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On March 17, 2015, the Center for Historical Culture at Erasmus University Rotterdam organized the symposium “Representing Genocide”. Speakers were Andrej Kotljarchuk (Södertörn University) and Laurike in’t Veld (University of Chistecher). Andrej Kotljarchuk presented the results of an ongoing research project “The Roma Genocide in Ukraine 1941-1944: History, memories and representations” that involves four Södertörn’s researches Piotr Wawrzeniuk (project leader), David Gaunt and Anders Blomqvist and is supported by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (Östersjöstiftelsen).

The symposium was opened by the director of the Centre Prof Maria Grever. She paid attention to the concept of “historical culture” that expresses a new way of understanding the relationship that a human group has with its own past. The concept historical culture aims to embrace a broader field than historiography, which often is limited to the analysis of ‘classical’ written and oral sources and literature. The production of our knowledge on the past is carried out by various social agents and institutions, such as film industry, art, museums, memorials, schools, and fiction literature, all of this in the focus of researchers dealing with historical culture.
Thousands of Roma were killed in Ukraine between 1941 and 1944 by Nazi *einsatzgruppen* and local collaborators. The Romani victims were practically never deported to extermination camps but instead their bodies were left where they had been murdered. Babi Yar (Babyn Yar in Ukrainian) in Kyiv is considered a single largest Holocaust massacre in Europe. The place is a chime of seven deep ravines in the north-western part of the city. There on September 29-30, 1941, more than 33,000 Jews were exterminated by Nazis in a single mass killing. In 1941-43 hundreds of Ukrainian Roma were also murdered there. The total number of victims (Jews, Roma, underground fighters, mentally ill people, Ukrainian nationalists) killed in Babi Yar is estimated to 100,000 people. However in the postwar report published by the *Extraordinary Commission for Investigation of War Crimes* (ChGK), the Roma were not specified, they were rather counted as “murdered civil citizens”. The Soviet leadership discouraged placing any emphasis on the ethnic aspects of this genocide. In April 1945 the leading Soviet newspaper *Pravda* informed their readers that according to the party decision a memorial and a museum will be built in Babi Yar. Nothing was done. The Nazi policy of extermination of Roma was neglected; the war was depicted as a tragedy for all Soviet peoples. Until 1966 the site of mass killing in was unmarked and the first monument was built only in 1976 after a number of protest actions such as a famous epic “Babi Yar” published by Yevgenii Evtushenko in 1961 and an unpermitted rally in Baby Yar in 1966. This rally, which was devoted to the the 25th anniversary of the tragedy, was attended by a number of well-known Ukrainian and Russian writers, filmmakers and dissidents: Viktor Nekrasov, Boris Antonenko-Davidovich, Ivan Dziuba, Petr Yakir, Sergei Paradzhanov, Vladimir Voinovich and Sergei Dovlatov. Despite the silence on the Jewish and Roma genocides, the 1976 Soviet memorial legalized practices of memory. Every year September 29 the monument was visited not only by Jews but also Roma. It was then that the Romani tradition was born to bring to the monument the photos of relatives murdered by the Nazis. This practice continues to this day. By this ceremony the Roma are trying to overcome the problem of de-personalization of the genocide victims.

With the *glasnost* and *perestroika* new interpretations about the significance of Roma and Jewish victims of Nazi occupation developed in Ukraine. The Soviet monopoly on memory ended and the significance of Roma genocide underwent a substantial change. In 1991 the government of independent Ukraine allowed the establishment of new memorial at Babi Yar that specifically identifies the ethnicity of victims. The Jewish memorial was built in the same year. In 1992, a monument to the Ukrainian nationalists was erected. The Roma memorial is still under construction. The controversial battles over commemoration of WWII and the Holocaust make this process much more complicated and scholars still do not have a clear picture of what is going on with Ukrainian politics of commemoration of the Roma genocide.

In 1995, an initiative to erect a Roma monument in Babi Yar was taken by a sculptor Anatoly Ignashchenko (died in 2011). One of the most famous Ukrainian sculptors and half-Roma by origin, Ignashchenko was the producer of more than 200 monuments around the world. He was also the chief-sculptor of a Soviet monument in Babi Yar. In 1996 Ignashchenko produced a model of the monument which was a gypsy wagon made of wrought iron. The author came up with an original solution to overcome the de-personification of victims. He attached to the tent photo frames in which relatives supposed to insert photos of the victims. The inscription on the monument was completed.
both in Ukrainian and Romani: “To the memory of Roma exterminated by the Nazis in 1940-1945. We remember!” However, the raising of the monument was forbidden by City architect Serhij Babushkin, with the motivation that the monument does not fit in the general design of the Babi Yar memorial. A part of Jewish community in Kyiv was also critical to the idea of Roma memorial. As a result the monument was transported to the western Ukraine and granted to the town of Kamyanets-Podilsky.

September 29, 1999 at the costs of Romani NGOs a simple foundation stone was put in Babi Yar with an inscription in Ukrainian: “In this place will be build a memorial to the victims of the Roma Holocaust.” On the night of July 4, 2011, few weeks before the International Day of the Roma Holocaust a foundation stone dedicated to the Romani victims was vandalized. July 13, 2011 the Roma Congress of Ukraine sent an open letter of protest to Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to end “the discrimination of their memory by the state” and required the inclusion of Romani representatives to the committee and dialogue with the government regarding the construction of a memorial in Babi Yar. In 2012 a new foundation stone was built on the same site, this time sponsored by the state. A new inscription in Ukrainian appeared: “In memory of the Roma who were shot in Babi Yar”. Romani activists pointed out the inscription can be interpreted a stone as a final version of the monument. For the last decade a number of monuments were built in Babi Yar devoted to the memory of murdered children, mentally ill, POWs, Soviet underground fighters, Orthodox priests, Ukrainian nationalists, Ostarbeiters, Dynamo Kyiv football players and victims of the Kurenivka accident of 1961.

The creation in 2012 of National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar was an important step to calm down the ongoing competition of victimhood. The staff of National Preserve organizes annually the commemoration of International Day of the Roma Holocaust According to preliminary information, the old project of Ignashchenko is chosen for a new Roma memorial. Despite all conflict over the past, Babi Yar becoming a national pantheon of all the groups of WWII victims. Today this place is regularly attended by Romani activists, representatives of the supreme power, and foreign delegations. Although about 20 monuments to the Roma Holocaust have been erected in Ukraine after the first and second Maidan revolutions, often motivated by the example of capital. For a long time the Roma minority was not included in Ukrainian nation building. The commemoration of the Roma Holocaust has the possibility to change this situation, boosting the inclusion of Roma in contemporary Ukrainian society. In the situation of the absence of a native state, common territory, language, culture and religion, a shared memory of the genocide brings together different groups of Roma, mobilizing their national movement.

LIVELY DISCUSSION ON MEMORIALIZATION OF VICTIMS
A one-hour discussion with a number of interesting questions started after the lecture.

One of the most interesting question was:

*How you can explain the active policy of memorialization of victims of the Nazi genocide of Roma in today’s Ukraine? And why, as you mentioned, this process is going sluggish in contemporary Russia?*

*Answer:*

*With its 20 monuments the contemporary Ukraine shares with Germany the honorary first place in Europe regarding the number of Roma genocide memorials. Russia has no the Roma*
The main reason is a humanization (as historian Andriy Portnov points out) of contemporary Ukrainian memory politics, it means a switch from the memory of heroes of WWII to the memory of the suffering of ordinary people. Topics prohibited during Soviet times such as the Holocaust, the partisan activity of Ukrainian nationalist, the Polish-Ukrainian ethnic cleansings in Volhynia, became the subject of extensive scientific and public debates. Rejection of the Soviet interpretation of WWII destroyed the effect of path dependency and created the preconditions for the inclusion of collective trauma of Ukrainian Roma in the national context. The historical culture of WWII in Russia still based on the Soviet canon with main focus to the soldiers not the victims of this war.

Ukraine is open democratic country. The initiative to erect a monument on the mass graves of Roma comes from different social agents from far-right Cossacks (Lubny) to the Communist Party of Ukraine (Kozatyn). In Russia, such initiatives are the only of Romani organizations. Moscow Union of Roma for several years lobbying for the construction of a monument to the victims of the genocide in Moscow. Unlike Ukraine, in Russia there is no professional historians specializing in the subject, the documentation of Roma genocide mass graves in the north-western regions and the North Caucasus is not started, the basic scientific literature is not written. In Ukraine a number of scientific conferences on the genocide of Roma people was held in 2005-2015, organized by the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, which also accumulated a considerable bibliography.

There is no political consensus about the genocidal nature of the Nazi extermination of Roma in Russia. In 2004 the Duma rejected an appeal to Germany about paying compensation to the Russian Roma for the Nazi crimes. During the discussion the parliamentarians showed a complete lack of understanding of the exceptional nature of the systematic destruction of Roma people. The same year the Verkhovna Rada adopted with one voice the resolution on the commemoration of the International Remembrance Day of the Holocaust of the Roma, which by the proposal of the Council of Europe held annually on 2 August. The 2004 parliament’s resolution certainly gave a powerful impetus to the memory work. Since 2005 the central and local authorities implemented a special program in order to identify Roma genocide mass graves and to investigate the Nazi genocide of Roma. The Ukrainian state has supported a number of Roma memorial projects.

Another strong argument for the intensification of memory work is the integration of Ukraine into the EU. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance continuously monitors the implementation of the 2004 parliamentary resolution in order to determine the extent of actual implementation of the program of commemoration of the Roma genocide. Ukraine is a member of the EU program “Roma Decade 2005-2015”. Recently the All-Ukrainian Association of Teachers of History published with the financial support of the EU a textbook on Jewish and Roma genocides for secondary schools. Following many European countries, Ukraine the only one country on post-Soviet space that abandoned the official use of the word ‘Gypsies’ (tsihani) in favour of the more politically correct name ‘Roma’. As known this term was recommended by the First World Congress of Roma in London in 1971. Substantial support to commemoration projects in Ukraine has been given by foreign institutions, in particular the German Federal Foundation for Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the George Soros Foundation. The activity of such foundations is strictly restricted or prohibited in Russia.
Thus, the revising of the Soviet myth of WWII opened the once closed floodgates of memory. Fast-paced memorialization of the Roma genocide confirms the fact that the realignment of Soviet history around new narrative axes is taking place in the memory politics of today’s Ukraine.


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