Romani Identity Formation and the Globalization of Holocaust Discourse

Huub van Baar

A Dialectic of the Local and the Global

Over the last decade, there has been a growing tendency among Romani elites and organizations to participate in a globalized holocaust discourse to deal with processes of Romani identity formation. This article scrutinizes the consequences of this participation by focusing on debates about the role of the Nazi genocide of the Roma in these processes of identity formation, and by analyzing the exhibition on the extermination of the European Roma in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in particular. As we will see below, from this analysis arises the general question of how the processes of Romani identity formation in general, and their reliance on the Roma’s various histories of marginalization and persecution in particular, have to deal with their own specificity.¹

The visitor to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland who follows the route suggested in the museum’s guidebook will end her or his tour with a visit to the recently established permanent exhibition on the extermination of the European Roma. This exhibition is located in barrack 13 of the former Auschwitz I extermination camp (the so-called Stammlager). The barrack is the last one on the recommended route along the fifteen camp barracks that together make up the museum’s exhibition. Established in August 2001, the exhibition on the Roma marks a rather unique part of the museum’s exhibitions. For the first time in the museum’s history, a particular exhibition has been dedicated to the suffering of the Roma. Moreover, since it was realized by various national Romani organizations, it can be considered as one of the first opportunities for Romani self-representation at such an internationally important site of memory.² At the moment of its establishment the exhibition was the most modern and remarkable exhibition of the museum, and it still is in
many ways. Moreover, besides the exhibition titled “Struggle and Martyrdom of the Jews,” it is the only permanent exhibition not dedicated to a particular nation-state. From this point of view, the Jewish and Romani exhibitions break with the museum’s tradition to present its exhibitions along the lines of the nation-state. Furthermore, the Romani exhibition is established in the barrack in which the exhibitions on Denmark and the German Democratic Republic were housed in the past. Like Bulgaria, these countries are no longer represented in the museum. Once we realize the implications of these changes, we are in the midst of a discussion on the past, present, and future of holocaust remembrance, and its interrelationship with debates on nationalism, globalization, and identity politics.

The removal of the former exhibitions in barrack 13 belongs to a long history of various removals and renewals. The exhibitions were already re-organized during communism. The first Hungarian exhibition, for instance, was established in 1960, and new or restyled ones replaced it in 1970, 1980, and 2004 successively. Hence, the Romani exhibition belongs to a whole series of new and renewed exhibitions (cf. van Baar, “Memorial Work”). The tendency to change the exhibitions regularly indicates that we have to be attentive to “how much forgetting is always entailed in the production of memory” (Sayer 16). Not only does this imply that the production of memory can intentionally or unintentionally coincide with the erasure of other memories that were produced in the past, it also implies that memory can be considered as a very particular regulation of remembering and forgetting. When we analyze the institutions involved in memory production, we need to be aware of the ways in which memory intrinsically implies selection and, therefore, oblivion as well. Hence, we need to scrutinize which kinds of regulation and selection the exhibited materials embody and the extent to which both are related to concrete socio-cultural and political developments.

Undoubtedly among these developments are the nationalization and globalization of memory and of holocaust memory in particular. The museum’s guidebook mentions the Romani exhibition at the top of a list of “national exhibitions.” This is all the more interesting when we realize that Romani elites and organizations are striving for the recognition of the Roma as a nation at a European level. The declaration of the Romani nation, presented by the International Romani Union (IRU) at its fifth world congress in Prague in 2000, says in its first paragraph:

We, a Nation of which over half a million persons were exterminated in a forgotten Holocaust, a Nation of individuals too often discriminated, marginalized, victim of intolerance and persecutions, we have a dream, and we are engaged in fulfilling it. We are a Nation, we share the same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation. We have never looked for creating a Roma State. And we do not want a State today, when the new society and the new economy are concretely and progressively crossing-over the importance and the adequacy of the
State as the way how individuals organize themselves. (qtd. verbatim in Acton and Klímová 216)

Notwithstanding the unclear status of the IRU among the Roma and the questions raised by both Roma and non-Roma on whether all Romani communities do indeed share what has been stated here, the declaration is remarkable for its reference to Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech and for its use of the concept of “a nation without a state” as a post-nation-state formation. Within the scope of this article, however, it is most important to note that the unity of the Romani nation is first and foremost associated with the holocaust and the Roma’s long history of suffering, and, at the same time, with their shared tradition, culture, origin, and language. This is in line with what Romani intellectuals such as Andrzej Mirga and Nicolae Gheorghe consider to be the way in which Romani national consciousness is created. Romani political elites “advanced other elements of the concept of nation; the common roots of the Romani people, their common historical experiences and perspectives, and the commonality of culture, language, and social standing. The experience of the Porrajmos, the Romani holocaust during World War II, played an important role in providing the Romani diaspora with its sense of nationhood” (Mirga and Gheorghe n. pag.). This quote clarifies that the IRU’s link between Romani national identity and the Roma’s Second World War history is not a singular one. Throughout Europe, and Eastern Europe in particular, there is an increasing tendency among Romani elites and organizations to refer to the genocide of the Roma alongside the Jewish holocaust on the one hand, and to rely on holocaust references in Romani identity building processes on the other (cf. Kapralski, “Auschwitz”; “Identity Building”).

These references to the Jewish holocaust are part of a worldwide tendency to speak in terms of “forgotten,” “other,” “unknown,” or “new” holocausts. Whoever browses the website www.holocaustforgotten.com, for example, finds information on the Nazi mass murder of the Roma, homosexuals, the disabled, Black Africans, Jehovah’s witnesses, and Poles. Moreover, the term “holocaust” is not exclusively used for the mass murders during the Second World War and on the European continent. Events in different periods and on various continents are increasingly framed as holocausts: e.g. the mass murder of the Herero by the Germans in Namibia in 1905; the one of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915–16; Stalinism in general; the massacre in Nanking, where Japanese soldiers slaughtered Chinese civilians in 1937; the violent displacement of the Palestinians in 1948; and the brutal reductions of the indigenous populations of the Americas and Australia. Furthermore, recent large-scale ethnic cleansings, such as the ones in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and the Sudanese province of Darfur, are referred to as holocausts as well. Without judging the value of these holocaust references, all of them rely on a comparison with the Jewish holocaust in one way or another, while simultaneously trying to certify their own specificity. Because of this increasing tendency to use the
holocaust as “a universal trope for historical trauma,” Andreas Huyssen has suggested to speak of a “globalization of Holocaust discourse” (23). As he wrote, this discourse concerns a dialectic of the local and the global. A global awareness of similarities between present and past holocaust-related events has emerged from the local events in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, while past or present violent local conflicts could be mediated and identified as “holocausts” or “genocides” by the very existence of something like a globalized discourse. In the case of the Roma, however, as in those of the disabled and homosexuals, we have a paradoxical situation. While their sufferings during the war were spatio-temporally conflated with those of the Jews, though neglected for decades, both the spread of knowledge about the Nazi genocide of the Roma and the public identity derived from it are highly dependent on a general discourse in which disjunctive holocausts are presented as “of the same kind.” When spatio-temporally different events are formally lumped together under the term “holocaust,” each loses some of its specificity. In order to analyze the consequences of such a loss, we first have to scrutinize the ways in which holocaust discourse operates globally.

The Globalization of Holocaust Discourse: Three Stages

Over the last two decades, the scope of holocaust discourse has widened through the various controversies about how it could and should be represented. Events such as the establishment of holocaust and genocide studies centers in different countries, the opening of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993, the controversies around various artistic representations of the holocaust, the post-1989 rise of international tourism to the former Nazi camps, and the organization of international holocaust conferences, are but a few of the ways in which holocaust discourse achieved its actual form. Paradoxically, the de-nationalization of holocaust discourse started with its Americanization. The debates surrounding the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum exemplarily illustrate what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider have called the “loss of the monopoly position of the heroic national narrative” in favor of “a skeptic self-reflexive cosmopolitan” holocaust discourse (234). The museum has been criticized for various reasons, which can roughly be summarized under three different types of critique. First, because the museum pays little attention to holocausts other than the Jewish one, it has been criticized for privileging the latter. Second, since the museum emphasizes the liberation of the Nazi death camps by American soldiers, through its prominent representation at the very entrance of the permanent exhibition, some critics have considered it one-sided and have accused the museum of nationalizing the holocaust. Finally, since the route through the museum and the representation of “the stages of suffering” in particular recall Christ’s Via Dolorosa, the museum has finally been accused of the Christianization of the holocaust (cf. Young, Texture of Memory; Linenthal; Finkelstein).
Yet, although the Americanization of the holocaust has certainly resulted in its nationalization, from the very beginning the museum’s project has also been presented as something larger than American life. Because, firstly, it universalized America’s Bill of Rights and then considered the Nazi crimes as its ultimate violation, the Holocaust Memorial Museum could be defended as an institution beyond the national scope and with universal value (cf. Young, *Texture of Memory* 336). The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, which was responsible for the museum’s project, expressed its approach as follows: “An event of universal significance, the Holocaust has special importance for Americans: in act and word the Nazis denied the deepest tenets of the American people” (qtd. in Young, *Texture of Memory* 337). From this point of view, the museum’s adaptation of the holocaust to American secular Christianity did no more than effectively link American citizens to the universal “holocaust story,” resulting in both the deterritorialization and universalization of holocaust discourse, albeit in American-centric forms. I consider this the first of three interrelated stages in which holocaust discourse has started to become globalized.

The second stage, which is not strictly separated from the first one, is dominated by the more popular understanding of Americanization as commercialization. Holocaust memory has become inextricably bound up with its distribution by mass media. Therefore, we cannot discuss issues related to holocaust discourse without taking into consideration the various ways in which it is globally commodified. Over the last few decades, the U.S.-dominated mediascape has effectively been transformed into a global one, in which “the holocaust” has become a large-scale consumable product. However, unlike Theodor W. Adorno suggested in his critique of mass culture, commodification does not amount to forgetting, and holocaust commodification does not necessarily amount to banalizing the original historic events and their traumatic consequences. Phenomena like autobiographical, artistic, and academic holocaust representations, as well as international tourism to the former Nazi camps, war relics, and museums cannot simply be split into serious and “trivial” memory. Instead, these phenomena “compel us to think traumatic memory and entertainment memory together as occupying the same public space, rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive phenomena” (Huyssen 29).

The encoding of holocaust memory implies the production and reproduction of images and narratives that can be transported by global mass media, which does not necessarily entail the homogenization of memory. The globalization of culture, and of holocaust discourse in particular, “is not the same as its homogenization, but globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization . . . that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues . . . in which the state plays an increasingly delicate role” (Appadurai 42). To understand the full-scale political and cultural impact of both the
aforementioned aspects of the Americanization of holocaust discourse, we thus need to reflect on the ways in which globally commodified holocaust memory is decoded locally, e.g. nationally or regionally. Indeed, “the political site of memory practices is still national, not postnational or global” (Huyssen 26, original emphasis). This means we need to analyze not only local memorial practices such as the Romani exhibition in Auschwitz, but also the extent to which international political decisions are influenced or even controlled by the ways in which globalized holocaust memory is decoded nationally, and then re-encoded globally. To do the latter, we first need to explain the way in which the first two stages are transversally linked with a third one in the process of the full globalization of holocaust discourse.

Huyssen, Levy, and Szaider emphasize the overriding importance of the massacres in Bosnia for a decisive turn in holocaust discourse. The images of the Serbian “death camp” in Omarska that swept the world’s television screens in 1992 convinced the global audience that it had to worry about a “new” holocaust on the European continent. When we analyze the different national debates that the Bosnian war unleashed, like Levy and Szaider did for the American, German, and Israeli ones, we notice that the Bosnian war was increasingly framed in holocaust terms. Simultaneously, many of the national debates started to focus on the issue of intervention and the violation of human rights, while the passive spectator mentality was increasingly interpreted as a failure of the national governments (and the U.N.) to fulfill their moral duty. Hence, the ways in which the Bosnian war and its interrelated holocaust references were decoded nationally, as in the cases of the Rwandan and the Kosovo conflicts later on, were charged with morality and closely related to compliance with the Charter of the United Nations. This is what characterizes the third stage of the globalization of holocaust discourse: its moral encoding. Admittedly, holocaust discourse was always intimately related to morality. What has changed is the way in which it is globally deployed to denounce violations of human rights, and how it becomes intrinsically linked with the International Charter of the United Nations. Hence, in the third stage, a further deterritorialization and universalization take place, and by linking holocaust discourse to the general frame of human rights, entirely other post- or neo-colonial contexts could be incorporated in the discourse as well. However, the more “universal” and deterritorialized holocaust discourse becomes, the more important it becomes for the groups in question to develop a strategy to relate their own case to the globalized discourse effectively.

Levy and Szaider suggest that such strategies bring together victimhood and morality in a particular way:

The oppressed have to be “guiltless”, and those who violate human rights, have to be “evil”. Nazis and Jews form the constituents of this new global religion. Consequently, those who claim that their human rights are violated, have to relate their suffering to the one of the Jews, and have to bring the perpetrators symbolically
at the level of the Nazis. . . . The holocaust has become a universal “container” of memories of indistinguishable victims. It has resulted in “the globalization of evil.”

This strategy of claiming victimhood could explain why it is meaningful for Romani elites and organizations to inscribe Romani history in a globalized holocaust discourse.

Yet, Dimitrina Petrova, executive director of the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), claims that, “while we see very little in-fighting and a tendency to strong consensus among Roma over human rights issues, identity issues are increasingly sensitive and controversial. . . . The struggle over identity at this stage does not unite the Roma in Europe. Is identity then the dividing principle, as opposed to Human Rights?” (4). This question could be answered negatively, once we accept that Romani identity building and its reliance on a globalized holocaust discourse are now intrinsically linked with a call for the compliance with human rights. This link returns in the IRU’s declaration, which, as we saw above, starts by relating the Romani nation to the holocaust and ends by connecting their nation to the U.N. Charter: “We, the Roma Nation, have something to share, right by asking for a representation, respect, implementation of the existing International Charter on Human Rights, so that each individual can look at them as at existing, concrete warranties for her or his today and future” (qtd. verbatim in Acton and Klímová 217). The question remains how the inscription in a globalized holocaust discourse actually works in the Roma’s case. Therefore, in the next section, I return to the Romani exhibition to analyze in detail a particular example of such an inscription.

Cultivating Victimhood and Periodizing History in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

The Romani exhibition is roughly divided into two parts. The room visitors enter first has a floor that is raised thirty centimeters. The displays in this space concern, on the one hand, the rise of National Socialism and its implications for the Roma and, on the other, the history of the persecution and deportation of the Roma state by state. This central room is diagonally placed on the “original” floor of the barrack and does not touch its outer walls. The thirty-centimeter-high floor in its turn has two levels: the upper consists of grey nature stone tiles, the lower of orange-brown bricks, which resemble the barrack walls seen from outside. The soft, orange-colored and orange-lighted panels that display documents and photographs from the pre-war period stand on the highest level, while the steel elements that display documents and photographs concerning the wartime period stand on the lower floor (cf. Figure 1). The visitor who leaves the latter level enters the second part of the exhibition at the same time: it has been put on the original floor, which has been painted white. The panels that stand on this floor predominantly concern the Roma’s suffering in...
Auschwitz and their extermination. The catalogue explains the exhibition’s structure as follows:

The central room, which stands for the persecuted people, does not blend in well with the existing architecture and also stands in contradiction to the original room in every respect: the axes of both rooms are not identical, here pleasant, safe forms, there hard and severe forms, here warm, earthy colours, there cold blue-white, here faces of people, laughter and family life, there typewritten documents of the captors. The wedge-shaped steel elements as symbols of persecution and violence dissect the central room, gliding more or less on the invisible axes of the original room and finally break it up completely. (Rose 317)

While the exhibition has been well-designed and thoughtfully created, I would like to make some critical remarks with reference to my earlier reflections on the globalization of holocaust discourse.

First of all, it is striking that the pre-war past is almost exclusively represented by photographs and brief explanatory captions. These images are predominantly portraits and group photographs of families, school classes, sports clubs, bands, and little orchestras. Few images show working Roma, and only very few are shots of Romani villages or caravan dwellers. Since the displayed photographs are mainly snapshots of members of Romani elites on holidays, the part of the exhibition that
concerns the pre-war period mostly shows peacefully and harmoniously living individuals and groups all over the represented European countries. Furthermore, these images are not complemented by texts other than the brief captions (cf. Figure 2). Hence, the visitor passes by images from the pre-war period from which poverty, hard times, the differences between various regional groups, and national forms of marginalization or persecution different from the Nazi ones, are practically excluded. The omission of the latter, in particular, creates a radical, inaccurate contrast between the pre-war and the wartime period. By underrepresenting anti-Roma measures taken in pre-war European countries other than Nazi Germany, the Roma from the countries that are included in the exhibition become indistinguishable victims of one and the same brutal aggressor that occupied their “peaceful” nations.

In fact, a lot of European countries took restrictive measures with regard to their Romani populations, in particular in the interwar period. To mention but a few examples: a Czechoslovakian law from 1927 “condemned the Roma as asocial citizens, limited their personal liberty, introduced Gypsy identity cards, and decreed that Romani children under 18 be placed in special institutions” (Barany 99; cf. Nečas 41); a Hungarian law from 1928 “ordained semiannual Gypsy police raids in order to weed out the criminal and parasitic elements from the Romani communities. As in Czechoslovakia, special regulations required the fingerprinting and registration of all

Figure 2  Images of pre-wartime Roma in the former Czechoslovakia (Huub van Baar, 2003).
Roma” (Barany 100; cf. Szabolcs 38). From the 1920s onwards, Ante Pavelić's Croatian Ustaša-movement increasingly endangered the position of Roma and Jews in the former Yugoslavia, while during the Second World War the pro-Nazi Ustaše-regime was responsible for the extermination of about 25,000 Roma, mainly in the camps surrounding the Croatian town of Jasenovac (cf. Acković; Glenny; Reinhartz). Furthermore, countries such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands had already taken restrictive measures against Roma and other travelers during the migration waves at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Hubert; Gotovitch; Lucassen). These national differences and local anti-Roma sentiments and measures are underrepresented in the exhibition, creating the impression of a homogeneous European Romani people, which began to suffer as soon as, but not before the moment Nazi terror penetrated the occupied countries. In this particular conception of their victimhood, any possible aggressive element against the Roma is excluded from the non-German national territory and history, and projected abroad. The good and peaceful nations on the one hand, and the evil and foreign aggressor on the other are largely polarized and a moral logic à la Levy and Snaider’s appears.

What is true for the pre-war period is also true for the post-war period. By displaying the wartime period on steel elements into which the related documents and photographs are entirely integrated (the pictures are not fixed onto, but reproduced on the panels themselves), it seems that the memory of the wartime is guaranteed “forever” (cf. Figure 3). However, when we consider post-war and current situations in many European countries, we can easily list a number of local cases in which it is questionable whether the memory of the Roma’s war history is safeguarded at all. One of the most delicate examples is the neglect by the Czech authorities of the former Roma concentration camps in Lety and Hodonín (cf. Nečas; Pape; van Baar, “The Way out of Amnesia?”). At the sites of these former camps stand a pig farm and a cottage park respectively. It is even worse in some of the Balkan countries. The mass graves of both Roma and Jews in Transnistria in today’s Moldova, to which about 25,000 Romanian Roma were deported by the Antonescu regime, are still hushed up by local and national authorities (cf. Crowe; Heim; Kelso; Mihok). Last but not least, the Bosnian wars of the 1990s have radically disturbed the museum that was established in 1968 at the site of the former Jasenovac camp at the border of today’s Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. From 1991 to 1995 Serbian soldiers occupied this site. Afterwards, the area was mined and part of the museum’s collection has been ‘removed’ to Belgrade.

The topicality of this issue leads me to another point. Objects, documents, and photographs that depict the lives and suffering of the Roma in the pre-war and wartime period are relatively scarce; they mainly concern the elites or are based on what remains from the Nazi administration. Moreover, only very few Romani war testimonies
and diaries are known (among the few exceptions are Bernáth; Hübschmannová; Meijer; Lacková; Danielová, Zajoncová and Haragal’ová). Memory related to the war period is consequently largely dependent on oral testimonies from a rapidly decreasing number of survivors and representatives of the following generations. Therefore, Romani holocaust memory relies increasingly on what Marianne Hirsch and James Young have respectively termed “postmemory” and a “vicarious past” (Hirsch; Young, Memory’s Edge). The Romani exhibition in Auschwitz has excluded such references, instead attempting to provide what Andrew Hoskins calls “a literally ‘documentary’ past” (10) by carefully displaying as many original documents and pictures as possible. By thus isolating wartime experiences from both pre- and post-war ones, history becomes conceptualized in terms of disjunctive periods. The war experiences seem to have neither predecessors nor successors, and the wartime period itself is represented as a “distant past.”

Concluding Remarks
The establishment of the Romani exhibition marks a historical opportunity for Romani self-representation at such an internationally crucial memorial site. Disappointed by the scarce attention paid to the Roma in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., the Romani linguist Ian Hancock expressed the hope that “we
will eventually be moved out of the category of ‘other victims’ and fully recognized as the only population, together with the Jews, that was slated for eradication from the face of the earth” (59). To some extent, the opening of the Romani exhibition in Auschwitz illustrates that Hancock’s hope was not in vain. Since the Romani and the Jewish exhibitions are the only ones dedicated to a particular group of victims, it could be claimed that the Roma are not in the periphery of holocaust memory anymore. Once we arrive at this point, however, we also need to ask ourselves, as Edward Linenthal did with regard to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, to what extent groups that argue that they belong within the boundaries of the holocaust define their position always “in relation to the Jewish center” (249, original emphasis). When we consider the debates and studies that have been published on the genocide of the Roma, we indeed have to acknowledge the considerable effort that has been expended on the (in some cases rather fanatic) demonstration that the scale and the manner of the atrocities are of the same kind as in the case of the Jews.

Nonetheless, the definition of the Roma’s position in relation to the Jews is finally not evidence of competition, but of a striving to occupy a place as unique and important as that of the Jews in post-war Euro-American history. This is one of the main reasons why participating in a globalized holocaust discourse could help improve the visibility of the Roma. Two partly incompatible interests seem to play tricks on the Roma’s case, though. On the one hand, the participation in the globalized holocaust discourse, since it is linked with the denunciation of the violation of human rights, meets the wishes of many Roma to see recent or current dramatic events with regard to their group in terms of the wartime past. Hancock strongly makes such a claim: “Today, the Romani population faces its severest crisis since the Holocaust; neo-Nazi race crimes against Gypsies have seen rapes, beatings, and murders in Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia; anti-Gypsy pogroms in Romania and Bulgaria, including lynchings and home burnings, are increasing. For my people, the Holocaust is not yet over” (55). It may be said that the participation in a globalized holocaust discourse enables the Roma to make a local translation to the present-day situation and, furthermore, to represent themselves collectively, as a non-territorial nation.

On the other hand, the inscription in a globalized holocaust discourse results in the loss of the specificity of the Roma’s own histories. This not only includes losing sight of the specificity of various Romani groups, but also, most important in the context of my argument, losing the specificity of the history of the Eastern European Roma in particular. By focusing on a conception of victimhood that excludes both the pre- and the post-war (communist) anti-Roma measures that were taken in most of the region’s countries, the treatment of the various Romani communities within the different national contexts becomes undertheorized. A better understanding of the ways in which Roma and non-Roma were historically related to each other at a
national level, as well as a better contextualization of the ways in which the commu-
nist victimization of many of the inhabitants of the former Eastern Bloc is related to
the suffering of the Roma, are of paramount importance to formulate a concept of
victimhood beyond artificial polarizations. Until at least these conditions are fulfilled,
the Roma’s case seems to remain dominated by the paradox of gaining an identity
through the loss of its specificity.
1. I use the term “Roma” and its adjective “Romani” to indicate all the different groups that are often called “Gypsies” in English-speaking regions. Hence, when referring to the Roma, I often also implicitly refer to the Sinti and other Gypsy groups who prefer to be distinguished from the Roma.

2. The exhibition on the genocide of the Roma and Sinti in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was an initiative of the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma (Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma, Heidelberg). This center intensively collaborated with the Auschwitz Memorial and the Association of Roma in Poland. Furthermore, national Romani and Sinti organizations from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine, and the Netherlands participated in the realization of the exhibition. The exhibition was designed by the Atelier für Gestaltung, under supervision of Wieland Schmid. In fact, the monument established in the former so-called “Gypsy camp” (Zigeunerlager) in Birkenau, can be considered as the first opportunity for Romani self-representation in the museum. This monument was an initiative of the Association of Sinti in Germany (Verband der Sinti Deutschlands) and was established at the site of the 28th barrack in the former BIIe section of the Birkenau camp in 1973.

3. Remarkably, the former exhibitions are not archived by the museum, and the museum direction does not know what has happened to the exhibits. Since the national exhibitions are property of the corresponding nation-states, the museum’s direction does not hold itself responsible for what happens to a particular exhibition after its removal (cf. Oleksy, Świebocła and Zbírská).

4. The translations from German into English of Levy and Sznajder are mine.

5. Silvio Peritore and Frank Reuter suggest that the photographs that were made by Sinti and Roma before the war and that are displayed at the exhibition counterbalance those of the Sinti and Roma that were made by the Nazis during the war. This is true to some extent, but, nevertheless, the selected photographs of the pre-wartime period give a one-sided, romanticized image of this period. Interestingly enough, representatives of three of the Romani organizations that contributed to the development of the exhibition told me that the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg made a pre-selection of the photographs to be displayed. They also told me that the center did not select the photographs of poor and not very well dressed Roma and Sinti that these three organizations had collected during their research (see Lhotka; Váradi and Kardos; Weiss).

6. Hirsch characterizes postmemory as “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (22). She distinguishes postmemory “from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (22). Since Hirsch considers the condition of exile from the space of identity as a characteristic aspect of postmemory, it is of high importance to analyze more extensively the ways in which Romani holocaust postmemory relates to contemporary processes of Romani identity building. Young’s concept of a “vicarious past” is mainly based on Hirsch’s concept of postmemory and characterizes a vicarious past as “the memory of the witness’s memory,” in its various mediated forms (Memory’s Edge 1-2).
Bibliography


Oleksy, Krystyna, Teresa Świebocka and Teresa Zbreska (Board of the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau). Personal interview. Oświęcim, Poland. 2003.


