subject. The idea of a film germinated, and *Hidden Sorrows* became the avenue through which I could best engage publics in conversations about the Romani genocide. I also used the documentary in my research to study how non-Roma audiences react to the narratives of

Roma survivors and in this dissertation I offered insight into the audience reactions and explained how they relate to the overall history and present state of the country, majority-minority relations and aspects regarding the Communist-era historiography.

The narratives presented in this dissertation work at several levels, from the recording of silenced memory for the restructuring of history, to the pushing of the symbolic boundaries between Romanians and Roma, which may, in turn, reconfigure relations between the two groups. Foremost, narratives provide personalized portraits of the often forgotten persecution of the Roma who were deported from Romania between 1942 and 1944. Through their words, we discover the tragic events that they faced from the onset of the brutal separation from their homeland as Romanian authorities forced them at gunpoint across their country, their horrific experiences in camps, and for the survivors, their perilous journey back home. Testimonies are not diaries or personal memoirs written for internal or external consumption. For the most part they are interviews made by second parties whose motivation typically is for posterity and public consumption. I collected the accounts presented here over fifteen years in an effort to overcome the lacuna in research and knowledge about the fate of Romanian Roma during the Holocaust. The testimony is also part of cultural history, where Roma are the repositories of their life events, as seen and interpreted by them throughout the past sixty years and retold to the listeners of their tragedies.

Narratives are paramount in revealing how Roma of varied ages and circumstance at the time of the war coped with their forced incarceration in labor camps in Transnistria. While we do not get much structural information from Roma survivors, such as the names of camp commanders or the numbers incarcerated in each camp, we find instead the effects of Romanian policies on Romani victims, revealing emotional and physical struggles for survival. We also find that survivors' constructed memory reflects not only their personal experience, but also their collective experiences. These accounts provide valuable insight into the social world of Roma, a group which has not been the subject of much research in academia, for reasons discussed in this paper, including the fact that Roma have been outside the means of production of knowledge as they have little cultural, social, political or economic capital. While this is evolving in Romania with

assistance from European and international institutions, alongside countless civil society organizations, there is still a way to go before inequalities are rectified.

I believe that survivor narratives, like those of Anuța Brânzan and others featured in this dissertation and in the film *Hidden Sorrows*, are not only important for the advancement of historical information as they provide details that documents cannot, but this memory work is also important because of its ability to humanize the victims, especially when audiences such as those in Romania may not be predisposed to hearing about the Romani genocide. Testimonies also can contextualize universalisms that audience members can relate to in their own lives, such as love of family and religious belief, which can bring them closer to understanding the personal dimensions of Romani suffering.

Narratives also can empower former victim-groups and eradicate long-held misconceptions about them due to biased historical sources by correcting imbalances in official versions of history. Oftentimes, national narratives of events are constructed through documents, artifacts and other relics left behind by those in power. As noted before, the persecution of Roma has been largely left out of history textbooks, and few researchers focus their efforts to advance knowledge about the Romani genocide. In the case of the Romanian Holocaust, the official history has recently been amended to include Roma with the notable Wiesel Commission's Final Report (2005), but even that document relied heavily on archival sources left by perpetrators to represent the events. While the documents give an overall image of the destruction, the Romani survivors teach us more about their horrendous sufferings, and how the state policies reflected in bureaucratic language on paper affected real people on the ground. It is one thing to read a report written by camp administrators about shortages of food, and another to hear from those people who starved, were beaten, and watched loved ones die. We must remember that documents written by Romanian functionaries, even those who were more sympathetic to the Roma, were still drafted for the use of the apparatus of repression, and their authors were, after all, active members of a bureaucratic system allowing for the minutiae that contributed to the Holocaust.

## Summary of the Findings

The aim of my dissertation was to examine the plight of a virtually unknown category of Holocaust survivors, which did not previously benefit from public space allocated for its testimonies. Oral histories I collected and analyzed reveal the deportation experience and how the Roma processed this event and its consequences over the years. I recorded the testimonies on video and used them alongside archival sources to make a documentary film, which was shown in classrooms and teacher training sessions, and I used surveys, focus groups and interviews to ascertain previous audience knowledge of the issue and how the new information regarding Roma victimhood was being processed by the non-Roma audiences, as well as their current views regarding this minority.

I looked at how the Holocaust, as a watershed event, was constructed in Romani memory as well as in Romanian historiography and collective memory. I found that even though some general societal knowledge of the Romani genocide has entered into collective memory, the prevalent view is that Antonescu's policy of deportation was meant to remove the Roma as asocial elements from the country, and therefore Roma suffering is not considered or recognized. The former ruler is also sometimes hailed as a savior of Jews and as a hero for having fought against the Soviet Union, which is still deeply resented in Romania as a former occupation power.

While history teachers appeared more entrenched in such views (as expected as they have been subjected to the dominant narrative that was reinforced systemically for decades), most high school students rejected the myth that the Holocaust was not perpetrated in Romania and did not see Antonescu as a hero. They however, lacked any knowledge of Roma history in Romania and seemed to share widely held societal views of the Roma as victimizers of Romanians and therefore were not ready to easily accept Roma as victims of the fascist regime. Longitudinal studies on students on the effects of Holocaust education should be undertaken to assess whether bringing awareness fulfills goals of building a more just society as literature suggests that Holocaust education should do (Short and Reed 2004, Schweber 2004).

I also examined the changes to that narrative post-socialism, and sought to glean insight on how public discourse about the Holocaust today shapes inter-ethnic relations

and identity formation. I analyzed the ways in which certain segments of the Romanian population hold on tightly to their beliefs, with private and public discourse minimizing the wartime genocide of Roma and using symbols of the Holocaust (i.e.: images of Antonescu) for racist mobilization against Roma in current political and social discussions. Similar to the case of the Jews, I found that recognition of Roma as victims of the Holocaust is also negatively affected by issues such the post-war history of Romania under communism and the dominance of a nationalistic viewpoint in historiography and in politics and a process of national identity formation which promoted Romania as a victim during WWII and eliminated uncomfortable issues such as the racial persecutions of the past and twisted some historical facts.

In a major turnaround fostered mainly by external factors such as US and European lobbying of the Romanian political elites, there was an official, radical shift in state policy in 2004 after an international panel of historians assembled by then-president Ion Iliescu published a report on Romania's role during the Holocaust. In offering a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant one asserting that Romanians were victims of the Second World War, the Wiesel Commission's Final Report showed that the Antonescu regime perpetrated mass killings and deportations against Jews and Roma. The panel's report has been officially embraced by the authorities, putting an end to sixty years of official denial and perhaps opening the way for Romanians to begin learning of the historical facts regarding the Antonescu regime. My research shows, however that changing the old narrative will be a difficult process and chances of success are questionable as key gatekeepers in the education system such as teachers and also the society at large express a deep bias against Roma, and this affects the acceptance of the new narrative presenting this ethnic group as victim of the wartime Romanian regime.

The mixed reception by Romanian educators, who control the reproduction of knowledge in the classroom, shows that there is much work to be done in this area and teacher trainings can be one method of addressing the issues, as can more institutional support from the Ministry of Education and Research by continuing to encourage the incorporation of Romani history into the curricular agenda, which also needs to move away from building national identity in a way that ignores minorities, past injustices and misdeeds of various rulers. Despite the difficulties presented above, according Roma a



place in history can and does help ease some of the marginalization, prejudice and ignorance that dominate almost all discussions of Roma today by providing non-Roma with first-hand information about Romani communities.

As noted by high school students who saw *Hidden Sorrows*, some professed to experiencing attitudinal changes toward Roma and others expressed gratitude for having learned more about their own history and welcomed the incorporation of Roma into it. Some also understood that history as they knew it had been falsified by authorities. While this was not the conclusion reached by all young viewers, perhaps it is enough to start more conversations about the place of Roma in Romanian society with their peers and family members.

The emergence of a new official narrative that acknowledges Roma suffering will provide a different context to understanding today's situation of this ethnic group. By offering recognition for their past suffering through education and awareness efforts it will contribute to building public support for social inclusion efforts of Roma. In the meantime, however the Roma's weak status as a marginalized, stateless and unpopular minority makes them more likely to be targeted again for persecution as we can see from state actions such as the recent mass expulsions of Roma men, women and children from France.<sup>334</sup>

I hope that the reading of this dissertation will provoke a re-conceptualization of Roma, moving away from the stereotypical image most often associated with peoples of this ethnicity. Omer Bartov (1998) uses the phrase "insider as outsider" in referring to the persecution of Jews by the Third Reich, a simile he extends to include similar persecution of the Roma and Sinti as well, establishing the social placement of the targeted group within the hierarchy of the society in which they resided as part of the structure of persecution. Although Jews and Roma occupied different strata in the socio-economic spheres, nonetheless both were viewed as "alien wedges" to borrow Geoffrey Short's term, and persecuted based on the perpetrators' characterizations of their supposedly biologically determined identities.<sup>335</sup> In Romania, the state-sponsored deportation,

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<sup>334</sup> French authorities adopted in August 2010 a policy of expelling Roma families en-masse, mainly to Romania and Bulgaria, citing a recent rise in crime around the Roma settlements.

<sup>335</sup> See Geoffrey Short, "Teaching the Holocaust: The Relevance of Children's Perceptions of Jewish Culture and Identity" *British Educational Research Journal* Vol.20 (No.4) 1994, pp.393-405.

internment, and killing of thousands of Roma goes against the grain of recent conceptualizations of Romanian victimhood, which during and even after the war boxed Roma into a template of lazy, asocials who are parasitically living off the Romanian society.<sup>336</sup> Indeed, the investigation of the crimes committed by the Romanian state against Roma deported to Transnistria invert the perpetrator-victim relationship, placing Roma in the role of the unjustly persecuted victim of racist policy partially inspired by the Nazi regime and molded into a Romanianized version of ethnic cleansing by Ion Antonescu and his cronies. By illustrating Roma as a victim category of the Antonescu regime, I am also raising new questions about the little known historical relationship between ethnic Romanians and Roma, while simultaneously calling for a reformulation of the current status of Roma in Romanian society away from the insider-outsider category and into an integrated citizenship. This is a path I believe in supporting if we are to achieve, in Raul Hilberg's words, justice for all by starting with the Roma. This work of public sociology has been an attempt to do just that.

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<sup>336</sup> For a better understanding of Romanian consciousness about the Holocaust, see Viorel Achim and Constantin Iordache, ed. (2004). *România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului*. București: Curtea Veche

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