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The Way Out of Amnesia? Europeanisation and the Recognition of the Roma's Past and Present

Huub van Baar

THE ROMA AND THE MEMORY LANDSCAPE OF EUROPE

Lety near Písek and Hodonín near Kunštát are two villages in the Czech Republic. Since the beginning of the 1990s, an industrial pig farm in Lety and a holiday resort in Hodonín have become tangible symbols of the poor recognition of the Romani Holocaust in the Czech Republic and, by extension, in Europe. Hodonín and Lety are the neglected sites of two former Nazi concentration camps on Czech territory that were used for the imprisonment and persecution of Roma. The Nazis murdered about 6000 Czech Roma, that is, 90% of the Romani population. A substantial number of them were deported to Auschwitz and other sites of extermination via the camps in Lety and Hodonín.¹ Since the 1970s the site of the former camp in Lety has been occupied by a pig farm privatised and modernised in the early 1990s. The site of the former camp in Hodonín is taken up by a privately owned holiday resort which has become a popular holiday destination since 1989.

For many years now, the sites of these two former concentration camps have been at the centre of a series of debates within and increasingly outside the Czech Republic. Czech and other Romani groups as well as their advocates want to remove both businesses to build decent memorials for an adequate recognition of the Romani Holocaust. Despite several attempts, however, Romani activists have so far been unsuccessful at removing the businesses.² Partly as a result of their ineffective attempts at the local and national level, they have recently 'Europeanised' their activism and collaborated with internationally operating Romani organisations to achieve more adequate recognition in the Lety and Hodonín cases, and for the Romani Holocaust in general. In their turn, European Union (EU) institutions have taken up the Czech cases and tried to assimilate the call for the recognition of the Romani Holocaust into their policies toward the Roma and their politics of European integration.

1 Ctibor Nečas, *The Holocaust of Czech Roma*, Prostor, Prague, 1999

2 Huub van Baar, recorded interviews with Čeněk Růžičká, chair of the *Výbor pro odškodnění romského holocaustu*, Prague, 8 November 2003, and with Petr Lhotka, historian at the *Muzeum romské kultury*, Brno, 26 November 2003. See also Gwendolyn Albert, 'Czech Romaphobia: Notes from the Last Decade', *Roma Rights*, no 2/3, 2006, pp 45–48.

The Czech Romani struggle for the recognition of their past and present, an extreme case, is no isolated incident in Europe. Despite the increasing visibility of Romani monuments, exhibitions, commemorations, films and various testimonies of Romani Holocaust survivors, European audiences are largely ignorant of the Romani Holocaust, at times even resistant to its recognition. A recent poll among Germans showed that 67% opposes the building of a Romani Holocaust monument in Berlin.³ An open discussion on the deportation and murder of thousands of Romanian Roma is still not possible in Romania. The existence of three concentration camps in wartime Italy and some twenty-five in France, primarily used for the persecution of Romani groups, is still neglected in historiographies of the Holocaust.

In the early 1990s, Katie Trumpener put forward the claim that the Roma are ‘a “people without history” in the narratives of the West’. She analysed nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels and stories to show that the Roma are often represented stereotypically and that these dominant artistic and cultural narratives deprive the Roma of a place in Western history.⁴ We could similarly ask whether the Roma are ‘a people without history’ in the memory landscape of the West, in particular the ‘memoryscape’ of the Holocaust in Europe. The demand for memorials in places such as Lety and Hodonín could be seen as an attempt by Romani activists to resist continued exclusion from society and history. These activists use the memory of persecution and extermination to undermine exclusionary practices toward the Roma.

Taking the Czech Romani example, I will consider whether the Europeanisation of Romani activism for Holocaust remembrance could effectively challenge such marginalising mechanisms. I will focus on the three main levels at which the discussion of the recognition of the Romani Holocaust has taken place. First, I analyse Czech Romani activists’ local inscription of Romani Holocaust memory in the Czech memoryscape as attempts to develop a Romani memorial culture and to challenge dominant Czech discourses on the Nazi genocide. Then, I discuss the framing of these attempts in public and governmental debates and their repeated displacement at the Czech national level. Finally, I analyse the ways in which EU institutions have taken up the Czech Romani case, partly due to lobbying and networking by Czech and other Romani organisations at a European level. I conclude by pointing to the ambivalences towards Romani Holocaust recognition and the way in which EU institutions have recently addressed the Romani Holocaust.

LOCAL ANAESTHETICS AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF ROMANI MEMORY

In an illuminating article on Romani identity-building in Central and Eastern Europe, the British sociologist Will Guy has argued that, due to ‘almost universal unemployment’ among the Roma in post-socialist societies:

Many Roma are forced daily to confirm the negative stereotype in local eyes as work-shy, scrounging thieves, while those who behave quite differently are nevertheless branded with the same image. All the time the

3 Valeriu Nicolae, quoted from Huub van Baar, “De angsten van toen bestaan nog steeds”: Roma en Sinti herdenken Auschwitz’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 128:31, 2004, p 18

4 Katie Trumpener, ‘The Time of the Gypsies: A “People without History” in the Narratives of the West’, *Critical Inquiry*, 18, summer 1992, pp 843–84

task of central governments in counteracting this denigratory labelling process with carefully-crafted schemes for multicultural education becomes all the harder.⁵

This link between stereotypical representation and governmental programmes is particularly relevant – in an even more radical way than Guy has suggested – when we look at the relation between the official Czech discourse on the Roma on the one hand and, on the other, the way in which the sites of the former concentration camps in Lety and Hodonín have been treated since 1989. Whereas many post-1989 Czech governmental programmes for the Roma have been framed in terms of multiculturalism and ‘integration with the preservation of identity’ and juxtaposed with Communist attempts to assimilate the Czech Romani population, the sites of the former camps have been literally assimilated in the rapidly industrialised post-Communist Czech countryside. Indeed, these sites have been fully incorporated in the Czech free-market economy. The businesses that currently occupy these locations have ‘consumed’ both Czech sites of Romani memory. The pig farm in Lety not only occupies the place where the Nazi concentration camp had been built, but also absorbs its entire surrounding area because it is about five times bigger than the former camp.⁶ Moreover, the stench that the farm usually produces permeates much of the area, including the location where the Romani monument is built.⁷ The farm belongs to the international company AGPI which owns about twenty well-equipped farms in the Czech Republic and is one of the most commercialised Czech sellers of pork and poultry meat, eggs, fertilisers and pesticides.

The holiday resort Žalov in Hodonín includes about twenty cottages, a restaurant, a playground, a swimming pool and one of the original camp barracks, which is used as a depository. The website of a Czech tourist information office recommends the Žalov resort to individual holidaymakers and youth camps. It has a total ‘capacity’ of seventy beds during wintertime and one hundred during the summer, much fewer than the 1200 ‘beds’ that the camp offered during wartime, resulting in severe health problems for the imprisoned Roma. Another tourist website, available in six languages, offers the opportunity to make an electronic reservation at Žalov, described as follows:

On the eastern edge of highland close to Bystřice pod Pernštějnem at a very nice sunny spot surrounded by wood our recreation facility offers you perfect conditions for family holiday, weekend and long term stays, schools in nature or seminars or courses... Full board with domestic cuisine gives you enough energy for sports in our area, e.g. volleyball or little football, table tennis. In summer you can be refreshed in solar warmed swimming pool with padding [sic] pool for kids. In winter there is ski lift 0,5 km long 1,5 km far from our facility. In the surroundings there are perfect conditions for cross-country skiing.⁸

Besides postcards of the holiday resort the owners of Žalov sell logs. A distressing example of how the site has been commercialised is the way in which the owners have ‘decorated’ the last remaining barrack. Advertising signs for their own timber trade and other internationally known brands, such as the tobacco company Marlboro and ice-cream producer Algida, hang on the outside wall of the barrack. The owners

5 Will Guy, ‘Romani Identity and Post-Communist Policy’, in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed Will Guy, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield, 2001, p 23

6 The Museum for Romani Culture in Brno has topographically investigated the site on the basis of historical surveying photographs that have been provided by the Czech Institute of Military Topography.

7 To avoid complaints about the noxious smell, the farm’s owner turns off air-conditioning on the day of the annual Romani commemoration. See Jarmila Balážová, ‘Lety po letech’, *Romano Vodí*, no 6, 2005.

8 This quotation is reproduced from the website verbatim, see: http://www.abc-hotel.cz/en/katalog_det-new.php?KID=265&cpFce=d.



Postcard for sale at the holiday resort Žalov on the site of the former Nazi concentration camp for Roma in Hodonín



Advertising signs at the last remaining barrack in Hodonín, photos: Huub van Baar, 2003

have recently stated that they want to get rid of the last remaining barrack. Partly due to protests from the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, this will probably not happen. The preservation of the barrack is important in light of the postwar history of the camp. After the war the camp was used for the collection of Germans to be extradited to Germany according to the so-called Beneš decrees; it was then turned into a forced labour camp for Czechoslovakian political prisoners in the 1950s; finally it was a children's camp during the twilight years of Communism.⁹

One of the most obvious consequences of the post-1989 tendency to obscure Romani memory is that it continues to be displaced: there seems to be no 'place' for Romani memory at the sites of the former Nazi concentration camps for the Roma. The arrival of the free-market economy in the Czech Republic has largely rendered the Roma 'useless' and reinforced stereotypes of them as 'unproductive'. At the same time, they face severe difficulty in occupying a place in the Czech memoryscape that could contribute to a better understanding of their current socioeconomic deprivation and its historical causes. The Romani memorial culture that emerged after the 1990s seems doomed to remain on the margins of Czech society. The Museum for Romani Culture, for instance, is located in what Czechs usually consider as the Romani ghetto in Brno, whilst the few monuments dedicated to the Romani Holocaust are located on the fringes of cemeteries and near the sites of both former concentration camps.

9 *Česká Tisková Kancelář* (ČTK), 'One barrack remains of Hodonín concentration camp', 6 June 2005



Symbolic references to the 'Romani nation' that are included in the Romani monuments at the cemetery by Lety in Mirovice (left) and in Hodonín (right), photos: Huub van Baar, 2003

Despite their displacement, the visual language of these memorials tries to challenge the suffocating logic of present-day Czech nationalism and racism. Both monuments at the cemetery in Lety and in Hodonín, made by Romani artists, include unambiguous references to the symbolism of the international Romani movement. The former integrates a broken wheel and the latter a wheel in the form of a horse halter fastened to the top of a cross. International Romani organisations and some of their national representatives have chosen the caravan wheel as the symbol uniting disparate Romani groups globally by reference to an alleged common history of travelling, migration and socioeconomic and cultural displacement.

'WE BUILD MEMORIALS TO THOSE WHO MANAGED TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING'

While the symbols of the international Romani movement are carefully inscribed on the local Czech Romani memorials, at the same time the monuments are hardly traceable in the Czech national memorial landscape. The road signs that indicate the location of the memorials have been made inconspicuous and use a dubious language. The signboard to the monument in Hodonín is rusty and much smaller than the multiple signposting to the holiday resort Žalov. The text on the signpost is 'the monument to the victims of the gypsy camp' (*památník obětí cikánského tábora*). This indication reiterates the official Nazi reference to concentration camps for the Roma as 'Gypsy camps' well after the term 'Gypsy' has become a politically incorrect reference to the Roma in most of Central and Eastern Europe.

The signboard in Lety even uses an entirely de-ethnicised language, simply referring to the 'Lety monument' (*památník Lety*). Moreover, the signpost leads only to the 'official' monument erected by the Czech national government in 1995 and does not indicate the location of the Romani memorial at the cemetery near Lety. If we understand not only monumentalisation but also signposting as effective tools that inscribe history and memory spatially, the situation in and around Lety and



Signposts to the former 'Gypsy camps' in Hodonín (left) and Lety (right), photos: Huub van Baar, 2003

Hodonín illustrates that Romani memory has been banished from the Czech memoryscape.

An analysis of post-1989 Czech public and governmental debates on Romani memory shows yet other ways in which it has continuously been displaced. National debates on the removal of the businesses in Lety and Hodonín have frequently led to outbursts of outrageous anti-Roma sentiments and even Romani Holocaust denial. In the late 1990s, for instance, a representative of the extreme-right Czech Republican Party (SPR-RSČ) declared that building monuments to the Roma would be ‘simply rudeness and an insult to all white citizens of this state’.¹⁰ This statement was part of the Republicans’ national election campaign which was extremely dismissive of the Roma and initiatives to improve their socioeconomic situation. They put up huge billboards throughout the country, which read: ‘The Republicans reject a privileged treatment of the gypsies.’

The most remarkable element of Czech national debates on Romani history and memory, however, is that their abuse has not been limited to the extremes of the political spectrum but is centred on the Czech political arena. Many political parties, as well as successive Czech presidents and prime ministers, have been involved in mobilising Romani memory for non-Romani interests, most notably in national elections. In 2005, Czech president Václav Klaus openly joined those who had questioned whether Lety and Hodonín were really concentration camps. Klaus declared:

[Lety] was originally a labour camp for those who refused to work, and not only for Romani people. It is really not a concentration camp in the sense in which we all subconsciously understand the words concentration camp and envision Auschwitz, Buchenwald and all that went with them. Of course many tragic things happened [in Lety]. But we understand that the victims of this camp primarily succumbed to an epidemic of spotted typhus, not due to what is traditionally understood as the fate of a concentration camp victim – at least according to what every child learns in school.¹¹

On the eve of the 2006 national elections, Czech premier Jiří Paroubek further politicised the Roma case. His Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) traditionally competes with Klaus’s Civic Democratic Party (ODS). Contrary to Klaus, Paroubek repeatedly declared that he was willing to think about the removal of the pig farm. He even wanted to ‘solve the issue’ before the elections of 2006 by purchasing the farm from the owner and removing it afterwards. Despite a number of Roma-friendly actions, however, Paroubek gradually postponed and finally cancelled his promise.

Both the president and the premier’s statements on Lety have revealed the exclusionary mechanisms in the national discourse on Romani memory and have enabled less moderate and mainstream political parties to radicalise the debate. In 2006, the Czech far-right National Party (NS) organised an aggressive election campaign against the Romani call for more adequate recognition and unveiled a ‘counter-monument’ which would have re-classified Lety as only a ‘labour camp’, not a ‘concentration camp’. Though the monument was removed soon after its turbulent unveiling – partly due to immediate Romani

10 Josef Krejsa, quoted from Rick Fawn, ‘Czech Attitudes towards the Roma’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53:8, 2001, p 1201

11 Petr Kolář, ‘Rozhovor týdne s prezidentem ČR hovořil: Václav Klaus’, *Lidové Noviny*, 14 May 2005, p 11

protests – the discussion on Romani memory was omnipresent in the Czech media for a few weeks. The Romani victims did not fight for Czech liberation, the NS's chairwoman Petra Edelmannová said. 'They were deported to the camp, because they were unwilling to work.' She told the Czech press that the Nazis had 'also' interned 'antisocial elements' in the camp, a dubious phrase for the Nazis used it as one among other categorisations to persecute the Roma. Edelmannová added that the Roma themselves were to blame for their deaths 'since they did not observe sanitary rules'.¹² She suggested that 'if one is not accustomed to observe hygiene and spreads infectious diseases, it is him or her who is more or less at fault'. She concluded that 'such people are not worthy of monuments; we build memorials to those who managed to achieve something'.¹³ In these statements the Nazi categories of 'anti-social', 'work-shy', 'unfit' and 'inferior' as well as the Nazi typology of 'labour camps', 'Gypsy camps' and 'concentration camps' are used to invert the causes and effects of the Nazi persecution of the Roma and mobilised to blame the victims and the Romani struggle for equal representation. Any reiteration of the Nazi terminological distinction between 'labour camps', 'Gypsy camps', 'transit camps', 'concentration camps' and 'extermination camps' neglects the way in which forced labour was an integral part of the Nazi policy to 'Aryanise' large parts of Europe and gradually became an essential part of the Nazi extermination policy.

The expressions of anti-Roma feelings in Czech society cannot be isolated from the larger European context. Indeed, Klaus, Paroubek and Edelmannová's statements about Lety followed efforts by Czech Romani groups and their advocates to 'Europeanise' their activism and bring their case to the attention of European institutions, the EU in particular. Due to intensive Romani networking and lobbying, the European Parliament (EP) called on EU institutions and member states in 2005 to recognise the Romani Holocaust, 'to take all necessary steps to remove the pig farm from the site of the former concentration camp at Lety... and to create a suitable memorial'.¹⁴ After the adoption of this European Parliament resolution, Klaus immediately condemned the call as an interference in Czech domestic affairs. He declared that the Czech Republic, not the EU, will decide on what will eventually happen to the farm in Lety. A Czech member of the EP claimed that 'there has never been any genuine concentration camp there'. Both his and Klaus's statements have culminated in a series of ongoing Czech national debates on Romani memory.¹⁵

Attempts by political analysts and scholars to explain the relation between Romani interests and Czech nationalism and racism against the Roma have often focused on Czech domestic affairs, Czech history and EU pressures on successive Czech governments. Whereas such analyses could offer a better insight into the present-day situation, they could also lead to the ambiguous suggestion that Czechs are Romaphobic and that the EU represents liberal and human ideals. On the basis of this representation of the EU, the Union is understood as the social agent that could morally and logistically resolve the amnesia concerning the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of starting by juxtaposing Czech and EU interests and scaling the EU level above the Czech national or local one, however, we need to extend the scope of the analysis to the

12 Note how this statement is similar to President Klaus's opinion that the victims of Lety 'primarily succumbed to an epidemic of spotted typhus', Kolář, *op cit*, p 11.

13 Edelmannová, quoted from ČTK, 'Nationalists' plan for memorial in Lety is provocation', 12 January 2006; ČTK, 'Romanies expect police to act against NS's Lety plan', 13 January 2006.

14 European Parliament, *Resolution on the Situation of the Roma in the European Union*, Brussels, 28 April 2005, §G

15 When the new Czech premier Mirek Topolánek said that the government supports the construction of a new Romani memorial near the farm in Lety, but does not want to move the farm, this was considered breaking news on 11 April 2007 at PigProgress.net, a web portal on 'global pig production', available at: <http://www.pigprogress.net>.

wider context of the ongoing 'Europeanisation' of Roma representation, the discourse of European integration and recent EU attempts to reconsider its own Cold War 'founding narratives'.

THE POLITICS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE MOBILISATION OF HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

In postwar Western Europe, anti-Nazism and anti-Communism were central discursive and strategic frames for the European Community's search for peace and stability. In socialist Central and Eastern Europe, the discourse of anti-fascism profoundly shaped the anti-Western and anti-capitalist attitude. The memorial landscapes of the Holocaust were forcefully Sovietised and inscribed within the rhetoric of anti-fascism and Communist martyrdom. In most Socialist war memorials the representation of the war histories of the Jews and the Roma was downplayed or purposely neglected. Instead, most of the memorials celebrated de-ethnicised 'Communist' resistance groups and soldiers of the Red Army as those who had beaten the 'fascist tyranny' and finally brought peace and stability to the Socialist states. Communism was consequently understood as the true force behind the collapse of Nazism and as the sole source of postwar peace. Simultaneously, the Communists tried to universalise and externalise fascism as something that was always latent in the capitalist world order of the West, not only before and during the Second World War but also afterwards.

The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1948–1989) was no exception to this rule. After the war, speaking publicly of the Romani Holocaust became taboo. The sites of the former 'Gypsy camps' at Lety and Hodonín were radically ignored. A number of punitive and segregating practices relating to the Nazi persecution of the Roma, such as forced sterilisation and settlement as well as exclusion from the mainstream school system, were gradually reinstalled according to the emerging Socialist ideology to weaken 'anti-revolutionary forces' and change the 'primitive gypsy way of life with all its bad habits' into a productive workforce.¹⁶

However, when the European Community reached relative stability at the end of the 1980s and Communism fell, neither the symbolism of East European anti-fascism nor that of West European anti-Communism could function as a founding transnational narrative of European integration. New founding 'myths' and narratives were and are still needed to foster, revitalise and continue the project of European integration.¹⁷ Since these narratives have a crucial function in creating unity and stability in the growing EU, their symbolic scope also needs to encompass Central and Eastern European audiences, histories and memories. As Dan Diner argues:

... the commemoration of the Holocaust is increasingly becoming the core of a unifying European memory, thus giving constitution building in Europe the necessary symbolic foundation... The commemoration of the Holocaust... is not only a source of symbolic legitimacy but also of political action and values, such as the rejection of racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.¹⁸

16 Czechoslovak Socialist Government, *Práce mezi cikánským obyvatelstvem, Úřad předsednictva vlády*, Prague, 1959, p 28, quoted from Will Guy, 'The Czech Lands and Slovakia: Another False Dawn?', in *Between Past and Future*, ed Will Guy, op cit, p 290.

17 Lothar Probst, 'Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust', *New German Critique*, 90, autumn 2003, pp 45–58

18 Dan Diner, 'Haider und der Schutzreflex Europas', *Die Welt*, 26 February 2000, paraphrased by Lothar Probst, op cit, p 53 (the quote is reproduced verbatim from Probst).

In particular, the issue of how Holocaust remembrance could be a source of political action has recently become relevant in the EU's approach to culture and cultural policy. Over the last decade, we have been able to observe a gradual shift in the EU's way of dealing with cultural affairs from conceptualising culture primarily in symbolic terms to instrumentalising it in governmental terms.¹⁹ This governmental approach is based on 'the belief that ways of life can be acted on through the governmental deployment of artistic and cultural resources'.²⁰ Cultural practices are considered as instruments to achieving specific aims and targets, such as European integration and the increase of the EU's global competitiveness. In particular, EU institutions try to mobilise and utilise various cultural practices and programmes to help individuals to transform into actively participating 'European citizens'. The mobilisation of culture in the EU implies a deployment of such practices for the more effective management and integration of (parts of) the European population, including Europe's 'minorities'.

We can observe a similar trend in the context of memorial practices and Holocaust remembrance. The 2005 resolution of the EP on the Roma in the EU, which calls for the removal of the farm in Lety, refers to another recent EP resolution:

[The EP] pays homage to all the victims of the Nazis and is convinced that lasting peace in Europe must be based on remembrance of its history; rejects and condemns revisionist views and denial of the Holocaust as shameful and contrary to historical truth... [The EP] urges the [European] Council and the [European] Commission, as well as the various levels of local, regional and national government in the [EU] Member States, to coordinate their measures to combat... attacks on minority groups including Roma... in the Member States, in order to uphold the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination and to promote social, economic and political integration.²¹ [emphasis added]

This resolution links the remembrance of the Holocaust to the promotion of social, economic and political integration of the Roma in the EU. In other words, the Union mobilises the remembrance of the Holocaust in order to achieve its aim of European integration. The EU considers remembrance, Holocaust education and promoting dialogue among diverse communities as vital instruments to 'make intolerance, discrimination and racism a thing of the past'. The Union also encourages its members to create a 'European Holocaust Memorial Day', to use Holocaust memorial institutions, such as the Auschwitz museum, to reinforce Holocaust education and to make Holocaust education and 'European citizenship' standard elements in school curricula throughout the Union. The means of remembrance, education and intercultural dialogue, which are assembled in the EP resolutions, need to be introduced into the curricula of schools, museums, cultural venues, commemorations and the like. The memorial practices are understood here as 'embodied mediums for changing the conduct of individuals and social groups, and thereby as means of addressing problems of discrimination and social exclusion'.²²

The reason why the EU's mobilisation of Holocaust remembrance for integrative aims also affects the Roma has to do with another, more general and widespread tendency to Europeanise the representation of the Roma. From the early 1990s onward, European institutions, Romani

19 Clive Barnett, 'Culture, Policy, and Subsidiarity in the European Union: From Symbolic Identity to the Governmentalisation of Culture', *Political Geography*, 20:4, 2001, p 411

20 Tony Bennett, 'Acting on the Social: Art, Culture, and Government', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43:9, 2000, p 1420

21 European Parliament, *Resolution on Remembrance of the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism and Racism*, Brussels, 27 January 2005, §1, §3, emphasis added

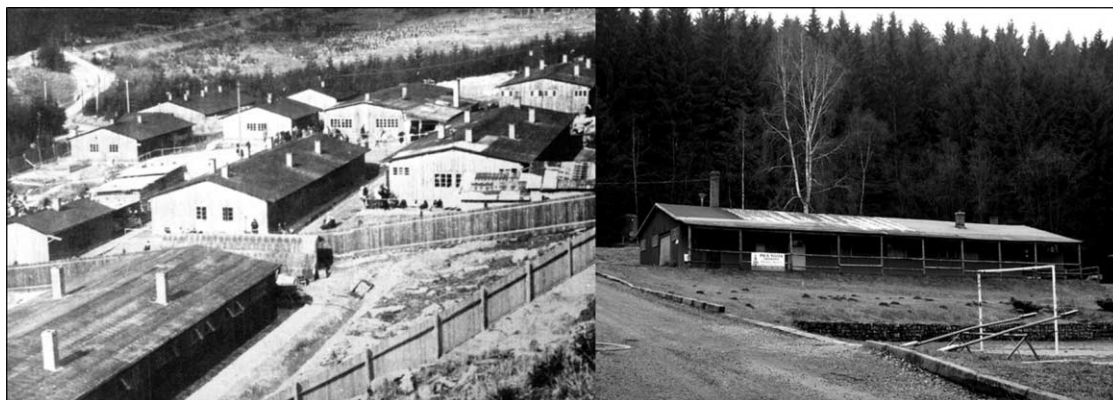
22 Barnett, op cit, pp 419–20

groups and associations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, scholars and various media have increasingly ethnicised the Roma and represented them as a homogenous European minority. European institutions have explicitly framed the Roma as a European or even a ‘truly European’ minority.²³ The EP, for instance, has recently called for their recognition as ‘a European minority’ and for their integration into ‘Europe’.²⁴ Largely due to the negotiations over the entry of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU, European institutions have simultaneously approached the Roma in terms of European integration. These institutions, and the EU in particular, have gradually developed a Roma-related policy and strongly encouraged Central and Eastern European governments to do the same on a national and sub-national level, mostly as a prerequisite of EU membership. Attention to the Roma as a European minority and as part of the politics of European integration has also brought to the fore more explicitly the Roma’s relation to European history, and the Holocaust in particular. Romani activist and advocacy groups have capitalised on this ‘momentum’ for a more adequate recognition of their current and past situation in a European context. For various reasons, however, it is doubtful whether the recent confluence between Europeanising Roma representation and deploying Romani Holocaust remembrance for the purposes of EU integration could really challenge the widespread neglect of Romani history and memory in Europe.

ROOM FOR REMEMBRANCE?

- 23 Council of Europe, ‘Gypsies in Europe’, Recommendation 1203, Strasbourg, 1993; European Commission, ‘Brussels Declaration: The Roma – A Truly European People’, Brussels, 1996
- 24 European Parliament, *Resolution on the Situation of the Roma in the European Union*, Brussels, 28 April 2005, § 2, § 6, § 24

The Europeanisation of Roma representation has undeniably led to an increased attention to the difficult and often deteriorating situation in which a substantial number of Roma live in Europe. In this context, the linkage of the Roma’s past and present in current EU discourses, policies and practices is a welcome contribution to the struggle of Romani activists and their advocates to get more adequate recognition for the Romani Holocaust. EU approaches toward Romani groups throughout the Continent, Central and Eastern Europe in particular, have been developed along with the representation of the Roma as a



The ‘Zigeunerlager’ (‘Gypsy camp’) in Hodonín in 1942 (left) and the last remaining barrack (right), used as a depository, in the holiday resort Žalov, photo (left): Museum of Romani Culture, Brno, Czech Republic; photo (right): Huub van Baar, 2003

homogenous European minority that has accordingly become approachable in terms of a distinct group to be integrated in European societies. On the one hand, the Europeanisation of Roma representation, also by Romani agents, has enabled Romani groups and their advocates to mobilise European fora, such as EU institutions, to address the Roma's plight throughout Europe, including the disregard of their situation in European and national histories. New EU member states need to watch their steps now that – partly due to processes of Europeanisation – Romani activists, international advocacy and human rights groups and European institutions have become increasingly alert to various kinds of violations of the rights of the Roma.

On the other hand, however, the construction of the Roma as a homogenous ethnic European minority that faces large-scale exclusion risks promoting a stereotypical image of the Roma as an un-integrated group or even a group that actively resists attempts to include it in mainstream society. Focusing on the Roma as a homogenised European minority and on the necessity to integrate this minority population into mainstream European societies disregards those Roma who are 'integrated'. Even more importantly, it ignores the complex mechanisms that have historically led to the exclusion of many Roma. This threat is all the more relevant since the representation of the Roma as marginal and asocial outsiders who are themselves responsible for the situation in which they live is still the most common stereotype of the Roma. Promoting a 'pan-European Roma problem of integration' could easily become counter-productive and be abused for other reasons, as the contribution of various Czech social agents to the debate on Romani memory has illustrated. More generally, this important effect is associated with all Romani identity politics that remains uncritical of the discussed risk:

Romani activists can make their voice heard successfully by engaging in identity politics and asserting Romani identity as the main focus of political action, but in doing so they run the risk of reifying, politicizing, and perhaps even intensifying the boundary between minority and majority identities. A simplified reification of the Roma as a coherent and clearly identifiable group with common attributes (such as economic marginality, common culture, common descent, specific traits, a single ethnic identity, and so on) not only missed the power to mobilize people in a unified movement, but it also fails to overcome the powerful negative valuations of Romani identity that are present in society at large.²⁵

In this respect, the EU's deployment of Romani Holocaust remembrance may be particularly dangerous because its mobilisation for integrative aims could suggest that the Roma have 'always' lived in isolation and that their far-reaching socioeconomic and cultural segregation under Nazism was not the effect but the cause of their persecution. In the latter case, it would appear that their segregation was not due to socioeconomic and cultural mechanisms of exclusion, but simply to a group characteristic. Put differently, the mobilisation of Romani Holocaust remembrance may be dangerous because it 'temporalises' or even 'universalises' the stereotypical images of the Roma as a group reluctant to be integrated. If attention to the Romani Holocaust fails to address the multifaceted processes through which the Roma were first

25 Peter Vermeersch, 'Marginality, Advocacy, and the Ambiguities of Multiculturalism: Notes on Romani Activism in Central Europe', *Identities*, 12:4, 2005, p 454

stigmatised as antisocial, 'work-shy', unfit and inferior and then singled out for separation, deportation and extermination, we will be blind to the historical circumstances under which marginalisation occurs. An inadequate consideration of the exclusionary practices that led to genocide also has far-reaching consequences for the possibility of addressing current forms of exclusion. Indeed, any one-sided attention to the 'final results' of the Nazi treatment of the Roma in the form of a focus on concentration camps implies a risk that processes of homogenisation and exclusion inherent to current EU approaches toward the Roma are also overlooked.

Therefore, Romani groups and their advocates need to be critical of how they Europeanise their activism and how EU institutions receive and translate their networking and lobbying. These issues are also relevant to the Czech cases. The removal of the farm and the holiday resort and the erection of memorials will not be helpful to the Roma unless the mechanisms of the Roma's exclusion and marginalisation are addressed simultaneously. From the mid-1990s onward, various social agents have suggested that the expensive removal of the businesses in Lety and Hodonín, and the subsequent building of monuments, is much less important than educational, housing and employment projects for the Roma. One of the main aims of this essay has been to argue for an inter-linking of forms of the Roma's displacement in both socioeconomic and memorial contexts. Therefore, any either-or-ism is misleading and will not lead to a feasible solution. The risk is that Lety and Hodonín remain isolated sites of two rather small former Nazi concentration camps. They ought to become powerful symbols of the past and current mechanisms of the Roma's marginalisation throughout Europe as well as strong tools in the hand of the Roma to expose and challenge these mechanisms.